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Harmonious, Africanised, and Modern Employment Relations model in strategic Employment Relations

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Orientation: With the world increasingly becoming a global village and many multi-national enterprises exploring African markets, the question of integrating indigenous traditions into employment relations (ER) systems and practices has become topical in the ER field.

Research purpose: This study investigated the integration of African traditions, perspectives and indigenous wisdom in modern ER.

Motivation for the study: There is a limited integration of indigenous wisdom in ER practices. The study examine how African perspectives can be further developed to align with and contribute to current and future workplace trends.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study to understand the prevailing workplace dynamics and how an Africanised ER perspective can add value to the workplace. Grounded theory was used as the primary research strategy to support the design of this study. Using semi-structured interviews, a purposive sampling method was used to collect data from 12 participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and make sense of the collected data.

Main findings: The findings show three themes associated with the development of Harmonious, Africanised and Modern Employment Relations (HAMER) model, namely, *organisational anxiety, organisational unity* and *strategic leadership*. The findings indicated that incorporating indigenous knowledge in ER can improve organisational harmony and relationships in the workplace. The findings also indicated that transforming traditional perspectives to embrace indigenous knowledge requires strong leadership skills and strategic thinking. Most importantly, the study identified a shortage of customised ER content as the main hindrance in the integration process.

Practical/managerial implications: The study proposed the adoption of the HAMER model to align current ER trends and requirements to indigenous knowledge. The model focuses on practical ways of integrating harmony and African perspectives in modern ER.

Contribution/value-add: First and foremost, the study addressed the shortage of Africanised ER content, including the infrastructure and behaviours required to achieve the integration.

Keywords: Africanisation; Ubuntu; harmony; integration; employment relations.

Introduction

In recent times, there is no doubt that employment relations (ER) are assuming an unprecedented proportion of relevance in workplaces across the globe. The evolution primarily accentuates this realisation from traditional industrial relations (IR) to the concept of 'holistic' ER (Harney et al., 2018). Almost two decades into the 21st century, the debate about the scope of ER, the nature of the phenomenon and how best to leverage this science in the workplace is still a topical issue. Although there are various schools of thought in this regard, what seems to be the consensus among scholars and practitioners in this field is that, firstly, ER has been vastly underutilised as a people management tool in the past (Harney et al., 2018). Secondly, improving the understanding of the concept could yield more organisational benefits in the workplace. Thirdly, organisational or industrial harmony is critical to attaining the required integration and positioning ER as a

critical people management and organisation development tool. Achieving these objectives, it would seem, requires effective leadership.

Globally, ER institutions are evolving and undergoing considerable changes (Frege & Kelly, 2020). Today, ER is a strategic tool to aid decision-making processes and drive a conducive organisational culture in the workplace (Matebese & Govender, 2020). Organisations are complex open systems that adapt and cope with surviving and prospering. An organisation exists because of the efforts of both the employer and the employees, who are the primary drivers of the entity's operational operations (Ogunola, 2018). The role of leadership in ER is becoming even more significant as organisations engage in workplace dynamics. No ER happen in a vacuum, and it is essential to recognise that ER happen in a range of situations, all of which have varied degrees of effect on the relationship (Leat, 2014). Thus, leaders must define and implement strategies geared towards creating a harmonious working environment where all role players collaborate to achieve set organisational goals. In South Africa, a multicultural country with a vast history of racial discrimination, conflict, cheap labour policies, authoritarian management, inequality and irrefutable socio-racial challenges, the significance of harmonious employer–employee relationships continues to be a topical issue in the workplace. To effectively manage all these socio-economic challenges, a holistic and strategic approach centred around integrating various components should be adopted.

It is in the best interest of shareholders or owners, management, customers, workers and workers' representatives (unions) that the organisation's resources, capabilities and competencies form the cornerstone of competitiveness. To achieve this objective, it is, therefore, in the best interest of all stakeholders that ER is embraced to create an ambience wherein collaboration among role players is encouraged and promoted (Nel et al., 2016; Ogunola, 2018; Slabbert & Swanepoel, 2011). African perspectives have been applied in various fields to resolve community disputes and create peace and harmony (Olabiyi, 2022). From a political perspective, South Africa adopted the principles of Ubuntu during the dawn of democracy. A conflict resolution process initiated in the 90s called The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was based on the principles of Ubuntu as a conflict resolution mechanism. From the legal perspective, the same approach was adopted by the courts, including in the landmark case (S v Makwanyane and Another [CCT 3/94]) that decided to abolish the death penalty in South Africa. The Constitutional Court strongly relied on the principles of Ubuntu, describing the significance of group solidarity, values, compassion, respect, human dignity, conformity to basic norms and collective unity (Keep et al., 2007:32).

In Philosophy and Ethics, unlike in most areas, Ubuntu and African perspectives have been explored, defined, redefined and developed to provide guidelines regarding how these perspectives can be used to add value to society. Contemporary exponents of these perspectives include Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013), Metz (2014), Koenane and Olatunji (2017), as well as Chimakonam (2019). The merits and demerits of the arguments raised by these scholars, just like the merits or demerits of the court cases and TRC records, all fall outside the scope of this study and are mentioned here only to provide context and highlight the emerging interest in African perspectives across numerous fields. Against this background, there is a paucity of empirical research exploring the strategic role of ER and the integration of African traditions, perspectives and indigenous wisdom in modern ER. Therefore, this study aims to explore the integration of African traditions, perspectives and indigenous wisdom in modern ER.

Significance of the study

This study is essential mainly for two reasons: firstly, there is currently not enough literature justifying the lack of, or reluctance to embrace, indigenous wisdom in the field of ER. Equally, there is insufficient literature to explain the apparent lack of interest in this academic and social discourse. Secondly, there is convincing evidence in the literature that integrating indigenous wisdom into ER system can enhance harmony, trust, motivation and other factors that can contribute to a positive organisational climate (Ruzungunde et al., 2023). The benefits of embracing indigenous wisdom and perspectives also have the potential to help non-African managers and multi-national enterprises (MNEs) working or doing business in Africa to understand and connect with the workforce better and quicker. The benefits are indubitable, but the buy-in is lacking. Therefore, this study delved deeper into understanding this topic and examined how African perspectives can be developed to reflect current and future workplace trends.

Literature review

This section focuses on the role of ideological perspectives in ER, a review of classical and modern perspectives, and common ER challenges in the workplace.

The theoretical or ideological perspective in employment relations

The primary purpose of theories in ER is that they present various ways the world of work can be interpreted. Therefore, they are useful because they help researchers and practitioners make sense of the world around them. They are the building blocks of interpretations based on perceptions and actions. These frames of reference are useful analytic devices for driving and categorising the attitudes, perceptions and values behind the management of organisations (Bingham, 2016). Because of the unquestionable complexity of the phenomenon, the study of ERs requires a broader understanding and analysis of various world views. It also requires flexibility, creativity and an open-minded attitude to fuse ideas and concepts to create meaningful and relevant ER content (Nel & Kirsten, 2020).

Classical perspectives

The unitarist perspective views the organisation as an integrated group of people having a unified authority structure with common values, interests and purposes. This ideology starts from the premise that workplace conflict is not inevitable in relations between managers and employees. The unitary theory's basic principle is that management exists as the only fountain of authority (Asenath et al., 2017). According to the unitary approach, employees and employers are thought to have a common interest, power is immaterial and conflict is viewed as a suboptimal condition of affairs (Budd & Bhave, 2019). Trade unions are viewed as a source of conflict in the workplace and hence are not required for harmonious conflict management (Mzangwa, 2021). The assumption is that conflict in the workplace may occasionally emerge between parties, but such manifestations are believed to be deviations in a relationship that is fundamentally inclined to be cooperative. Proponents of this perspective see managers and employees as having a common interest in the subsistence of their organisations. When a conflict occurs, it is, therefore, unlikely to manifest itself to such a harmful and severe extent that it will render the organisation insolvent (Nel & Kirsten, 2020).

Typical proponents of the pluralist theory believe that business organisations are complex social constructions made up of various interest groups. Because of the very nature of workplace dynamics, management and employees constitute two groups that are seen as invariably subscribing to and advancing different values and objectives. According to the pluralist viewpoint, the organisation is viewed as a coalition of persons and groups with opposing perceptions and ambitions. They may seek to express themselves through action (Mugumwa, 2017). The pluralist theory also assumes that there will be different sources of authority within an organisation and that the potential for conflict over the organisation of work tasks and the allocation of rewards between them will always exist (Finnemore et al., 2018).

The most well-known theory based on a pluralist frame of reference is an old Dunlop's (1958) systems theory. This theory assumes that the IR system is a social sub-system, and its actions depend on three factors, namely, technology, the economy and the distribution of political power. Work is believed to be regulated by a wide range of formal and informal rules and regulations that cover everything from performance, salaries, recruitment, leave and hours to numerous other employment factors. Industrial actors try to determine the rules, and their establishment is influenced by the broader environmental context in which the actors operate. Actors themselves share an interest in maintaining the processes of negotiation and conflict resolution (Abbott, 2006; Finnemore et al., 2018).

The radical perspective accepts that economic inequalities are expressed in social conflict, and in the workplace, this is manifested by unrest and conflict within the employment relationship (Bingham, 2016). This perspective draws primarily from Marxism, linking capitalist societies to perpetual class struggle. Inequalities in the distribution of wealth and the skewed ownership of the means of production cause this struggle. Wealth and property ownership are perceived as highly concentrated in the hands of a small number of the bourgeoisie (capitalists), while the vast mass of the proletariat (workers) live in poverty and have nothing to sell but their labour (Orsi, 2019). The dominant capitalist class control the levers of political and economic power and are forced to exploit the working class by extorting surplus 'value' from their labour. Capitalism generates this exploitation because, by its very nature, it requires capitalists to engage in ruthless competition with each other (Orsi, 2019). Marx saw this dynamic as forcing capitalists to drive down workers' wages perpetually and reduce their numbers (Chand, 2017).

Modern perspectives

According to Finnemore et al. (2018), corporatism can be divided into two types. Societal corporatism may be explained as an extension of pluralism because it is concerned with the aspects of pluralism and democratic principles through social dialogue between employers and employees. The point of departure from the traditional pluralist perspective is that societal corporation acknowledges the interdependence of parties in the workplace and the state's role. The second tradition is called state corporatism. This tradition involves less democratic practices by the state (government). It is characterised by the shift from a tripartite cooperation to a situation where the state imposes itself as the primary authority in the labour market (Nel & Kirsten, 2020). The rights, recognition and interests of the other two parties are suppressed. As a result, organised labour and other stakeholders are demobilised and co-opted as the states assume a paternalistic role.

The Africanisation perspective is concerned with infusing the indigenous knowledge systems based on the socio-cultural living experiences of African communities into organisational practices (Nel & Kirsten, 2020). This does not mean the exclusion of non-African persons whose beliefs and outlooks subscribe to African philosophy. It also does not call for eradicating external influence and best practices, as Africa does not exist in isolation. Africanisation is not about skin colour or race but about the recognition and revalidation of indigenous knowledge to advance African identity and wisdom (Nel & Kirsten, 2020). In the South African context, this perspective is linked to the principles of Ubuntu, which have been explored in various scholarly works and fields (Nel & Kirsten, 2020).

In the 21st century, many leadership models have become crucial, and among these are African models that incorporate philosophies such as Ubuntu. The Ubuntu worldview can have a positive impact when its principles are used effectively in leading any organisation. However, Ubuntu demands a paradigm shift, a change in what many employees have been

used to. Aspects such as caring, sharing, respect and compassion might be challenging to internalise for many workers. Ubuntu poses the challenge of fostering a culture of interconnectedness and interdependence among workers (Msila, 2015). Ubuntu refers to an all-inclusive worldview and stands for universalised humanness (Ubuntu/botho) values, which are shared across cultures and include care, respect, tolerance, honesty, hospitality, compassion and empathy (Koenane & Olatunji, 2017).

The word 'Ubuntu' comes from the isiZulu and isiXhosa languages and can be roughly translated as 'humanity towards others'. Ubuntu embodies all those virtues that maintain harmony and the spirit of sharing among members of society. The ethical values of Ubuntu include respect for others, helpfulness, community, sharing, caring, trust and unselfishness. It underscores the importance of agreements or consensus and prioritises the community's well-being as a whole (Nel & Kirsten, 2020).

The philosophical canard that Ubuntu is only based on emotions and does not incorporate logic as a perspective is wrongheaded. Detaching reason and logic from Ubuntu is erroneous and is a distortion perpetuated by the Western civilisation, which is the dominant critique in the world today. This is also in line with the views of Nel and Kirsten (2020) that the principles of Ubuntu should be at the centre of transforming the South African ER agenda from Eurocentric labour practices to Africanised ones. The basic principle of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* [a person is a person through other persons] is a clear indication that the philosophy embraces reason and not just emotions (Chimakonam, 2019). The implication of this perspective is very important in this study as it addresses the question of application which often hinders the implementation of initiatives in the Human Capital field. Ideas that are normally devoid of logic are usually difficult to interpret, understand, share and implement.

Consequently, such ideas are meaningless and cannot be used to derive useful insights to resolve challenges in the workplace or society at large. However, Ubuntu is not a panacea for everything. Although it can be claimed as part of the cultural heritage, it must be acknowledged that it is not a solution to all socio-economic and political problems. Ubuntu must be re-evaluated and integrated to adapt to the changing socio-political and economic circumstances to add more value to the society (Eze, 2010).

Conceptualisation of employment relations

Employment relation is a concept that reflects the close relationship between human resource management (HRM) and IR and the need to acknowledge their interplay and interconnectedness (Nel & Kirsten, 2020). Employment relation is primarily concerned with how employers, employees, the government and other third parties utilise a variety of norms and processes to negotiate and control workplace and work community behaviour (Bennett et al., 2020).

Employment relation includes features of IR such as labour legislation, collective bargaining and industrial disputes, as well as components of HRM such as recruitment, training and development, performance and reward management. While they were once viewed as discrete and distinct disciplines of study, there is now a greater emphasis on integration. However, it is critical to recognise some fundamental differences between the approaches to ER (Barry et al., 2016).

The field of ER covers the relationship between management and employees, how the parties interact, how they regulate conflict and how they manage power and interest in the workplace (Abbott, 2006; Tirintetaake, 2017). Employment relation focuses on individual and collective workplace interactions, with an increasing emphasis on direct forms of representation and assisting line managers in establishing trust-based relationships with employees. A positive employee relations climate characterised by high levels of employee involvement, dedication and engagement can improve business outcomes while also contributing to employees' well-being (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2021). Employment relation deals with interactions, behaviours and outcomes between employer and employees in and around the workplace. It includes individuals who work, those who employ them (employers) and those who influence their working connections, such as regulators and politicians. The study of the regulation of the determinants and consequences of the employment relationship and the breakdown of such regulation is central to ER (Bingham, 2016).

Employment relation is better understood as an 'area of study' rather than a separate academic discipline. This field is dynamic because of its multidisciplinary nature, encompassing fields such as economics, sociology, psychology, history and law. Human resource management, labour process theory (LPT), organisational behaviour (OB), institutionalism and neo-institutional contributions are examples of contemporary advancements in the field. Each of these disciplinary perspectives contributes something distinct and different to the topic of study (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Aylott (2018) described ER as a field that concerns communication with employees and the involvement and participation of those employees in the workplace. It also covers the conflict between employers and employees and among employees. According to Worlu et al. (2016), employing effective employee relation strategies can be the greatest strength of organisations. Since the conception of modern economic organisations, ER has been the most critical element in the public and private sectors.

Common workplace employment relation challenges

Diversity management and inclusion continue to be topical in the ER domain. While diversity addresses the differences based on individual attributes and/or social relationships,

inclusion is a systemic effort to include differences in collectives such as groups, organisations, tribes and societies for a particular objective (Kazeroony & Du Plessis, 2019). There is a very strong relationship between diversity and disharmony in the workplace. Workplace diversity is associated with counter-productive work behaviours such as derogation, ostracism and discrimination. Equality and diversity challenges pervade all aspects of employees' working lives (Nachmias & Caven, 2019). In the global economy of the 21st century, workforces have become increasingly diverse in multiple dimensions – gender, age, national origin, family structure, religion and profession. Leaders cannot reasonably assume that everyone entering their workforce shares values about work, assumptions about workplace roles or the degree of formality that is appropriate for workplace communications (Cooper & Leiter, 2017).

Conflict management remains one of the top challenges in the workplace over the years. Conflict occurs when one person or a group perceives that another person or a group is preventing them from achieving their needs or is blocking them from expressing their values and beliefs in a way that they think is reasonable (Liddle, 2017). Conflict is indisputably one of the most significant risks in ER; if poorly managed, it can be very destructive. Discord occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible in the workplace, and those individuals or groups block or frustrate one another's attempts to achieve their objectives. Conflict is thus an inevitable part of organisational life because the goals of different stakeholders such as managers and staff are often incompatible (Ogunola, 2018).

Another significant challenge for practitioners in modern ER is managing the impact of evolutions (ideological and technological) in the workplace. Ideological evolution involves aligning traditional perspectives with modern trends and finding a conducive balance in the approach. Technological evolution involves the disruption in technologies and business models emanating from technological and industrial evolutions. Currently, new Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies are being integrated into every facet of society and the physical world. The challenge that the 4IR brings is not a lack of technology; it is about the human ability to cope with, collaborate around and lead others through this revolution (Groscurth, 2019). These trends will persist in the subsequent technological revolutions and remain relevant in the ER domain for years to come.

Research design
Research method

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate and explore the research questions and objectives. Qualitative research method seeks to provide comprehensive understandings based on rich, contextual and thorough data. In qualitative studies, greater emphasis is on 'holistic' types of analysis and explanation rather than simply recording superficial patterns, trends and correlations (Pitney et al., 2019). This study aimed to explore various ER perspectives to gain in-depth knowledge about the value of indigenous perspectives in ER; therefore, this study satisfies the criteria for exploratory research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study adopted an inductive reasoning logic, and thus, it moved from more specific questions to a broader theory (Tjora, 2019). In addition, an interpretivist paradigm is to understand the participants' interpretation of various ER perspectives and how that relates to the world around them. A basic tenet of interpretivism is that in order to describe social phenomena adequately, a researcher must fully understand the participants' understanding of their actions, the situations in which they find themselves and the rules that regulate the institutions in which they take part (Balsvik, 2017).

Research strategy

Grounded theory (GT) is employed for this study as the suitable research strategy to ground this study. Specifically, the constructivist tradition of GT was adopted in this study because the strategy complements an interpretivist approach adopted for this study. The constructivist tradition is flexible, and it explicitly endorses the researcher and participants' co-construction of knowledge and mutual interpretation of meaning. According to Glaser and Holton (2004), a GT is a set of interconnected conceptual hypotheses that are methodically constructed to build an inductive theory about a substantive topic. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), GT is derived from data that have been methodically acquired and analysed throughout the research process, allowing the theory to emerge from the data. Charmaz (2006) referred to GT as a qualitative research method that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories by building an inductive data analysis. Similarly, this study employed tenets of the constructivist GT from a research strategy perspective. This genre is clear on critical issues such as the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. The flexible approach unequivocally endorses the researcher and participants' co-construction of knowledge and mutual interpretation of meaning, which will benefit all role players. The constructivist GT, therefore, not only offers accessible methods for researching in the 21st century but also represents a middle ground between post-modernism and positivism, in line with Charmaz (2006).

Research setting

This study was conducted in two organisations in the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) sector based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Entry and establishing research roles

The process of gaining entry involved obtaining formal permission from the HR departments in the two selected organisations. The HR departments also arranged the initial

meetings with the potential participants. After a rapport was established, participants were provided with the necessary documents to guarantee their confidentiality and obtain consent before the process commenced. Data collection in this study followed a blend of online and physical (face-to-face) sessions.

Research participants and sampling methods

A non-probability sampling method (purposive sampling) was used to select 12 participants with ER knowledge and experience as illustrated in Table 1. These participants were sampled across various organisational levels and sections, including top management, senior management, line managers, union leaders and non-union members. The maximum variation technique was used as part of the sampling approach. Maximum variation means exploring different perspectives of one situation or phenomenon by recruiting people with a variety of backgrounds or positions for the study. The idea is to allow researchers to fully explore many facets of a problem and view it holistically (Pitney et al., 2019).

It is not uncommon for qualitative studies to focus on a small number of individuals or sites, using theoretical or purposeful rather than probability sampling. Qualitative studies rarely make explicit claims about the generalisability of findings but focus on the richness of the data when generating insights about a particular phenomenon (Maxwell, 2008).

Data collection methods

This study adopted semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. A pre-established set of questions or broad themes during the interview usually guides this method. The advantage of the semi-structured interview method is that it allows for greater flexibility and engagement with the participants to capture their thoughts, feelings and opinions about various topics (Brennen, 2017; Pitney et al., 2019). Participants were therefore allowed to share their views on various ER perspectives and propose practical solutions in line with the themes. This method is also in line with the GT tradition selected for this study (constructivist tradition), which advocates for the co-creation and co-construction of knowledge and mutual interpretation of meaning. Data were subsequently arranged using Atlas-ti software to prepare for coding and analysis.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used in this study. This data analysis method can be widely used within various ontological frameworks across various epistemologies and research questions (Nowell et al., 2017; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). The method was suitable for this exploratory (inductive) study because it is flexible and can be used in both inductive and deductive methodologies (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). The other advantage of this method is that because of its high level of flexibility, thematic analysis can be used to analyse data from 'traditional' face-to-face data collection methods such as interviews and focus groups (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017).

The actual analysis process involved the initial manual coding process and arranging the data using Atlas.ti software package. The transcribed data were reviewed and aligned to research objectives throughout the coding process. Codes and sub-categories were then identified, refined and merged in the sense-making process to arrive at key themes that were analysed and supported with existing literature evidence. The emergent theory was used to understand ER perspectives and explain the role of indigenous knowledge in ER and possible implications.

Strategy for ensuring quality and rigour

Creating a strong sense of trustworthiness in qualitative research may become the primary way to build credibility (Yin, 2016). Weaver-Hightower (2018) suggested that the most sensible way of dealing with this is by assessing 'trustworthiness'. There are generally five trustworthiness concerns that any researcher needs to address, irrespective of their research paradigm. Firstly, *credibility* is concerned with whether the study measures what is intended and presents a true reflection of the social reality of the participants. Secondly, *transferability/applicability* relates to the ability of the findings to be transferred or applied to other contexts or settings. Thirdly, *dependability/consistency* involves how researchers know if the findings would be repeated consistently with similar (same) participants in the same context. Fourthly, *confirmability/neutrality* is concerned with minimising bias by acknowledging the researcher's predispositions. It is about establishing whether the investigation was not influenced by the bias, motivations or interests of the researchers. Lastly, *integrity/truth value* is concerned with how researchers establish confidence in the findings and how researchers know if the findings are not false information from the study participants.

TABLE 1: Profile of participants.

Number of participants	Job category	Age (years)	Criteria	
			ER experience	Union exposure
2	Top Management (Executive)	45–55	• More than 10 years	• More than 10 years
4	Line Managers (Top, Senior, Middle, Junior)	35–55	• More than 5 years	• More than 5 years
2	Union Representatives	30–40	• More than 5 years	• More than 5 years
2	Staff/Professional/Skilled (Union members)	40–45	• More than 5 years	• More than 5 years
2	Staff/Professional/Skilled (Non-union members)	40–48	• More than 5 years	• Nil

Total: *n* = 12

ER, employment relations.

Ethical considerations

In a qualitative study, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the research process (Mohd Arifin, 2018). This study was conducted with integrity throughout the data collection and analysis process. Efforts were taken to ensure that the most appropriate procedures and methods were adopted. It is imperative to protect participants when conducting a research study. Human rights need to be the centre approach when studying a phenomenon. All the research protocols adhered to in the current study. Ethical clearance was received from the University. Additionally, permission to conduct research was obtained from the selected IT companies. A consent letter was given to target participants, and the research was voluntary. Participants could withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. All responses were treated with confidentiality. This involved following guidelines on the privacy, safety, confidentiality, and anonymity of the research participants (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018).

Results

This section outlines the key themes of the findings derived from the data.

Key themes

The three main themes (with related subthemes) extracted from the study are summarised in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Themes and subthemes identified from the data.

Primary theme	Subtheme
Strategic leadership	• Integration • Harmony • Stakeholder management • Vision
ER content	• Evolution • ER tools
Historical context	• Employment equity • Equality
ER perspectives	• Africanisation • Ubuntu

ER, employment relations.

Theme 1: Strategic leadership in employment relations

This theme encompasses understanding what modern ER entails in the workplace and scrutinises the value of harmony in ER. In this study, the term 'strategic leadership' therefore specifically refers to leaders' ability to dissect and understand leadership qualities required in modern-day ER. This includes the role of leaders in interpreting and integrating strategic objectives, stakeholder management, directing organisations towards a harmonious working environment and translating the organisational vision. The participants shared the following:

'Leadership is very important in the organisation; it is a crucial quality required in ER – that is where everything starts. If you do not have good leaders, it will be extremely difficult to achieve most of the organisational goals. Great leaders have high emotional intelligence, and understand the importance of harmony in the business, they know how to manage various stakeholders, and they are good with strategic planning. Leaders must be smart, they must be streetwise and be able to manage various organisational dynamics, they must be flexible and not rigid.' (Participant 3)

'I think the important thing here is to understand how ER should be presented and positioned in an organisation. This point is key because ER is a tool used to facilitate strategic processes in the organisation and leaders need to know how to align it to their processes and overall business strategy. This is obviously not an easy one. The thing is that different organisations have different organisational structures. However, I believe ER should be an independent department or function as part of organisational development. I don't believe ER should reside in HR and my only problem with that is that I feel it will be ineffective and maybe even be consumed in HR processes. I just feel that the attitude and mentality are different and the objectives or reasons for its existence are different. HR is about management and ER is about nurturing relationships and building for the future. I don't have a problem with it being an OD function because OD is about the same issues.' (Participant 7)

'All I can say is that for ER to work it must be integrated into almost everything in the organisation. It is not an HR function; it is a strategic imperative that can be used to facilitate any business

TABLE 3: Summary of the practical recommendations.

Category	No	Specific recommendation
ER content	1	Development of ER strategy. The strategy should outline the organisation's position on indigenous knowledge, the degree of integration, channels, change management process and timeframes.
	2	The process of creating ER content should involve all stakeholders, that is, consultation and co-creation of ER templates, policies, ER awareness communications, campaigns and branding.
	3	Development of ER Key Performance Areas and Key Performance Indicators (These targets should be incorporated in individual and departmental performance reviews for accountability purposes).
	4	Development of ER audit tools ER targets should be measured and monitored using audit tools to assess the success of the initiatives.
ER structures	5	Establish ER research and development forum – to investigate and consolidate indigenous traditions and how they can be incorporated in modern ER.
	6	Establish indigenous platforms – Introduce ER lekgotla (committee) as a recognised dispute resolution platform preceding formal organisational disciplinary procedures. In the context of employment relations, a lekgotla can be understood as a structured meeting or forum where various stakeholders within an organisation come together to discuss important matters related to employment practices, workplace dynamics, and employee engagement. Just as in the traditional sense, a lekgotla involves open dialogue, sharing of ideas and collective decision-making. It is a space where leaders, management, employees, and possibly even external parties can engage in meaningful discussions aimed at fostering a harmonious work environment, addressing challenges and making decisions that impact the workforce. Introduce annual ER Imbizo (gatherings) to discuss and brainstorm about ER initiatives. Imbizo within the realm of Employment Relations signifies a gathering where representatives from different levels of an organisation convene to exchange viewpoints, communicate strategies, and solicit input on matters related to employee well-being, workplace policies, and organisational direction. In this context, Imbizo embodies the spirit of inclusivity and participatory decision-making. It involves creating opportunities for open communication between leaders and employees, allowing for the exchange of insights and concerns and enabling a sense of involvement and ownership among the workforce.
	7	Exco representation – Ensure that ER is represented at the top management level (Exco) to account and advise on all ER issues.

ER, employment relations.

process or plan, the same way that change management can be used in most business areas. It is a key leadership competency in my view.' (Participant 5)

'ER is the heart of human capital. From a strategic point of view, it should reside wherever the human capital strategy resides. I don't think you can isolate ER from the organisational development strategy if you really want it to be effective. I, however, think it should be separated from HR. It can be an independent function with IR as a sub-unit or even part of OD. I just don't think ER is HR. It should not be hidden there otherwise it becomes toothless and ineffective. Unless, of course, we are talking of organisations that subscribe to the Strategic Human Resources Management concept; in that case, you can afford to merge the two.' (Participant 4)

Subtheme 1: Integration

Most participants identified the ability and desire to integrate ER principles and perspectives in various organisational processes as an important tactic in strategic leadership, participants explained the following:

'ER is the heart of the organisation from a strategic point of view. It is the engine that makes the whole vehicle move. Without relationships in the organisation, there is not business. If ER is working efficiently, then we have a better chance to survive as a business. Therefore, every HR process must be guided by ER principles. As leaders we must prioritise the relationship with employees, it is a very important relationship, everything else turns on that.' (Participant 9)

'ER should be integrated into various systems to be successful. If you see it as an isolated tool or department, it will not give you the desired results because everything in the organisation is interconnected and our strategies should be informed by that understanding. Everything, our skills, our moral, our cultures, personalities, everything is connected to each other.' (Participant 6)

Subtheme 2: Harmony

The majority of the participants indicated that harmony is essential in an organisation. Some indicated that they believe that organisations should invest more in promoting organisational harmony so that the workplace can be a peaceful and conducive environment. Participants stated that ER is dysfunctional when organisational harmony is negatively impacted, resulting in many workplace challenges for employees and employers. Participants indicated that harmony is essential in strategic leadership and ER. Some participants indicated that disharmony in the workplace can be toxic and disruptive; therefore, leaders should strive to achieve a harmonious working environment to protect organisational and individual interests:

'Harmony is very important because most people like to work in a peaceful environment. Where there is no harmony there is no order, no respect for each other, and lots of ugly stories of victimisation, bulling and even racism. That is why attaining harmony is very important in the organisation, it protects the organisation from all the negative and unpalatable things.' (Participant 8)

'I think the greatest benefit is that harmony in the organisation increases commitment and performance indirectly. There are

other benefits like teamwork, and innovation because of the freedom given to employees to explore things, but I think commitment and performance are top of the list. So, leaders must find a way to strategically use harmony to facilitate their initiatives.' (Participant 5)

'Strategically, harmony is an important tool in the organisation. It is a tool you can use to achieve other objectives in the business. For example, you can use organisational harmony to achieve a desired organisational culture to improve diversity and inclusion in the workplace, but most importantly to improve stakeholder management in the workplace.' (Participant 3)

Subtheme 3: Stakeholder management

The majority of the participants identified the ability to influence and manage various stakeholders as a critical leadership prerequisite in ER. This includes the ability to get buy-in from top management, employees, unions and any other stakeholders with an interest in ER. The participants shared the following:

'… Leaders are key role-players in this whole game [*stakeholder management*]. They establish rules of engagement and influence organisational culture. If you have ER/IR managers who are afraid of unions and always defensive even when unions table a fair agenda to protect the rights of the members, you have a problem already … You need leaders who are streetwise, and brave, and fair – so that they can bring everyone on the table and ensure that we all work together not leaders that are divisive and dishonest.' (Participant 11)

'… ER concepts are universal concepts that overlap and affect various stakeholders. It is easy to talk about the role of leaders or management in the organisation, but the reality is that ER will only be successful if and when everyone is onboard, everyone.' (Participant 9)

Subtheme 4: Vision

Majority of the participants identified leadership vision as a key success factor in ER. Participants stated that for an organisation to achieve harmony, integration and buy-in from stakeholders, its leaders must have a clear vision:

'… [*E*]verything revolves around leadership vision – without leadership one must just forget about achieving things like harmony and success in business. You can have everything in your organisation but if you do not have leaders with vision, you will never see the fruits of your hard-work or investment. To drive ER, you need leaders who are creative, who believe in their workforce, who respect and trust their employees.' (Participant 4)

Theme 2: Employment relations content

This theme is linked to Research Objectives 1, 2 and 4 (to understand what modern ER entails in the workplace, to understand the value of indigenous knowledge in ER and to propose practical solutions for implementing modern ER in the workplace).

The majority of participants indicated that there are lots of knowledge gaps in ER, and hence, most people do not understand what modern ER entails. The perception is that the field has evolved over the years, affecting the field's scope and nature. The other perception is that ER custodians in the

two organisations have not developed sufficient ER content to educate and guide stakeholders on ER issues. The participant indicated that the problem with ER content is serious, and there are no clear ER policies and strategies, no ER consultations and no ER templates to guide ER processes. These findings suggest that the organisations still mainly rely on generic HR content to deal with ER issues.

Subtheme 1: Evolution

The majority of participants identified evolution in the field as one of the reasons the field is experiencing a shortage of ER content. The perception is that most organisations and ER practitioners still rely on outdated ideologies and guidelines to resolve modern-day ER challenges. Some of these ideologies are believed to be inadequate and irrelevant in modern-day workplaces because of their lack of flexibility and resonance:

'ER dynamics have gradually changed over the years; some theories and ideologies are now irrelevant because a lot has changed. Evolution itself is not a bad thing, in fact it usually brings lots of opportunities, however people need to understand the impact of evolution and manage it properly to avoid confusion and contradictions. Everything must be understood within a particular applicable context, our labour relations should reflect that as well. Evolution is an opportunity for us to revise our approaches and select what is working for us, not just consume old western practices without integrating them.' (Participant 9)

Subtheme 2: Employment relation tools

Most participants identified the shortage of ER tools as the major contributing factor to ER content. 'Employment relation tools' in this context refers to tangible and intangible enablers that can be used to develop the field of ER. This includes strategies, ideas and ideologies that can be used to transform the field, as well as practical tools such as templates, guidelines and committees' setup to drive ER initiatives. Some participants stated that the field of ER, unlike most Human Capital functions, has a shortage of content and tools, which is mainly why other Human Capital functions sometimes overshadow the field. Participants also stated this challenge as the reason there is so much confusion in the field, particularly regarding the scope and value of ER in the workplace:

'One of the challenges is that people are appointed into ER senior positions, but they do not fully understand this concept, and perhaps we must be fair and not underestimate the complexity of this phenomenon. This field is actually tricky, mainly because it overlaps into various Human Capital areas. There are still a lot of people who think ER is labour law, IR, or even HR. Some see it an Employee Wellness initiative, but the reality is that ER is not any of those things, it is a stand-alone concept that can be used to facilitate processes in all those areas. This function should therefore have its own devices that leaders can use to implement it. People struggle with ER issues because they 'do not have tools and models to use, they end up borrowing from other fields to resolve ER matters.' (Participant 9)

'I think majority pretends that they understand the whole concept in order to appear smart, but they actually do not understand it. If you ask most of then they will tell you that ER

is about finding rational ways of resolving conflict in the organisation and building relationships, but their actions paint a completely different picture.' (Participant 7)

Theme 3: Historical context

This theme is linked to Research Objectives 1 and 4 (to understand what modern ER entails in the workplace and to propose practical solutions for implementing modern ER in the workplace). Majority of participants indicated that there are still diversity, discrimination and equality issues disturbing harmony in the workplace. Participants mentioned that as in many other organisations and sectors, there are still cases of unfair discrimination on the basis of race and gender. Most of these cases are as a result of the historical political background in South Africa, the legacy of apartheid system and poor leadership. The finding indicates that although the apartheid system was replaced with a democratic system in 1994, certain organisations have not successfully uprooted workplace discrimination, which is reflected in their pay-scales, development programmes and leadership structures.

Subtheme 1: Diversity

The majority of participants indicated that some of the leaders struggle with managing workplace diversity, which causes discomfort and disharmony in the workplace. Some participants indicated that some acts are motivated by discrimination, but some are purely because of ignorance and immaturity, participants stated:

'… [O]ther cultures and religions are not respected in this company, if not in the whole sector or country even. Our laws favour certain traditions than others, but remember these laws come from the Romans and the Dutch people, they still control us even today. Diversity management is very important in the workplace. People must learn to accommodate each other.' (Participant 11)

'… The problem is that in this organisation and across the sector, racial discrimination is still a big problem. Sometimes people are afraid to talk about it because of the rainbow nation spirit but the reality is that people are still treated differently merely based on the colour of their skin and it is disgusting. It is not only in this company, but it is also all over the sector.' (Participant 10)

'[T]he other problem is that sometimes you get a sense that some people's cultures and traditions are prioritised over others. You see it everywhere. It is a pity that, so many years after achieving freedom, nothing really changed. We still use Western beliefs and guidelines for almost everything in the workplace. Africans are not accommodated by these traditions, and, for me, that is where we are missing the point.' (Participant 11)

Subtheme 2: Conflict management

Majority of the participants identified conflict as a serious threat and business risk. Some participants associated conflict with various triggers in the workplace such as workplace bullying, diversity, poor leadership and workplace stupidity. The perception is that conflict is disruptive and can be costly if not well managed, one participant remarked:

'Organisations lose a lot of money every year due to work disruptions, strikes, lawsuits, poor performance, recruitment

costs and things like that. If you drill deeper into the root-cause of most of these issues you will find that someone somewhere failed to manage an issue and allowed it to escalate to a conflict level or even a crisis. What organisations ought to do to prevent or mitigate these issues is to have a proactive approach in the organisation, to say how do we minimise the risk of work disruption by taking control of people issues as early as possible.' (Participant 6)

Theme 4: Employment relation perspectives

This theme entails understanding what modern ER entails in the workplace. Employment relation perspectives are generally world views or theories that society uses to analyse attitudes, trends and dynamics in the workplace. In this study, ER perspectives refer specifically to ideologies that leaders and organisations usually adopt to guide their outlook on workplace and workplace dynamics:

'Organisations have different approaches to people management issues, corporate responsibility issues, culture and so on. Usually, these approaches are influenced by the overall organisational objectives, purpose and reason for existence. Similarly, human capital processes are influenced by the same ideologies, therefore it is important as OD, HR and ER professionals to understand these ideologies and how they affect our reasoning, perceptions and processes in the workplace.' (Participant 3)

Subtheme 1: Africanisation

Some participants indicated that they are frustrated by the continuous reliance on Western-based ER ideologies at the expense of indigenous perspectives. The perception is that South Africa and other African countries are missing out an opportunity to use indigenous dispute resolutions and mediation processes as formal or informal ER processes:

'Our laws and processes favour certain traditions than others… some traditions are prioritised over others. Africans are not accommodated by these traditions. These things are imposed on us, and when we raise these issues, we are always criticised for being troublemakers. It is always the same things, certain religions are not recognised like others, anything African is seen as inferior, and we are allowing that in the workplace, that is wrong. We need to find a way to creatively engrain our identity in everything we do, including the workplace.' (Participant 11)

'The problem with our laws and policies is that they are too prescriptive, you are always told how to resolve a dispute and what should be the end results. If you 'do not to that, you are then accused of favouritism. The point is, fairness, equality and such like concepts must be understood in context, and Africa has a context that is barely recognised by these foreign systems.' (Participant 4)

Subtheme 2: Ubuntu

Some of the participants believe that indigenous perspectives such as Ubuntu can be used strategically in the workplace to build relationships and to facilitate stakeholder engagements. The perception is that Ubuntu embodies critical virtues that are necessary to secure and maintain harmony and unity within teams:

'… [H]armony is critical because it will alleviate the pain and fears [*from the past*] if it can be attained. Sometimes these policies and

the labour laws are also problematic. They are too quick to reprimand; there is no room for building each other. Make one mistake and the case goes to a hearing and then someone is fired. Surely there must be other ways of dealing with these issues.' (Participant 6)

'… ER is about harmony, it is about treating people with respect, humility, sharing and caring for each other, that is how trust is achieved. As Africans that is what we know, botho [*humility*] such things should be incorporated in our workplace process.' (Participant 3)

Discussion

This study investigated the integration of African traditions, perspectives and indigenous wisdom in modern ER. This section summarises the most significant findings.

Primary finding 1: Strategic leadership in employment relations

The key finding that strategic leadership in ER is associated with leaders' ability to dissect, interpret and integrate strategic objectives to achieve harmonious working environment means that majority of participants support an integrated ER approach. This also means that participants perceive strategic leadership as a key enabler of harmonious ER. This finding also suggests that some leaders rely on their skills and experience to integrate systems and processes in order to have a holistic ER approach. However, some leaders only have theoretical understanding of ER and are struggling with implementation.

This finding is significant because it outlines critical issues about the relationship between organisations and their employees and the alignment between organisational objectives and personal goals. This finding dissects the critical elements of an employment relationship, how personal value and beliefs can affect modern strategic ER, and how organisations should define and position ER in the workplace.

This finding further indicates that majority of the participants perceive organisational harmony as a significant tool in ER that should be used to achieve organisational goals. Harmony is perceived as a powerful tool that can be used to facilitate stakeholder management and drive the organisation towards achieving its vision. This means that organisations that do not have strategies to embed harmony in their processes and organisational culture may encounter challenges with stakeholder management and achieving some of the set strategic objectives.

This primary finding is significant in this study because it underscores the complexity of the ER field. It highlights the intricacies surrounding strategic priorities in the organisation, the importance of investing in talent management at the leadership level and recognising leaders that are doing a great job. To achieve most of the strategic objectives, top executives and management should be in sync at all strategic

levels. In other words, organisations should have a solid management team that is capable of understanding and implementing the strategic objectives. Building this knowledge in the organisation is always a challenging task, but a critical step is without strategic thinking, most objectives will not be achieved.

Senior managers and executives should also be recognised for the value they add in organisations; this is good not only for the individuals but for the organisational culture as well. The relationship between line managers and employees is very important for organisational well-being and talent management. Ultimately, good talent managers work diligently to preserve positive relationships among all members of an organisation. Good people managers must be supported particularly because they are the treasured managers who can bring out the best in large numbers of staff (Argus & Samson, 2021; Nzonzo & Du Plessis, 2020). Leaders are required to be creative, innovative and aware of their impact on business. Hence, ensuring their well-being is crucial, as they hold significance for the organisation. Their expertise and actions can shape the organisation's trajectory, impact their colleagues and influence the industry as a whole (De Roche et al., 2020).

Primary finding 2: Employment relations content

The finding that majority of participants complained about the shortage of ER content means that knowledge management and information-sharing systems and practices are not efficient in the two organisations. Although some participants from the one organisation indicated that their ER executive has (over the years) engaged with employees on ER matters and initiated ER campaigns, the findings indicate that the initiatives were not impactful as most line managers and ER practitioners are still unclear about the ER strategy and tools to transform the department. The finding that existing ER content is still mainly based only on Western ideologies and some redundant sources means that there is a serious lack of ER creativity and ER investment in the two organisations. It also means that there is poor ER planning and infrastructure to execute ER initiatives. This finding is significant because it demonstrates the magnitude of the problem in the organisations. For ER to add value in the Human Capital environment, firstly, it must be appropriately positioned as a strategic function, and secondly, ER custodians must ensure that they develop proper ER content for the function. Where ER is merely perceived as a support function, there is usually no opportunity for the function to add any strategic value to the organisation. Consequently, under such conditions ER is usually consumed by other functions that are positioned properly or led by leaders with influence.

Proper management of modern ER involves proper planning and organising of ER systems and thinking ahead in terms of what the organisation should target to achieve.

It involves formulating a vision for the organisation and setting various goals and objectives. Management must develop appropriate content and infrastructure to facilitate the execution of the strategy adopted (Nel & Kirsten, 2020).

Primary finding 3: Historical context

The finding that some employees are still subjected to gender and racial discrimination in the workplace means that harmony has not been successfully entrenched in organisational processes and culture. It also indicates poor leadership skills and ineffective diversity management programmes. The finding that the discrimination is also reflected in the pay scales and leadership structures (in the two organisations) means that the existing ER infrastructure is inadequate to deal with workplace injustices. Post-1994, most organisations in South Africa have invested in transformation initiatives to promote employment equity and equality and to uproot racisms and various other forms of discrimination. Some organisations have made transformation a strategic imperative and have firm policies and strategies to deal with these issues. Nonetheless, certain organisations have not taken sufficient action as most of these programmes have proven unsuccessful.

This finding is significant because it highlights some of the sensitive issues, especially racial discrimination, which most people are afraid to talk about in the workplace. These issues are usually avoided and hidden from the public to protect the business reputation. However, injustices of the past in South Africa cause discomfort in the workplace and are sources of stress, depression, absenteeism, employee turnover and many other negative feelings which lead to organisation anxiety.

Strategic leadership, therefore, should strive for workplace justice. This refers to organisational activities relating to the distribution of the organisation's resources and rewards. These can include goods such as wages and salaries, jobs, promotions and training opportunities (Nel & Kirsten, 2020). Modern ER, therefore, requires that management should take into account the historic context of the organisation, sector or country when developing internal strategies. To manage these dimensions, management should adopt a holistic approach to workplace well-being, which includes physical health, emotional care, social and spiritual dimensions of life (Cooper & Leiter, 2017).

Primary finding 4: Employment relations perspectives

The finding that most participants feel that their organisations and leaders rely on foreign ER ideologies at the expense of indigenous customs means that there is an ideological misalignment between management and employees. This also indicates discrepancies in leadership philosophy, which is often inculcated through ER consultation sessions and information dissemination mediums. A material disconnect

between ideological principles and leadership philosophy has the potential to perpetuate disharmony in the organisation.

The finding also raises important questions about the role of indigenous customers and wisdom in modern ER. To what extent can indigenous traditions be integrated into current ER (and thus IR) systems? What will be the benefits of such an integration, and most importantly, what should organisations do to accommodate indigenous knowledge in ER?

African perspectives in the field of ER have been marginalised. The principles and philosophies that characterise human interaction such as Ubuntu have received limited recognition because of the attachment to classical ideologies. The principles of Ubuntu should be at the centre of transforming the South African ER agenda from Eurocentric labour practices to Africanised perspectives. The philosophy of Ubuntu is perfectly aligned to drive and derive harmonious ER in the workplace. Ubuntu embodies deep notions of inclusivity, communal responsibility and shared interests, yet has never been formally incorporated in the South African workplace and ER literature as an alternative ideology to Western-based traditions (Nel & Kirsten, 2020).

Limitations and strengths

There is very limited literature on the role of indigenous perspectives in ER. Emerging literature shows interesting predispositions to develop indigenous traditions in line with ER systems, relying on perspectives such as Africanisation and Ubuntu principles. Apart from identifying gaps in literature, this study managed to generate solid insights from the empirical data outlining the implications of integrating indigenous knowledge into modern ER systems. The positive aspect of this study is that although the data were collected in South Africa, the principles followed and insights generated can be applied anywhere in the world, where indigenous knowledge is incorporated into existing ER systems in that geographical region.

Recommendations for future research

Ideological arguments, discussions and debates are often complex by nature. Studies based on such arguments run the risk of being unnecessarily cumbersome or misconstrued. This study is not without such limitations. Although there is a lot written about the question of ideologies in the workplace, not much has been written about the significance of indigenous knowledge in ER. This study mainly depended on empirical data, supported by limited literature in the South African context. Therefore, there is further scope for potential refinement of this topic or extension of the perspective presented. Future research in this area will be crucial to create more content and enhance the body of knowledge in the field.
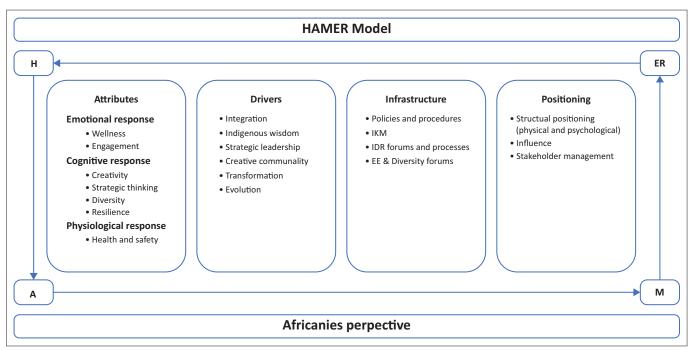
Practical implications

Considering the significance of the findings discussed above, the implications for the application for this study are presented in the form of an ER model (Figure 1) designed to outline the value of an integrated ER system that incorporates indigenous knowledge, traditions, value and wisdom. The proposed Harmonious, Africanised and Modern Employment Relations (HAMER) model is a graphic representation of the attributes, drivers, infrastructure and thinking required to facilitate an integrative ER approach.

The backbone of this model is the concept of integration. The model is based on four key pillars. The first pillar outlines the key attributes required for harmony to be achieved in the workplace. This refers to the behaviours and actions that animate harmony. The model suggests that harmony is achieved when organisations adopt a holistic and creative perspective when dealing with human capital issues. The emotional response refers to the need for all parties in the employment relationship to ensure that their emotional needs are nurtured. This involves ensuring that employees and leaders receive emotional support in the organisation and, where possible, outside the workplace as well. The framework suggests that employee engagement improves when emotional needs are cherished.

Cognitive response refers to the parties' ability to analyse, assimilate and generate information that supports the achievement of harmonious employee relations (ER). This includes imaginative and tactical thinking, the ability to grasp diversity issues and the psychological resilience to manage conflict in the workplace. Physiological response, on the contrary, involves the ability of members to advocate for and ensure basic health and safety issues in the workplace. This includes awareness of issues such as working hours and fatigue in the workplace, the physical working environment, stress and related challenges in the workplace.

The second pillar is concerned with the Africanisation of ER processes and practices. The model identifies key drives for this purpose and argues that for ER to achieve strategic value, it must be integrated into the traditions of the indigenous people. The role of the society and its practices needs to be interpreted in the right context. This process requires creative leadership, indigenous wisdom and the 'will' to transform organisations. In the context of ER leadership, 'creative' refers to the ability of leaders to think innovatively and develop new, imaginative approaches to managing and leading within organisations, especially in the realm of ER. Leaders in the ER space need to go beyond traditional and routine methods of managing employee relations. They should be able to come up with fresh ideas, strategies and solutions to address challenges, conflicts and changes in the workplace. Creative leaders are open to exploring unconventional ways of improving workplace dynamics, employee engagement and overall organisational performance. The model therefore suggests that organisations should use indigenous knowledge to facilitate critical processes in the

ER, employment relations; IKM, indigenous knowledge management; IDR, indigenous dispute resolution; EE, employment equity.

FIGURE 1: Harmonious, Africanised and Modern Employment Relations (HAMER) model.

workplace to connect with the values and customs of a particular country or region. The reference to 'indigenous wisdom' and the 'will' to transform organisations indicates that successful creative leadership in the context of ER also requires an understanding of cultural nuances and the determination to drive meaningful change. In this case, the model specifically suggests the incorporation of Ubuntu principles as part of codified organisational processes. It implies a holistic approach that draws from different sources of knowledge and involves a proactive commitment to driving organisational transformation. Overall, creative leadership in ER means fostering an environment where innovative thinking is valued, and leaders can leverage creative strategies to navigate the complexities of workplace dynamics and achieve positive outcomes for both employees and the organisation. Employment relation is an evolving field and requires leaders who are creative and willing to align organisations to developing trends. This includes the management and facilitation of dispute resolutions, mediation, disciplinary processes and stakeholder management.

The third pillar is concerned with the understanding of modern ER. Focuses on the physical and intellectual infrastructure required to facilitate modern ER in the workplace. The argument advanced by the HAMER model is that only when organisations understand what modern ER entails, what infrastructure is required and what drives the phenomenon, will they be able to implement and maintain effective ER in the workplace. The model suggests that modern ER involves tangible and intangible infrastructures necessary to facilitate the implementation and attainment of ER. These tools include data analytics, digital transformation platforms, automation, indigenous knowledge management systems, policies and procedures, indigenous knowledge forums, diversity and EE committees, indigenous dispute resolution

and meditation platforms. This intellectual infrastructure should be developed and incorporated in the modern ER approach to connect with people today and provide guideline for the future. Existing practices based on traditional Western approaches should not be discarded but rather integrated into the same platforms to arrive at a holistic product to which all members can relate and with which they can identify. The result is likely to be long-lasting harmony in the workplace.

The final pillar is concerned with the idea of positioning ER as a function in the workplace. This refers to how ER is interpreted, implemented and supported in the organisation. The model suggests that for ER to create strategic value in the workplace, firstly, it needs to be positioned as a strategic function. Secondly, the function should be vested with the necessary power to drive transformation. Strategic value is therefore created when ER has influence in the organisation to manage various relationships or stakeholders.

Overall, this HAMER model is about behaviours and actions needed to enliven integration in order to achieve harmony in the workplace. It also demonstrates the importance of a holistic and integrative perspective in ER, aligned with the empirical data and literature from Slabbert and Swanepoel (2011). This model also supports the academic discourse about the adoption of indigenous perspectives in ER, aligned to literature by Nel and Kirsten (2020), advocating for alternative socio-economic theories in ER.

Contribution and value add to the study

The limited recognition and use of African perspectives in the field of ER have remained a perennial concern for

decades. This study makes a significant contribution to the academic discourse regarding the relevance, value and implication of exploring alternative post-modernist ideologies in the field of ER. The study proposes the adoption of Africanised perspectives in ER and provides initial guidelines for integrating indigenous knowledge in existing ER perspectives, using the HAMER model as a starting point.

Conclusion

This study provided literature and empirical evidence that ER perspectives affect various aspects of the organisational, including the leadership approach and the overall vision. This study demonstrated the significance of understanding various ER perspectives (classical and modern), in order to properly align the organisation, from a strategic perspective. Africanisation was found to be the most suitable ER perspective to be adopted as the cornerstone of integration required in modern ER systems. The findings also suggest that incorporating indigenous traditions into the main ER system and acknowledging the indigenous knowledge and wisdom in organisational processes have the potential to create and enhance organisational harmony in the workplace. In addition, such integration can have a meaningful impact on dispute resolution processes and conflict management.

The findings of this study further suggest that the integration can also be particularly useful to doing business in Africa, or any enterprise led by non-Africans having interest in exploring African markets. Based on the significance of these propositions, future research efforts may focus on initiating similar studies, across various sectors, conceivably with more interest in the implementation challenges of the integration process.

Acknowledgements

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