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*Highly Skilled South African Immigrants  
in New Zealand*

*A Thesis in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Management*

*In  
Management  
At Massey University  
Albany  
New Zealand*

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2006*

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## 1. ABSTRACT

This exploratory research represents a first step into investigating the acculturation strategies employed by highly skilled South African immigrants to New Zealand. It answers the call for information to be added to the body of knowledge, in this emergent research area for New Zealand, on this specific immigrant group. The report examines the match between the South African and New Zealand acculturation strategies in the workplace, and highlights the relationships expected as a result. It also identifies factors helping and hindering the acculturation of South African immigrants. Limiting factors such as time constrained the report; however, results add new information to the body of knowledge in the fields of immigration to New Zealand, emigration from South Africa, and acculturation in New Zealand. The research used convenience and snowball techniques to identify participants, and structured interviews with open ended questions were used to elicit their migration experiences. Data analysis was qualitative, and consisted of identification of themes that could be used to classify participant groups. The research concluded that highly skilled South African immigrants to New Zealand pursue either an integrative or assimilative acculturation strategy. Those pursuing an integrative strategy are likely to have consensual relationships with New Zealanders in the workplace, given the New Zealand expectation that immigrants should integrate into the host culture. However, those pursuing an assimilation strategy may experience more problematic relationships in the New Zealand workplace. The main factors helping the integration group to acculturate were developing shared understanding and acceptance between different cultural groups. The factors helping the assimilation group were their ability to be flexible adapt to change. The main factor hindering the acculturation of the integration group was that their expectations of New Zealand workplaces were not met. For the assimilation group the main hindering factor was suffering from acculturative stress. A major implication of the research for New Zealand workplaces is developing a better understanding of highly skilled South African employees, which in particular will affect selection and retention practices for this group. By developing shared understanding, a better fit between the person and their environment can be achieved. This can help ensure the skills of this immigrant group are utilised in New Zealand's growing knowledge economy.

## 2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis has been a long road, and I have a lot of people to thank for their support during this journey. Firstly, to my family and partner, thank you all for your support and love, I could not have motivated myself to achieve this goal without you. My supervisor, Kaye, you are a wonderful, positive and intelligent person, and I value your friendship. Not only have you organised all the administrative details and provided input and advice, but you have also managed to inspire me, and for that, I thank you. Thanks also go to the entire Department of Management and International Business, who have provided much needed help along the way. Finally, to my friends, thank you all for listening and always being there to take my mind off my work, and remind me that there is always time for play.

‘We have a hunger of the mind which asks for knowledge of all around us, and the more we gain, the more is our desire; the more we see, the more we are capable of seeing’ – Maria Mitchell

May our minds never cease to hunger.

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### 3. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IAM – Interactive Acculturation Model

IOM - International Organisation for Migration

OECD - Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development

P-E – Person Environment fit

P-J – Person Job fit

P-O – Person Organisation fit

UN – United Nations

## 4. INTRODUCTION

### 4.1. New Zealand

New Zealand is considered one of the few countries in the world that experiences immigration from new source countries such as Asia and the Pacific Islands (Bedford, Ho & Lidgard, 2000; Castles & Miller, 1998). It is also one of a minority of countries that actively encourages immigration as a way of increasing economic and population growth (Department of Labour, 2006a; Poot, 1998). As a result, New Zealand is becoming a more ethnically complex, multicultural country (Bedford, McPherson & Spoonley, 2000). New Zealand has faced quite varied population changes in the last twenty years. These include the highest net gains seen in one hundred years, attributable to Asian immigration; high net losses of New Zealanders, dubbed the brain drain; and an increase in temporary migration (Bedford, Ho & Lidgard, 2000). The country is losing its qualified youth to the "Big OE" or overseas experience, a working holiday that can last 12 months or more (Inkson & Meyer, 2003). Any gain in skilled labour is hampered by migrants unwillingness to commit to New Zealand permanently, hence the temporary migration trend (Bedford, 2000). The above changes have implications for the economic capacity of New Zealand. A key aspect of being competitive in the global market is the ability of the country to attract and incorporate skilled migrants, who have a wide choice of host country (Benson-Rae & Rawlinson, 2003).

Successive New Zealand Governments have, since the 1970s, met the issues identified above by actively encouraging immigration of skilled labour (Bedford, 2003; Lidgard, 1993). Driving this is the shift towards a knowledge based economy, and greater international competition for skills (Bedford, 2003; Department of Labour, 2006a). It is vital to ensure new immigrants skills are utilised in the labour market, something researchers warn is not happening, resulting in under employment of skilled immigrants (Mace, Atkins, Fletcher & Carr, 2005). The most recent action has been to conduct a review of the 1987 Immigration Act, as New Zealand legislation needs to adjust to cater to labour market needs by harnessing the increased circulation of migrants, while still maintaining border integrity (Department of Labour, 2006a). The current

immigration system is based on points, it ranks applicants and grants entry on the basis of qualifications, work experience, age, English language proficiency and ability to settle (Bedford, 2003; Department of Labour, 2006a). The New Zealand immigration program has three streams; Skilled Migrant, including Business, Investor/Entrepreneur, General Skills and Skilled Labour; Family Sponsored; and International/ Humanitarian (Dunstan, Boyd & Crichton, 2004). All categories except family focus on bringing highly skilled or experienced people into New Zealand to complement the workforce. Bonus points can be earned by having an offer of employment in an occupation on the long-term shortage skill list; having skills in identified future growth areas; or skills in areas of absolute skills shortage (Department of Labour, 2005). This helps New Zealand select those who will be able to match their skills with employment opportunities in New Zealand (Bedford, 2003).

Regulations regarding temporary work visas have already been amended in an attempt to attract younger skilled migrants to New Zealand (Bedford, 2000). New Zealand also has equal employment opportunity policies in place to improve the labour market position of immigrants and ensure the labour market takes advantage of the skills they have to offer (Bedford, 2003). The New Zealand Government also actively supports the development of a multicultural society. This is evidenced through a multitude of cultural festivals sponsored by local councils. For example, the Auckland City Council organises a Lantern Festival, a Chinese celebration; a Pacifica festival to celebrate Pacific cultures in Auckland; and Diwali, the Indian Festival of Lights (Auckland City, 2006). New Zealand has a positive attitude towards skilled immigrants. Research suggests 81% of New Zealanders feel immigrants have made a positive contribution to the country (Ward & Masgoret, 2005, p.2). The country also has positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, with 78% of New Zealanders agreeing that accepting a wide variety of cultures into the country was important, and 88% agreeing that society should be multicultural (Ward & Masgoret, 2004, p.5).

The result of these policies has been positive net migration since 2001, although numbers have fallen from 95,951 (2002) to 78,963 (2005) (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b). Statistics New Zealand; following countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia; is currently conducting a Longitudinal Immigration Survey, with results expected to be released in 2007. This survey focuses on the experiences of new

immigrants; examining the outcomes of immigration policy and determining how to assist the settlement of immigrants (Statistics New Zealand, 2006c). The pilot study for the survey shows a trend of increased approvals in the Skilled Business category between 1998 (around 14,000) and 2002 (around 36,000), with a slight decline in 2003 (around 30,000) (Dunstan, et al., 2004, p. 23). Table 1 provides information on residency approvals by category, from 1999 to 2005. The highlighted row indicates just over half (55%) of immigrants are in the Skilled Migrant category (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b).

Table 1

*Residence Approvals by category, 1999-2005*

| <b>Residence Approvals by Category<br/>1999–2005</b> |                     |               |               |               |               |               |               |
|--|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Category   | Year ended December |               |               |               |               |               |               |
|  | 1999                | 2000          | 2001          | 2002          | 2003          | 2004          | 2005          |
| General skills                                       | 14,398              | 19,075        | 31,015        | 29,630        | 20,516        | 8,237         | 915           |
| <b>Skilled migrant</b>                               | ...                 | ...           | ...           | ...           | ...           | <b>7,504</b>  | <b>30,040</b> |
| Family   | 12,915              | 13,941        | 15,965        | 12,663        | 14,608        | 13,394        | 14,834        |
| Marriage   | 5,582               | 5,792         | 6,473         | 5,203         | 6,430         | 2,440         | 319           |
| Parent   | 3,570               | 4,041         | 4,724         | 2,431         | 2,273         | 2,758         | 3,410         |
| Child  | 1,168               | 994           | 1,131         | 1,283         | 1,312         | 1,362         | 1,302         |
| Humanitarian   | 1,438               | 2,029         | 2,264         | 1,902         | 381           | 267           | 139           |
| Partnership  | ...                 | ...           | ...           | ...           | 178           | 4,534         | 8,496         |
| Other  | 1,157               | 1,085         | 1,373         | 1,844         | 4,212         | 2,033         | 1,168         |
| Employees of businesses                              | 2                   | 18            | 49            | 48            | 19            | 10            | 8             |
| Entrepreneur category                                | 20                  | 26            | 69            | 150           | 801           | 1,608         | 2,048         |
| Investor / Business investor                         | 305                 | 869           | 4,077         | 4,130         | 2,573         | 1,620         | 901           |
| Refugee  | 1,944               | 1,635         | 1,395         | 1,531         | 1,079         | 1,336         | 926           |
| Samoan quota   | 1,024               | 1,444         | 1,069         | 403           | 343           | 610           | 1,753         |
| Other  | 381                 | 583           | 475           | 262           | 3,483         | 1,836         | 2,751         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>30,989</b>       | <b>37,591</b> | <b>54,114</b> | <b>48,817</b> | <b>43,422</b> | <b>36,155</b> | <b>54,176</b> |

Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006b)

Demographic information on immigrants from the Skilled Business category is available in Appendix A. The pilot study (Dunstan, et al., 2004), clearly shows the choice to immigrate to New Zealand is based on lifestyle and the physical environment, more than employment opportunities. Further, the majority of immigrants intend to stay for more than five years. Most immigrants (75%) have contacts in New Zealand, however, most (75%) do not have family members here (Dunstan et al., 2004, p. 43).

They are well educated; the main occupations are professionals (health, teaching, mathematical and engineering), administrators, managers, legislators, and technicians (physical and health). Other common industries included property and business services, retail and education (Dunstan et al., 2004). Recent data from Statistics New Zealand (2006d) corroborates these findings, which are presented in Table 2. Of those immigrants whose occupations are known and identified (Total OKI), administrators, managers and professionals currently (2005) account for 44% of permanent and long term migrants.

Table 2

*Occupation of permanent and long term migrants, 1997- 2005*

| <b>Occupation of Permanent and Long-term Migrants<br/>1997–2005</b> |                     |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
|---|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Occupation  | Year ended December |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
|   | 1997                | 1998          | 1999          | 2000          | 2001          | 2002          | 2003          | 2004          | 2005          |
| <b>Arrivals</b>   |                     |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |               |
| Administrators and managers   | 2,729               | 2,147         | 2,001         | 1,680         | 2,493         | 3,435         | 3,334         | 2,944         | 2,970         |
| Professionals   | 9,153               | 7,218         | 6,624         | 6,499         | 8,153         | 9,764         | 9,688         | 9,292         | 9,374         |
| Technicians   | 4,278               | 3,427         | 4,034         | 3,721         | 4,304         | 4,267         | 4,849         | 4,164         | 3,712         |
| Clerks  | 2,670               | 2,380         | 2,334         | 2,184         | 2,856         | 3,558         | 3,497         | 2,682         | 2,471         |
| Service and sales workers   | 2,940               | 2,670         | 2,915         | 2,739         | 3,434         | 3,565         | 3,819         | 3,635         | 3,790         |
| Agriculture and fishery workers                                     | 969                 | 788           | 764           | 852           | 997           | 975           | 988           | 877           | 1,034         |
| Trades workers  | 3,483               | 1,893         | 1,884         | 1,769         | 2,232         | 2,374         | 2,661         | 2,684         | 2,886         |
| Plant and machine operators   | 1,090               | 811           | 773           | 734           | 890           | 952           | 1,018         | 1,051         | 1,055         |
| Elementary occupations  | 602                 | 576           | 535           | 581           | 692           | 556           | 700           | 588           | 665           |
| Occupation unidentifiable   | 3,224               | 5,717         | 6,366         | 7,047         | 8,562         | 10,094        | 9,465         | 8,966         | 10,311        |
| Not applicable <sup>(1)</sup>                                       | 32,340              | 27,686        | 27,318        | 29,690        | 39,078        | 48,054        | 44,647        | 37,291        | 34,929        |
| Not stated  | 4,158               | 2,907         | 4,195         | 5,498         | 7,403         | 8,357         | 7,994         | 6,305         | 5,766         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>67,636</b>       | <b>58,220</b> | <b>59,743</b> | <b>62,994</b> | <b>81,094</b> | <b>95,951</b> | <b>92,660</b> | <b>80,479</b> | <b>78,963</b> |
| Total OKI   | 27,914              | 21,910        | 21,864        | 20,759        | 26,051        | 29,446        | 30,554        | 27,917        | 27,957        |

Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006d)

## 4.2. South Africans in New Zealand

The current study focuses on the group of South African immigrants in New Zealand. This is an immigrant group that personifies the New Zealand Government's desired migrant, as the following discussion will show. They have good English proficiency and are generally skilled and well educated. Unfortunately, in the pilot study discussed above, people from South Africa are grouped with those from Europe, North America and Russia, so little specific data is available. The best estimate the pilot study has is that 14% of migrants to New Zealand are South African (Dunstan, et al., 2004, p. 28). Statistics New Zealand estimates that 2.2% (1,433) of immigrants in 2005 were born in South Africa (Statistics New Zealand, 2006d). This may not, however, reflect the number arriving on South African passports. Between 1998 and 2004, an estimated 9% of immigrants were from South Africa (Department of Labour, 2006b). Table 3 presents Census data from 1991, 1996, and 2001 (Statistics New Zealand, 2006a). This shows that the number of South Africans in New Zealand has been steadily rising, however, the data is not current, and the latest Census data is yet to be released.

Table 3

### *South Africans in New Zealand*

| Ethnic Group – Up to Three Responses <sup>(1)(2)</sup><br>(Total Responses) <sup>(3)(4)</sup> and Sex<br>for the Census Usually Resident Population<br>Count 1991, 1996 and 2001 |             |           |           |
|--|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Ethnic Group – Up to<br>Three Responses and<br>Sex   | Census Year |           |           |
|  | 1991        | 1996      | 2001      |
| New Zealand European   |             |           |           |
| Male   | 1,287,543   | 1,218,765 | 1,307,610 |
| Female   | 1,330,902   | 1,277,784 | 1,381,698 |
| Total  | 2,618,445   | 2,496,552 | 2,689,308 |
| South African  |             |           |           |
| Male   | 936         | 3,270     | 7,185     |
| Female   | 1,068       | 3,489     | 7,707     |
| Total  | 2,007       | 6,762     | 14,889    |
| Total People   |             |           |           |
| Male   | 1,648,239   | 1,698,099 | 1,747,752 |
| Female   | 1,697,574   | 1,768,488 | 1,838,982 |
| Total  | 3,345,813   | 3,466,587 | 3,586,731 |

Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006a)

The number of immigrants arriving from South Africa has varied markedly over the last 20 years. Figure 1 depicts the trend as estimated by Statistics New Zealand (2006d). It shows the relatively high peaks of the nineties have dropped, and that returns to South Africa have steadily risen. South African studies have projected this trend; however, no reasons are given for these estimates (Statistics South Africa, 2005; 2006). Possible reasons include under-employment in host countries (Mace, et al., 2005), psychological factors (Pietersen, 2000), and culture shock (Furnham, 1990). Speculation within the migrant community suggests lower migration rates to New Zealand may be because all those capable of leaving South Africa have already done so, leaving only those unwilling or financially unable to emigrate.

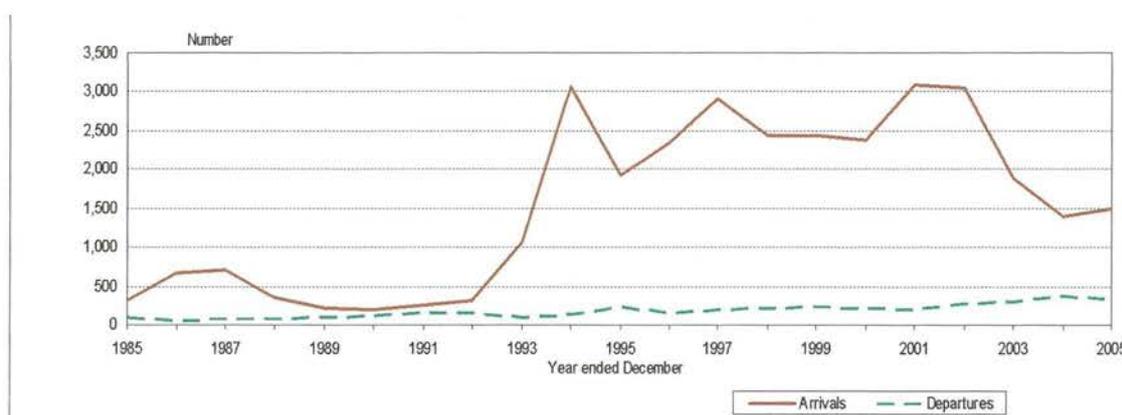


Figure 1: New Zealand figures for permanent and long term arrivals from and departures to South Africa

Source: Statistics New Zealand (2006d)

Using statistics from South Africa to corroborate New Zealand research is desirable, although problematic. In many cases, the statistics South Africa produces reflect much lower levels of emigrants than immigration statistics in destination countries show. Meyer (2002, p. 215) found that actual emigration of skilled labour out of South Africa is 3.2 times greater than estimates provided by the South African Government. South African Statistics is aware of this and suggests emigrants are not declaring their status until they have gained residency in their destination countries, or are filling in departure forms with false information. Therefore they present their statistics as “self declared” emigration information (Statistics South Africa, 2005, p. iv). What is agreed upon by both South African authorities and international researchers is that there are five main countries that South Africans target as destinations. These are the United Kingdom,

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United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Crush, 2002; Meyer, 2002; Statistics South Africa, 2005). These countries may be popular as they have similar cultural orientations to South Africa (Dunstan, et al., 2004). It is also suggested that data from destination, rather than source countries should be used to evaluate South African migration flows (Meyer, 2002).

South African authorities can provide some relevant demographic information on self declared emigrants. More than half, 65.2% (10,540) are economically active, and of these, 26.7% (4,316) are professionals (Statistics South Africa, 2005, p. v). This is corroborated by research from the Presidential Commission in their statement that the emigration of skilled labour has since become a major issue for the country to address (Wocke & Klein, 2002). The majority of highly skilled (professional) emigrants from South Africa are aged between 20 and 50 (Statistics South Africa, 2005, p. viii). They come from a variety of professions and include engineers, lawyers, medical professionals and executives (Statistics South Africa, 2005, p. 53).

Statistics New Zealand (2006c) provides extra demographic information about South African immigrants. They can be categorised into two main age groups; 0-19 and 20-54. This could reflect the immigration of family groups rather than individuals. Almost half of respondents did not provide occupational information; however, the professional, administrator, manager and technician categories are well represented among those who did. This suggests families with one or both parents in the skilled migrant category are entering New Zealand, and supports South African research. Other South African research suggests that both black and white people emigrate, which disproves the perception that only whites are leaving (Crush, 2000). The same research suggests that the more ties cut with the home country, such as giving up South African citizenship, the more permanent their migration decision may be.

The reasons for emigration from South Africa are varied, and may aid our understanding of why New Zealand is chosen as a destination country. Some of the most often cited reasons include a lack of safety and security, poor economic conditions, fewer employment opportunities and uncertain future professional advancement (Mattes &

Mniki, 2005). Other reasons include high tax rates and living costs, providing a secure future for children, job security and income levels, dissatisfaction with Government policies (for example affirmative action) and politics, and a pessimistic future outlook. The belief that these needs will be better met overseas, and access to networks overseas also eases the decision to emigrate (Crush, 2000). Research also suggests the decision is affected by fear of the AIDS epidemic, and lack of quality medical and social services (Crush, Pendleton & Tevera, 2005). New Zealand research suggests immigrants choose the country as a destination because of the lifestyle, physical environment, safety, lack of crime, economic conditions and employment and educational opportunities (Dunstan, et al., 2004). These reasons certainly relate to those South African emigrants give for leaving.

South African immigrants to New Zealand have incurred significant expenses during relocation, and finding employment is seen as one of the most difficult aspects of the move (Harrison & Nortje, 2000). They are not used to the smaller size of companies or the tendency to offer short contracts. There are several perceptions they have to deal with in the marketplace. The first is that they are 'stealing' jobs from New Zealanders. However, the New Zealand immigration process specifically selects those with skills to fill gaps in the labour force (Department of Labour, 2005). Borjas (2003) has noted that the impact of immigration on wages varies between studies; it is evident that New Zealand specific research is required in this area. Another perception of South Africans is that they do not stay in jobs long (Harrison & Nortje, 2000). This may be due to problems with under-employment and subsequent frequent exchanging of jobs to try and overcome this issue. New Zealand research suggests that immigrant skills are not successfully utilised, and this may be the case with the South African group (Mace et al., 2005). Finally, South Africans are perceived as too confident, sometimes aggressive and overly talkative (Harrison & Nortje, 2000). There is a significant cultural difference between the countries, something that could result in acculturative stress, the result of psychological attempts to adapt to a new culture (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004). It may have an impact on the behaviour of new immigrants as they struggle to behave in a more socially acceptable fashion. The misinterpretation of this struggle could be responsible for the stereotyping South African immigrants face in New Zealand.

A final factor to consider is the acculturation style South Africans may have, the focus for this study. To understand their style requires some background information on South African policies towards immigration, and their stance on developing a multicultural society. This follows the reasoning of Bourhis, Moise, Perreault and Seneca (1997), who identified state integration policies as affecting the perceptions of and ideology pursued regarding acculturation, for both host and immigrant. The South African Constitution accepts and defends freedom of cultural, religious and linguistic expression. However, cultural events for the diverse immigrant cultures do not seem to have Government support. Rather, South African cultural industries and events focus on showcasing African cultures as a basis for tourism (Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, 2006). The South African Government does not officially recognise or fund immigrant groups, however, South Africa is not a homogeneous nation. It is widely referred to as the Rainbow Nation specifically because of the vast array of cultures residing within it. The country has eleven national languages and core domestic cultural groups. A prevalent attitude is for cultural harmony, for everyone to come together as Africans. These factors will be vital in identifying and understanding the acculturation strategies employed by South African immigrants to New Zealand (Bourhis et al., 1997).

Little specific research on South African immigrants to New Zealand is available, let alone research solely on the highly skilled category. While some statistics are available, they are broad and descriptive, rather than providing information employers can use to their advantage in recruiting and effectively utilising these skilled workers. Acculturation has been identified as a process that also occurs in the workplace, so it is not limited to research focussing solely on culture (Berry & Sam, 1997; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988). Research in this area would aid the acculturation of highly skilled South African immigrants, help develop relevant support systems and remove barriers to acculturation. This would support the New Zealand Government aim of ensuring skilled immigrants who are able to compliment our workforce with their skills, and are able to bolster areas where skill shortages are apparent. It is important not only to ensure New Zealand can attract skilled labour, but also that immigrants can be properly integrated into the labour market (Benson-Rae & Rawlinson, 2003). These are just some of the

steps along the path to developing a powerful knowledge economy. New Zealand researchers have already identified the South African group as one New Zealand needs to know more about (Mace, et. al., 2005; Poot & Cochrane, 2005). This study aims to follow on research by Mace et. al. (2005), and identify the acculturation styles of South African immigrants.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What acculturation styles are used by highly skilled South African immigrants to New Zealand?
2. What factors do highly skilled South African immigrants believe help their acculturation into New Zealand workplaces?
3. What factors do highly skilled South African immigrants believe hinder their acculturation into New Zealand workplaces?

The report will include a literature review to define and explore migration, the highly skilled migrant and acculturation, as they are relevant to New Zealand. The methodology will describe the steps taken in the research, and justify methodological choices. Qualitative data analysis and discussion will follow, along with conclusions regarding the acculturation style of South African immigrants to New Zealand. The implications of their style will also be discussed in terms of the relevance of the research to the New Zealand workplace. Finally, areas of future research will be outlined.

### 4.3. My Personal Experience

One of the main reasons I have pursued this study is my own personal experience. I moved to New Zealand from South Africa at the age of 15. My parents and many of their friends can be classified as highly skilled, and I have seen first hand the experiences they have had in the New Zealand workforce. Punch (1994) would argue that this situation and my personality have influenced my choice of research topic. I feel that South Africans represent an immense, underutilised resource for New Zealand business. This provides a major motivation for me to take a first step into researching the dynamics of the relationships between the two groups.