INTRODUCTION

South Africa (SA) of today is an emerging society. The emergence of new beliefs and values creates both uncertainty and a number of expectations.
One of the expectations is for social democracy within a society, which is characterised by: heterogeneity, no tradition of social democracy and a high level of illiteracy.

The expectation for social democracy is described in the SA Bill of Rights (1996): “Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person’. A further expectation is that of a people-driven process. The SA Reconstruction and Development programme (1994) states: ‘Regardless of race or sex, or whether they are rural or urban, rich or poor, the people of South Africa must together shape their own future.....It is about active involvement and growing empowerment,’ and ‘Above all, the people affected must participate in decision-making..... It is, rather, an active process enabling everyone to contribute to reconstruction and development.

One of SA’s biggest challenges is that the society is heterogeneous in a number of ways. Some of these are differences in nationality, race, language groups and religions as well as a third and first world dualism. Each group has different expectations, values, beliefs, and ways in which to evaluate situations that lead to a high degree of complexity (Kriel, 1996) and a high level of conflict in social life.

This dualism is reflected in the SA information technology (IT) environment. The spectrum of the IT environment ranges from the highly sophisticated, for example, in the banking environment at the one end, to the opposite extreme of both computer and general illiteracy. The expectation is that further development in the use of IT can contribute to solving SA’s general problems with education, and a great deal of attention is given to this specific topic by government and private organisations. The IT environment in SA is, however, largely influenced by the system rationalist viewpoint of IT in which efficiency plays a major role. The system rationalist viewpoint does not take into consideration situations where a number of different groups with differing viewpoints are involved and the probability of conflict is high (Kling, 1980).

A further complicating factor is that IT is seen as an important resource in socio-economic development in third world countries (Avgerou & Madon, 1995). This poses a number of opportunities and threats that should be taken into consideration by the developing countries. The difficulties as identified by Avgerou & Madon (1995) are: a number of imperatives are imposed when developing countries participate in the international system; large numbers of individuals and groups are further marginalised; dependence is promoted instead of interdependence; self-determination is neglected; and there is a
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