Most Americans have heard of South Africa in terms of "apartheid", the Kruger National Park or the Biko trial. Relatively few know how diverse its people are, how its economy is growing and how complex it is politically. On all three levels the country is dynamic - the change agent’s dream.

South Africa is a remarkable mosaic of human society on the most Southern tip of Africa. Here, in an area roughly eight times the size of Belgium, live some 30 million people, comprising Whites, Coloreds (persons of mixed race), Asians and no fewer than 10 indigenous African tribes, of which the Zulus is the largest.

The Cultures

Among the Blacks, the languages spoken can be divided into four main groups, 20 three sub-groups and numerous dialects. Some groups cannot communicate with each other in their home language. As with language, cultural differences are great: To illustrate - while the Vendas are a relatively homogeneous group with 27 distinctive tribes, the Zulus consist of 200 tribes; the Nguni people live in clans in disperse patterns, while the Sotho live in well organized villages.

The Whites speak two main languages, English and Afrikaans and within these two main groups is a strong Jewish community as well as large, more recent immigrant communities, such as Portuguese, Greeks, Italians and at present a large influx of Polish immigrants.

Asian people too are diverse - 65% are Hindu, 21% Moslems and the remainder are Christians and Buddhists.
Population Trends

The population is not only diverse, but it is also exploding. In the past two decades, the population has more than doubled from 13 million in 1964 to its present 30 million.

Urbanization is rapid. While in 1946 less than 2 million Blacks lived in cities, today the figure is around 10 million or nearly half the total Black population. Urbanization has brought drastic changes in housing, in social patterns in mores and norms and naturally also in community problems.

Compulsory education for Black and Coloured people is being phased in rapidly. Today nearly 80% of all Black South Africans between the ages of 7 and 16 are at school. As 50% of the Black population is under the age of 16, the country is facing a tremendous challenge to find the necessary resources, including teachers and classrooms, to cope with this new need for education.

The Economy

New levels of education are opening new career horizons for a large percentage of our people, but virtually the whole population is experiencing economic changes. Our economic growth can possibly be best illustrated by the following:

- South Africa is the seventh largest world market outside the developed and all surplus countries;
- South Africa is the sixth largest grain exporter and has some of the world’s biggest manufacturing plants;
- Nearly half the country’s liquid fuel requirements are produced at our Sasol oil-from-coal complex;
- South Africa’s uranium production has increased by 60% over the past three years and South Africa is one of the few countries with a capacity to enrich uranium.

It is said that South Africa will be the Saudi Arabia of the 80’s. The Republic has reserves of coal and uranium with contained energy one-and-a-half times that of Saudi Arabia’s oil reserves. South Africa manufactures to the microscopic tolerance required by the nuclear power industry, builds computers and Mag 2 jet fighters, exports motor vehicle components to 100 countries and has the world’s largest explosive plant.

One-and-a-half million Black people from other countries in Africa go to South Africa every year to work and study. In the last decade, the income of Black workers in industry increased by over 40%.

Political Changes

While economic changes are being experienced by all people, it is perhaps on the political level that there have been the most changes in the first year or two. Politically the country is in a process of transition. On the one hand, we have national states within the country in which the indigenous people have total autonomy over their own affairs. On the other hand, White South Africans last year voted overwhelmingly in favor of sharing their political rights with Coloreds and Asians. These political changes will mean tremendous changes in the attitudes of all our people.

Our Company

In this dynamic environment where change is the order of the day, the OD consultant in South
Africa has a task which can only be described as very exciting.

Our consultancy has been in existence since 1979. In the past five years (possibly the period of greatest change), we have been fortunate enough to become involved in many projects which have a direct bearing on the conditions of social, political and economic change in our society. We should like to share with you our involvement in a number of these areas.

*Intercultural programs.* When cultures as diverse as ours are integrated, understanding each other is a prerequisite for a change of attitude. One of our most exciting projects has been an intercultural program between Zulu and Afrikaner student leaders. This program has since been supplemented with our National student interaction program, which brings together two students from every tertiary educational institution around the country and is aimed at enhancing leadership skills within an intercultural context. Recently, the problem concerning culture and origin, especially in the African context, was given a new dimension. We were contracted to resolve an old, but very destructive conflict between two tribes with different cultural origins. It is in such situations that one becomes very much aware of the differences between Africa and the Western world.

*Community development.* Our new constitution is giving additional political rights to many persons of coloured origin who have as yet only had political experience at local government level. At present we are engaged in a Leadership for Development Program in which the development needs of Colored leaders are determined to meet the demands of the future. We are indeed grateful to be afforded the opportunity to contribute in this way towards a stable leadership cadre at various levels and in different communities.

*Management and leadership development.* Because of a tremendous industrial growth over the last three decades, South Africa has a very large ratio of managers to workers - one to thirty, compared 1:8 in the US. Consequently, management development receives much emphasis in industry and government to help cope effectively with the increasing demands on leaders and managers. Management development generally forms part of OD projects and in such cases, matches the needs of the client companies. Lately, however, possibly due to the described rate of change, we are called upon to conduct strategic awareness workshops, aid the process of Black supervisory development, deal with power issues, the development of leadership at all levels and the establishment of negotiation skills: all essential for a stable and prosperous industrial future for the country.

*The challenge of the education gap.* One of the new challenges in industry today is the problem in regard to the education gap. This gap has become evident after a strong drive by industry to train more Blacks for technical positions. Many factors contribute to this gap, among others, culture, language, home environment, community prejudices, etc. In an effort to breach this gap, a model has been developed, focusing on the areas of selection, training and motivation. We anticipate using this model in an OD framework and expect to start our first project in this regard shortly.

*Industrial relations.* In a country as diverse as South Africa, sound industrial relations systems are essential. It has also been proved that the approach to industrial relations in South Africa...
should be unique and not a duplicate of similar systems in the UK, Europe or the US, mainly due to its cultural composition and the many migrant workers from bordering countries. We have been fortunate to become involved in the training aspect of industrial relations - essential since peace and progress is dependent on the people who have to implement the policies and procedures. Our biggest challenge in this area has been the design and presentation of an industrial relations training program for one of the largest gold mines in the world.

**Government.** As a result of drastic political change and particularly the implementation of our new political dispensation, government departments are having to increase productivity, change structurally and in attitudes. This need is prevalent at central, provincial and local government level. Anticipating the potential contribution of the behavioural scientist in the political change process, we studied the context as well as the factors extensively over four years, publishing and lecturing on a national scale. Our successes with regard to leaders at central government level has been limited, but the situation as far as the local government is concerned, looks very promising. It is at the local government level where cultures will have to meet, the real negotiations have to take place and where final decisions within the broad policy guidelines have to be made. In this regard, we have developed a successful management programs for local authorities, but the projects that are really exciting, are the OD programs at local authority level, aimed at helping the local authorities to implement the change process in a planned way.

**Development of OD professionals.** OD practice in South Africa is in an early phase and we are proud of our involvement in the development of OD practitioners and in the establishment of a network of OD practitioners in South Africa. For three years we have presented a program for internal OP consultants, consisting of six modules, extending from March to November each year. Later this year, in co-operation with David Scott from Odisa, we hope to get an OD network started that will serve as a professional home for the people that we train.

Finally we are indebted to institutions in the US, the UK and Europe from which we have received professional support and guidance over many years. As members of CCI and The O.D. Institute, we have been able to keep in close contact with developments in the field through the close cooperation of our colleagues in the US and the European region.

It is abundantly clear that the situation in South Africa today offers challenges to the OP consultant which are unique in the Western World. To be successful in this field and to make a constructive contribution as behavioural scientists we are dependent upon continuous interaction between ourselves and our colleagues in other countries.