

**THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE: A TOP MANAGEMENT CONSTRUCTIONIST  
PERSPECTIVE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The future South African workplace promises to be different from that which exists today. In an attempt to understand worldly events and phenomena, people constantly form and reform their own ideas, thus mental models, about how the world works. The objective of this study was to investigate how Black executives, in the South African context, experience the emergence of the future workplace. Data was collected from eight participants using the Repertory Grid technique. The participants were employed as executive managers in five of South Africa's knowledge environments. Results revealed that legislative, social, political and economic factors will possibly play an influential role in shaping the emergence of the setting and perspective of the future South African workplace.

**Keywords:** South African context, future, workplace, repertory grid, Black executives.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a preamble to the issues that will be discussed in this study. It will focus on the following two aspects of the South African workplace:

- The contemporary South African workplace
- The future South African workplace.

The purpose of the discussion will be to highlight the changes in the South African workplace over time while looking at the factors that played a role in bringing about this change.

#### 1.1.1 The contemporary South African workplace

Work is an important part of human life, and has often been said to define people's identities and the way they conduct their daily activities (O'Sullivan, 2009). In recent years, however, work has become such an integral part of people's lives that it is often very challenging to speak about a person's life without making mention of various aspects of their work activities. As such, a large part of a person's time is devoted to some sort of work activity (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007).

Work is "... so pervasive a human activity that it has engaged the attention of an extremely wide variety of writers, commentators and thinkers" (Neff, 1977, p.1). In addition, theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber and Frederick Taylor have written extensively on the evolving nature of work and its importance, as well as the roles that it played and continues to play in many of the world's societies (Ritzer & Goodman, 2005; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). In addition, most people spend their lives completing some kind of work-related activity (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008). As a human activity, work has become so pervasive that it is imperative to study the future of work with specific reference to the South African workplace context.

The South African workplace today is not the same as what it was some years ago. As Webster and Omar (2003) explain, the South African workplace has undergone a triple transition. In the last two decades, the South African workplace has witnessed political democracy, economic liberalisation and racial equity.

In an effort to establish a “picture” of what the future South African workplace will be like, it seems appropriate to begin by revisiting some of the trends that have been known to signify the twenty-first century workplace, in other words the workplace of today. Amongst these are the following:

- Increased competition on a global level, hence “global workplace” or “globalised economy” (Taylor, Gall, Bain & Baldry, 2003).
- Labour force diversity relating to changing demographics in the labour force (Stewart, 2005).
- An increase in the use of computer-based technology (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008).

### **1.1.2 The future (South African) workplace**

Given the changes that have taken place in South African workplaces up until today, it is undeniable that the future South African workplace will be considerably different from what it is today. The future South African workplace promises a different setting and perspective from the present workplace (Ware & Grantham 2003). It is also an undeniable fact that winds of change are sweeping through people’s lives, thus affecting the workplace as well. As Hodson and Sullivan (2008) put it, the emergence of a new form of a workplace is not a possibility, but a certainty. Although predicting the factors that will play a role in determining the setting and perspective of the future workplace can be a challenging task, it is important for organisations to be aware of the possible opportunities and threats that they may be subject to in this new workplace regime.

Change, whether environmental, organisational, political, social or economical, has become a defining characteristic for most modern organisations (Holman, Wall & Holman, 2003). Change in organisational contexts has also been studied and written about for many years. Writers such as Handy (1984), Jenkins and Sheman (1979) and Merritt (1982) pre-empted that, among many other things, changes in future workplaces would include unavoidable unemployment levels, (Kinsman, 1986). This is indicative of the fact that work and its changing nature have been a topical discussion in organisational and socio-economic literature, and still remain so.

It has since become imperative for organisations to focus on devising plans to deal with an ever-changing work environment (Stewart, 2005). In addition, organisations should also begin to

redirect their goals and plans for going into the future in such a manner that they are able to respond and adapt to emergent future trends (Ware & Grantham, 2003). Although organisations have involved the media and researchers in an attempt to predict the future of work and labour markets, it is yet to be known whether the future workplace will turn out in accordance with these predictions.

It is within this context that words such as emergence, look, feel, trends and future become highly significant. In essence, the future South African workplace promises to be different from that which has been in existence in previous years, decades and even centuries. Furthermore, there are many challenges and opportunities that are facing organisations today that will be carried forward well into the future. Mitchell (2003) identifies some forces that will shape the future workplace. These factors, as outlined by Mitchell, “promise to dramatically restructure both the nature of jobs and workers’ employment patterns” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 1). According to Mitchell (2003) factors commonly cited as the main features of the future workplace include the following:

**Economic volatility due to the business cycle.** This concept outlines the fact that the modern workplace is influenced by the changing nature of the global world. Economic volatility is linked very closely with the macropolitical factors of any given country at a given time. Capitalism would be a prime example to use. Capitalism is characterised by “an interlinked cycle of booms and slumps, of varying magnitudes, where the conditions of one provide the basis of another” (Harman, 1986; as cited in Stewart, 2005, p. 21). The past recession and current volatility and crisis in the Eurozone are prime examples of economic volatility.

**Economic shocks or turbulence.** Taylor et al. (2005) define turbulence as “continual disorder, disruption and disturbance in levels and nature of work economic activity in general and in specific product markets, leading to agitation which produces change in courses of action, that is, organisational churn and flux” (p. 20). Recessions and depressions in the global economy would be prime examples of economic shocks and markets. The Great Depression of the 1920s would serve as an example of a very prominent economic shock.

**Shifting demographic trends in age, sex and ethnic/racial mix in the workforce.** Historically, there have been barriers in the workplace that prevented women workers from moving into



certain careers and posts (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008). The reason for this was that women were considered as not being capable to carry out certain jobs. As such, many women today occupy positions, and are thus deemed to be working, in what has often been deemed “a man’s world” (Stewart, 2005). An important development is that the labour market has since opened up, and has been more accommodating to women, as well as racial minorities. The introduction of Broad Based Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (BBBEE) and affirmative action has irreversibly changed the face of the South African workplace. This has been more noticeable especially in South Africa after the apartheid era where job reservation and skills training were regulated by the former government.

**Changes in household and family characteristics of the workforce** (Stewart, 2005). In recent years, the terms home-life and work have become integrated. This continuous work-and-home life has resulted in interests in a phenomenon known as “work-life balance”. Although such a topic borders on the discussion of employee well-being, it has become an important part of organisational life. It has now been recognised that the boundaries between home (private) and work (public) are more fluid than ever imagined. This resulted in a rise in employee-assistance programmes in the workplace.

**Legislative and regulatory changes** (Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus & Poisat, 2008). Since 1994, the South African government has introduced laws and policies that were aimed at regulating labour relations in the country. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) No. 66 of 1995 is the main Act which serves this purpose (Nel et al., 2008). Notable developments in South African legislation include the promulgation of the BBBEE Act of 2003, Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 75 of 1997, to name but a few. These regulatory Acts have changed the workplace into an environment that is more worker friendly.

**Changes in trade union composition and activities** (Webster, Buhlungu & Bezuidenhoud, 2007). In recent years, organisations have allowed for greater employee participation. This is most likely to take place by actions of unionised organisations (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008). As such, unions will play a more active role in terms of advancing and giving them (employees) a much improved standing in terms of their role in the workplace of the future.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The topic under investigation is motivated by an interest to find out from a top (black) management constructionist perspective, what will determine the setting and perspective of the future South African workplace.

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

In this study, the following research question occurs:

How do black executives in the South African context experience the emergence of the future workplace?

## **1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are the following:

- a) Investigating and identifying emerging trends that are leading up to the future South African workplace.
- b) Affording organisational leaders the opportunity to develop an anticipation and appreciation of the future South African workplace.
- c) Encouraging organisational leaders to respond effectively to change, and to develop an appreciation for the concept of “futurefit” in an emerging context.
- d) Fostering new ways of thinking through the use of mental models.
- e) Encouraging an enhanced understanding of Black management.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHOD**

George Kelly’s (1955) Repertory Grid technique was employed as a data-gathering method. Eight executives from the knowledge environment (investment, consulting, banking, mining, consulting and business development) were interviewed. The executives were current employees in the knowledge industry, in other words: knowledge workers. Employees of the knowledge environment are those “individuals whose primary tasks involve the collection, creation or processing of information to produce new ideas” (Ware & Grantham, 2003, p. 158).

## 1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

**Chapter 1** introduces the problem statement, aims of the study, a summary of the research methods, as well as a scope of this study.

**Chapter 2** is dedicated to the research design of this study.

**Chapter 3** presents the results of this study.

**Chapter 4** covers the researcher's interpretation and sense-making.

**Chapter 5** is aimed at summarising and bringing together the main findings and this will be followed by conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

Although countless studies pertaining to the future of work have been conducted, not so many studies were specifically focused on the future of work with reference to a South African context. Furthermore, very few studies have focused on the opportunities and threats that will confront organisational leaders such as executives and top management in the workplace of the future. As such, the importance of this study, from an organisational point of view, cannot be underestimated. Now that the aims of the study, the basic principles underlying this study as well as the research question have been introduced, it is essential to proceed onto a discussion of the "how" or the research design of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

To address the research question, as well as the aims of this study, a qualitative research method, the Repertory Grid, was used for data-collection purposes. This chapter also presents a discussion of the researcher's underlying philosophical stance which served as a guideline to the manner in which she approached this study.

#### 2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

There are many methods in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2000). There are also many advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the methods. More importantly, it is the responsibility of the researcher to decide upon the method that will complement his or her study in the best way possible. However, this in no way suggests that one method is easier, more scientific or more desirable than another (Mayan, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000).

Since qualitative research has a deep-seated history in other human disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), it is often applied in a variety of disciplines such as public healthcare, anthropological studies and sociological studies, to name but a few. Characteristically, qualitative research requires the researcher to engage in a set of interpretive activities resulting in a need to understand the meanings that participants attach when trying to make sense of worldly events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mayan, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). In addition, qualitative research is renowned for its ability not to place any limits on the meanings that individuals attach to events, fostering their own understandings of that particular event (Sandelowski, 2000).

Qualitative research can thus be understood as "... a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters. Its complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term qualitative research" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.2.)

Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) proposed that qualitative research is "... a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p.2).

Essentially, qualitative research seeks to interpret meanings that people attach to their personal experiences or actions. It treats individual context as forming a part of a holistic social process. Qualitative researchers seek to explore phenomena as they occur in their natural settings, thus allowing for ideas and explanations to innately emerge from the raw data (Payne & Payne, 2004). Given the nature of this research, the qualitative method is considered to be more suitable than the quantitative method. The reason for this is that the researcher is more concerned about the “stories” as told by the participants with whom she engaged in an attempt to explore the emergence of the future South African workplace.

### **2.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

This research can also be described as a qualitative, postmodernist study which was guided by the researcher’s world view or paradigm. A research paradigm is defined by the researcher’s ontological and epistemological convictions. Since ontology deals with the nature of reality (Sotirios & Sarantakos, 2005), the researcher’s ontology in this study is postmodernism. Postmodernists view reality as ambiguous, fragmented and uncertain (Crotty, 1998). More importantly, postmodernism advocates for a variety of realities about the world (Neuman, 2000), and reject the idea of “absolute truths”.

The researcher’s paradigm is also characterised by a constructionist epistemology that is informed by subjectivism. Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as a way in which we understand and explain what we know, and how we know. Constructionists maintain that there is no objective truth “out there”, and that the truth results from social interactions with multiple realities of the external environment (Crotty, 1998; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006).

In addition, constructionists maintain that “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p.9). This study also follows a qualitative approach which affords the researcher the opportunity to engage in a set of interpretive activities with an aim to understand the meanings that participants attach to worldly events or phenomena, when trying to make sense of them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mayan, 2009). The qualitative research method was chosen for the reason that it afforded the researcher the chance to explore raw data in its natural form, allowing for the emergence of ideas and explanations (Payne & Payne, 2004).

## **2.4 THE REPERTORY GRID AS THE CHOSEN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD**

The Repertory Grid is a cognitive mapping technique aimed at describing people's thoughts about a particular phenomenon in the world (Fransella, 1989; Tan & Hunter, 2002). It is well known for its flexibility and diagnostic abilities. Additionally, the Repertory Grid can be understood as a technique that acknowledges human agency by giving the interviewee a sense of control over the issues that are being discussed. After all, the technique is about a person's view of world. As Fransella (1989) states, human beings are regarded as active agents in that they do not passively sit back and absorb what the world presents to them, but rather engage in the process of imposing their individual meanings onto the world.

### **2.4.1 Background**

Developed by George Kelly in 1955, the Repertory Grid was initially designated for psychotherapeutic use. Over the years, this technique has gained popularity in other disciplines (Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999). Kelly's interest was centralised around people's thoughts and sense-making of the world around them. This technique also involves a series of ratings and comparisons (Beail, 1985; Chiravuri, Nazareth & Ramamurthy, 2007).

Like many other techniques, the Repertory Grid is embedded in some theoretical roots. In his book, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, Kelly explored theories about how people formulate personal ideas that they use to understand the world around them. Kelly's theory of personal constructs rests on the premises that people formulate their own interpretations, constructions and unique ways of understanding world events. Kelly's personal construct theory also forms a theoretical foundation for the Repertory Grid technique (Kelly, 1955).

### **2.4.2 Personal constructs**

Personal construct theory is based on ideas that human beings have an innate ability to formulate personal constructs that help them in categorising experiences (Boose, 1984). Fransella (1989) explains that a personal construct is a "porthole" through which individuals peek to try and acquire an understanding of events that take place in the world around them. These personal constructs are continuously shaped and reshaped by experiences that people come across in their

lives. Kelly (1955) assumes a shared, bipolar nature of personal constructs. By this it is meant that, to a varying degree, one person's personal constructs can be shared with those of another. In essence, a construct is "... a way in which some things are construed as being alike and yet different from others" (Kelly, 1955, p. 105). Kelly (1955) explains that "...the construct is the basis upon which elements are understood. The construct is an interpretation of a situation..." (Kelly, 1955, p. 109).

### **2.4.3 Conceptual networks**

Kelly (1955) theorised that people make use of conceptual networks to control their life experiences. In addition, these networks are used to formulate and test theories about their surrounding environments. These theories then form a graphical representation of an individual's conceptual network. The personal construct network is used to make comparisons and categorisations of things (tasks or objects) in the world. Thus, personal conceptual structures are people's views about the world (Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999).

### **2.4.4 Mental models**

Mental models are "deeply held internal images of how the world works" (Senge, 1992, p.5). In Senge's view, every person possesses the unique ability to formulate ideas and thoughts as well as assumptions about how the world works. Mental models can thus be understood as generalisations, stories or assumptions about how the world operates (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). These "stories" help shape the way people think and act. Mental models also serve the function of assisting people with acquiring problem-solving skills that are needed to function in the environment in which they function or live. Mental models primarily exist in the minds of individuals, and are continuously shaped and reshaped over time. These mental models are then represented through spoken words or communicated language (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). In essence, mental models house "images, names and an understanding of how things fit together" (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995, p. 1059).

### **2.4.5 Schemas**

A schema is a person's knowledge about what was involved in a particular experience (Goldstein, 2008, p. 256). By this it is meant that schemas serve as a guideline for directing a

person's thoughts about what he or she remembers from previous experiences. In addition, people make inferences from past events that they have experienced in their lives. More importantly, schemas shape the way in which people can use them (their schemas) to inform and enhance their memories regarding past events. In many instances, schemas have also led to erroneous decisions, as has been shown in many memory experiments that were discussed by Goldstein (2008).

#### **2.4.6 Characteristics of the Repertory Grid**

- Elements

Elements "... define the entities upon which the administration of the Repertory Grid is based" (Tan & Hunter, 2002, p. 4). The elements are represented by concrete examples that are used to help participants to identify constructs in terms of their own experiences of the emergence of the future South African workplace. In this particular study, the participants were required to provide their own elements, and these elements fell within the domain of the subject under investigation. Thus the elements used were related to the focus of the study or the topic under discussion (Macpherson, 2008). The participants were required to work with five elements, two inhibiting (negative) and three enhancing (positive) from which constructs would be extracted.

- Constructs

Constructs are defined by the relationships between the elements (Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999) and "... represent the research participant's interpretations of the elements" (Tan & Hunter, 2002, p. 4). Constructs indicate how elements can be similar to or different from one another, and are thus elicited from triads (Tan & Hunter, 2002; Macpherson, 2008). Kelly hypothesised that each triad is a representation of the participant's "internal concept" (Boose, 1984, p. 28). Construct elicitation is achieved through asking participants to identify relationships between the elements. This is a method known as the triadic sort method (Boose, 1984; Tan & Hunter, 2002).

- Links

Links are defined by clusters of similar concepts and relations (Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999). They "show how the research participants interpret each element relative to each construct" (Tan & Hunter, 2002, p. 4). Links are used to build connections between elements and



constructs (Chiravuri et al., 2007; Macpherson, 2008). By this it is meant that links serve the function of showing how the participants interpret the elements in relation to the constructs (Tan & Hunter, 2002).

#### **2.4.7 Application of the Repertory Grid**

Originally, the Repertory Grid technique was applied in clinical settings such as psychotherapy (Kelly, 1991). Since 1955 the Repertory Grid technique has been applied in a variety of other fields. Boose (1984) reports that this technique has also been used in education, employee relations and the business environment. In recent years, however, the use of this technique has broadened to fields such as training development and market research. In addition, the Repertory Grid technique can also be conducted using a series of computer programs (Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999).

Although its results can be used as a practical interventions tool, the Repertory Grid can also be applied on an individual or organisational level (Tan & Hunter, 2002). In this current research, the Repertory Grid was the preferred data-gathering method for the following reasons:

- It is a comprehensive method that generates a comprehensive range of comparable data. This allows the researcher to compare different sets of information.
- It places a great amount of value on inferred knowledge that is often disregarded by alternative methods.
- It allows the researcher to work with more than one mental model at a time. This again allows the researcher to compare different sets of information.
- It allows for further exploration of personal construct theory.
- The data-gathering process is straightforward with far less complications.
- It allows for flexibility in that it is conducted in the form of a discussion.

### **2.5 DATA GATHERING AND PROCESSING**

The Repertory Grid is not an interview as such, but it is rather a structured discussion that is aimed at understanding how people make sense of the world around them. In this case, more specifically, the factors that will play a role in shaping black executives' experience of the emergence of the future South African workplace. Participants were briefed about the topic of

the research, and what the research aimed to achieve. Once this was done, the data-gathering process commenced. In gathering the data, the following two methods were used, namely, eliciting elements and extracting concepts. These are discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Eliciting elements**

The participants were asked to provide five factors or forces (two negative and three positive) that, in their opinions, were going to play a role in the emergence of the setting and perspective of the future South African workplace. All five factors (elements) that each of the participants identified were written on a separate set of cards. In effect, each participant had five cards to work with. The participants were then asked to select three cards or a triad (Tan & Hunter, 2002). Out of the three cards, the participant was asked a question about two of the cards (the pair) and the other card (the singleton).

The elicited elements were typically nouns or verbs, that is: people, objects, events and activities that were related to the topic that was under discussion (Tan & Hunter, 2002; Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999). The primary aim was to invite participants to form opinions about the elements and to ensure that they could relate well to the elements that they were discussing (Tan & Hunter, 2002). Element elicitation was enhanced by asking participants to provide examples of their individual accounts as they were being reported.

### **2.5.2 Extraction of constructs**

(Jonassen, Tessmer & Hannum, 1999) define constructs as "... the values attached to the elements or the relationships between them" (p. 223). The following question was used to elicit constructs: "describe one way, or more than one way to me, in which any two of these elements are similar to each other, and different from the third?"

The participants were required to make combinations of contrasts between the different elements, for example, 1, 2 and 5 or 3, 4 and 1, resulting in an extraction of constructs. Through identifying the similarities and differences "contrasting poles for the construct" (Tan & Hunter, 2002, p.6) were produced.

The constructs pertaining to the pair were written on the left-hand side of the grid while the constructs pertaining to the singleton were written on the right-hand side. Eight to twelve

combinations were made to ensure that all the possible combinations between the different elements were used. Some themes were identified by applying thematic analysis as a method of analysis.

## **2.6 METHOD OF ANALYSIS**

### **2.6.1 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis can be understood as “... a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is used to organise and search for themes and patterns in the data so as to “voice” and reveal insights into the data (Sandelowski, 2000). In this study, thematic analysis was constructed within the constructionist paradigm, and sought to theorise the respondents’ stories. Thematic analysis was the preferred method owing to its flexibility when in use, and since it afforded the researcher varying levels of theoretical freedom (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This meant that the researcher could make use of different routes to arrive at a theme. These are discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006) in greater detail.

The process of analysing the data and reporting on themes required the researcher to assume an active role in terms of developing themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis occurred in four stages. Firstly, the Repertory Grid interviews were translated and organised into readable data. This data was used in conjunction with the field notes from each interview. Secondly, data was analysed by using thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report on patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thirdly, similar themes were grouped together into the same categories. Finally, by using her own interpretation, the researcher was able to make sense of the participants’ stories.

## **2.7 PARTICIPANTS**

The participants in this study were executives in the private sector. These participants were full-time employees, and had been in their area of specialisation for more than two years. At the time the participants were employed in the knowledge environment, and were therefore identified as knowledge workers. The knowledge environment comprises of “... individuals whose primary tasks involve the collection, creation or processing of information to produce new ideas” (Ware

& Grantham, 2003, p. 158). The participants were selected on the basis of their availability and willingness to participate in the research.

The initial aim was to include male and female executives who were employed in the knowledge environment. Although it was not the intention to make the group as homogenous as possible, the group ultimately consisted of male executives only from a range of industries. In the end the group consisted of eight black male participants. The participants can be profiled as follows:

- Finance (1 participant)
- Mining (1 participant)
- Consulting (4 participants)
- Business Development (1 participant)
- Banking (1 participant)

## 2.8 ENSURING QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH

The strategies that were employed to ensure quality research, and that this study yields valuable and trusted research results (Schurink, 2009; Hoffman, 2010) can be discussed as follows:

**Credibility/authenticity.** This refers to whether the study “rings true” (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster and Prozesky, 2001, p. 277). This means that the research should be a representation of the research’s findings. According to Schurink (2009), credibility is the most important criterion that qualitative research should meet. In addition to that, credibility is achieved when research is carried out over an extended period of time. In the current study, as far as was possible, the researcher forged prolonged relationships with her research participants, because qualitative social research is not a once-off thing, but should rather be seen as a prolonged engagement (Schurink, 2009).

**Peer or colleague debriefing or examination.** This role was taken over by the researcher’s supervisor who provided advice and commentary regarding the study’s progress. In addition, a good piece of qualitative research also provided the reader with **thick descriptions of the data** that was collected. This research study also made use of **purposive sampling**, which is a type of non-probability sampling which a researcher can use to select the prospective sample while

keeping in mind that the search is for people who will be most useful for the purpose of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1984; as cited in Babbie, et al., 2007).

**Dependability.** A dependable qualitative study gives the reader the assurance that if the same study were to be repeated with the same participants, using the same methods and techniques, and in the same or similar context, the findings would resemble those of a previous study (Babbie et al., 2001). As Schurink (2009) explains, an important question to ask about the research process is the following: “Is it logical, well documented and audited?” (Schurink, 2009, p.790).

**Confirmability.** A qualitative study is confirmable if its findings come about purely because of what the research found, and not because of the researcher’s influences and biases (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster and Prozesky, 2001). This (qualitative) research is confirmable as the researcher made use of the following:

- Data-reduction and analysis products such as field notes, summary notes and, personal notes. Personal notes are notes about the researcher’s critical reflections on feelings that he or she experienced during the research process (Schurink, 2009).
- Materials or notes which comprise the researcher’s plans and intentions about the research journey or process (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; as cited in Babbie et al., 2001).

This chapter served to present the “how” of the study. It included a detailed discussion of the research approach, research method, the process of data gathering and processing, as well as the method of analysis. A brief discussion of the research participants and strategies that were employed to ensure the quality of the research subsequently led to a representation of the results of this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Repertory Grid technique was used for data collection and integration. Each participant identified five elements which they elicited themselves, and these were used to develop the participants' mental models. From each of these mental models, themes were developed and reported on.

#### 3.2 REPERTORY GRID RESULTS

##### Participant 1

South African workplaces are becoming more **technical** and more **specialised** in nature. Due to a **division of labour** and high levels of specialisation, work will become more complex than it is at this stage. The danger with this is that people will become more detached from their colleagues as they become more strongly focused on perfecting their individual roles.

The future South African workplace will be characterised by legislation that will work to ensure that more **women** occupy certain positions at work from which they may previously have been barred from. With more women at work, a very **knowledgeable "breed" of female workers** will begin to emerge. This will possibly indicate a further movement towards gender equality in South African workplaces. Due to a **lack of work-life balance** there may be a destruction of family structures. In the words of Participant 1: "... work needs to be done while families need to be looked after as well... something has got to give". Additionally, as opposed to vertical, growth the South African workplace will start to experience **increased levels of lateral growth**.

Employees will be required to specialise in their own areas of work before they can proceed onto a next level of work. This participant also noted that due to the **economic downturn**, salaries have become very sensitive to economic change. As a result of this economic unrest, worker salaries will be affected in a negative manner. Organisations will be faced with the challenge of having to **adjust salaries** in order to respond to the economic climate.

## Themes

*Work situation:* Participant 1 saw volatility in the market in a negative light, and mentioned that it would cause employees to experience work in a negative manner. He also stated that division of labour and lateral growth could be experienced in a positive manner in as far as it may work to facilitate increased levels of freedom and employee creativity in the workplace.

*Women at work:* He placed emphasis on the idea that legislation was working towards promoting the rights of women in the workplace. He also explained how education would play a similar role in terms of promoting more female workers in the workplace.

*Employee well-being:* This participant placed emphasis on the importance of striking an appropriate balance between home and work life. He further emphasised that work environments today are designed in such a way that they require people to spend more time at work than at home. He also stated that lateral growth could be achieved when a person would spend more time at work than at home.

*Economic environment:* He mentioned that volatility in the market was driven by time and market forces, and that these could work together to destabilise a person's life financially.

*Salaries:* He mentioned that due to the instability in the economic environment, worker salaries would potentially be affected in a negative manner.

## Participant 2

In the opinion of Participant 2, the future South African workplace will undergo changes in terms of **people's perceptions regarding organisational ownership**. As an example he referred to the idea that in the future South African workplace, people's ideas that large corporations are owned and managed by white people and that small businesses are owned and run by black people will no longer be relevant. He also spoke about the prospects of having **equal opportunities for black and white business owners** as well as joint skills between black and white workers.

He also mentioned changes in **BBBEE policies**, and how these will work to create equal opportunities for people, irrespective of their race. He suggested that the **BBBEE Act may need to be amended and renamed** "Economic Empowerment" where there is no reference to

empowering a certain race of people. These changes will provide **equal opportunities for all**, and allow for **skills transfer**. He gave an example that in the future South African workplace, the tendering process will operate in such a way that work will be awarded to people based purely on their skills and ability to deliver. He emphasised the importance of **appointment based on merit**.

There is a possibility for **stand-alone trade unions** in the future. Trade unions will begin to operate in their “true sense”, and will have **no influence from political parties** unlike what is currently happening with Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the ruling party, African National Congress (ANC). In his own words, trade unions will “act as independent unions and monitor the welfare of employees”. This participant also spoke about **diversity**, and how it will lead to a **loss of identity** in South African workplaces. There will be a **movement towards a global society** in the workplace that in turn will lead to identity loss, he suggested.

## Themes

*Equal opportunities:* He emphasised the need for equal opportunities in the workplace. This, he said, would be achieved through the transfer of skills between people. Through the availability of equal opportunities for people irrespective of their colour, the issue of race will be considered unimportant.

*Racial issues:* He mentioned the importance of equal business opportunities for black-owned and white-owned companies. He said that legislation was a possible vehicle for driving this issue.

*Legislation:* In his opinion legislative issues are usually stipulated in company policies, and influence organisational decisions in a subtle manner. He placed value on the importance of representation. He stated that legislation was designed to represent all the citizens of a country. This he likened to the role of trade unions which is also to represent its members.

*Trade union power:* He contrasted trade union power to legislation by mentioning that trade unions affect organisational functioning in a more explicit manner while legislation affects organisational functioning in a more subtle manner. He gave the example of strike action and said that “... trade unions can bring the country to a standstill”.



*Identity loss:* He mentioned that the workplace of the future will be so diversified that people could lose their uniqueness, hence identity. He placed emphasis on the idea of a globalised economy. He referred to the outcome that will result from a more globalised workplace society as a “dilution of culture”.

### **Participant 3**

**Amendments to the Acts** are something that the future South African workplace will be confronted with. With regard to legislative law, the Labour Relations Act of 1995 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 will undergo some amendments. Regarding trade unionism he mentioned that in the future South African workplace we should expect an **increase in strike action**. Due to the fact that unions are gaining ever-increasing power with every day that comes, free association may end up working against organisations as **most of the unions members will be unionised**, resulting in a stronger union force than ever before.

There will also be **price increases for services**, raw materials, working equipment **and labour**. There is an increasing need for organisations to plan **workers’ salaries** so that they can become adjusted to **inflation**. Changes will also be evident in people’s work and home lives. **Work will become such an integral part of people’s lives** that they will begin to **spend increasing amounts of time at work**, and less at home. This may then force employees to form social structures within their organisation. Family structures will be replaced by **alternative forms of social structures**, such as **work social clubs**, that will develop out of work relationships. He also added that more **socialisation will take place at work** than at home, which may ultimately lead to the **demise of the importance of family life** since work will begin to **take precedence over family life**.

### **Themes**

*Legislation:* He emphasised that amendments will need to be made to South African legislation, more particularly to BBBEE policies.

*Trade union power:* He mentioned that trade unions and work social clubs shared a common factor in that they were both aimed at promoting employees’ social needs in the working environment. He placed emphasis on trade unions, and how they continue to affect the workplace

through strike action. He attributed a great deal of power to trade unions, and explained the power battles between employers and employees in Karl Marx's terms. He mentioned that there would be greater power battles between capitalists and proletariats. He also warned that going into the future, trade unions will have more power in the workplace than they have today.

*Economic climate:* He warned that the impact that inflation has, and will continue to have, on people's work and home lives would be detrimental in nature. He also mentioned that employers would have to plan employee salaries in such a manner that they can be adjusted to the rate of inflation in the country at the time.

*Work situation:* In his view, we will begin to see a formation of social clubs at work, which, in his view, will bring people together outside the home environment, catering for people's social needs elsewhere. He also placed emphasis on a future need for specialised skills, and an increased need for in-house planners and strategists to help steer companies in the right directions.

*Family life:* He said that in the future workplace we would begin to see a greater spill over between people's work, family and trade union lives or activities.

#### **Participant 4**

It is the view of this participant that owing to the fact that there will be more **educated black people** in the working environment in the future, **political influence on economic decision-making will be reduced. Amendments in the BBBEE Act** will result in the BBBEE policies being less politically charged.

The future South African workplace will do away with labour brokers. **Temporary staff will be replaced by technology and machines.** There will be drastic reductions in the number of workers in organisations. Technology will be used to improve efficiency. He provided the following example: more underground machinery in mines will lead to the replacement of human labour. In turn this will lead to downsizing, improvement and more efficiency. Similarly, the use of technology and machines has **negative consequences for the human factor.**

The **global recession could take affected countries** a generation to recover. He also mentioned that there would be **more knowledgeable people** entering the workplace as the future working

generation promises a much more knowledgeable workforce. He gave an example of an experience that he was having in his own job. He said that currently, the **younger generation** accepted change more easily. This is unlike the older generation who are more static. In the mining industry, for example, there is a lot of resistance from old people. He also mentioned that due to the lack of properly directed social spending by the government the **poverty gap continues to widen**. If this trend should continue jobs will be created but will not be filled. This will then result in an additional gap in the workforce where a large number of **people will be unemployable**.

### **Themes**

*Legislation:* Participant 4 thinks that government policies are influenced by political decisions. He used an example to illustrate this point. “The appointment of Gill Marcus at the reserve bank was a political one, mandating her to push out government policies”, he said. He placed emphasis on the view that government legislation has and will continue to be influenced by political decisions. He also made the point that legislation laws are influenced by South Africa’s political history. BBBEE was born out of political negotiations. In the future there will be more political negotiations between the government and society.

*Well-being at work:* He thinks that the future South African workplace will do away with labour brokers, and that temporary staff will be replaced by advanced machinery or technology. This, he warned, will potentially have a negative impact on the human factor or the well-being of employees.

*Education:* He saw education as a basic human right that should be made accessible to everyone. Education, he said, would lead to an improvement of people’s lives in South Africa.

*Lack of skills:* He expressed concern about the demise of a skilled workforce in South Africa. He mentioned that advancement in the economy would lead to advancements in technology, and further leading to a need for specialised skills which are already scarce in South Africa. In addition, the influx of a more educated workforce will mean that labour will become more expensive.

*Trade unions.* He also made reference to the connection that trade unions have with broader society. In his own words "... trade unions fight for social justice, and most unions are socialist at heart". He also warned that going into the future, trade unions might pose as a challenge to organisational leaders if they are not adequately "dealt with". He also mentioned that trade unions existed for economic reasons in that they fight for minimum wages for workers, which is a basic human right. He further said that going into the future, trade unions would continue to fight for workers' political emancipation. In his words, "Trade unions will represent social needs of the downtrodden and allow workers to maintain a social standing in society".

### **Participant 5**

This participant says that currently the workplace is dominated by white people who are the main owners of the means of production. **Workplace democracy** will facilitate the freedom of movement in terms of employment. As a result, **racial barriers** will be broken down. Policies will become biased, and South Africa could end up with what he referred to as "**single-party domination**". The political realm cannot be separated from the workplace because what happens in the broader society filters down to the workplace. In the future, there could be a **loss of diversity** that may lead to homogeneity.

The three pillars of Employment Equity that will be affected by amendments in legislature are Economic Empowerment, the Skills Development Act and Black Ownership. He also thinks that the **recession is not yet over**. **Job cuts** will still continue, going into the future, and leading to a gap in the employment market. In the future South African workplace, junior and semi-skilled workers will be more at **risk of losing their jobs**. This he attributes to the **complexity** that is beginning to emerge in the workplace. He also adds that unskilled workers will be unable to compete at work. A new generation will start to emerge where only people living outside of poverty will survive.

With regard to **education** he said that there were a lot of black people with degrees but without work. **Education** will play the role of acting as a **barrier to organisational entry**, leading to people not having a fair chance of competing in the market. There will be a greater **pay disparities** and **increased competition** for jobs. The unequal distribution of pay will create what

he referred to as “**unhealthy wealth**”, whereby there are **greater gaps and disparities** between employee salaries.

## **Themes**

*Workplace democracy:* According to this participant workplace democracy is concerned with achieving equality in the workplace. The need to achieve workplace democracy stems from South Africa’s political history. He likened workplace democracy to policy amendments, and says that they could both be used to correct the mistakes and imbalances that were brought about by the apartheid government.

*Economic environment:* He likened recessions to pay disparities and mentioned that both factors were of a monetary nature. He also stressed the point that recessions often result in poverty and other social challenges such as unemployment.

*Poverty:* He stated that poverty was exacerbated by an economic slumps or recessions. He also mentioned that poverty could also be worsened by pay disparities.

*Legislation:* He stressed that legislation was initially designed to promote human welfare and equality in the workplace. He also emphasised that, if passed on correctly, it could help in addressing imbalances in the workplace and in society.

*Pay disparities:* He thinks that if the gaps between employee salaries continue to widen, the problem of pay disparities will continue to be a challenge in South African workplaces. He provided an example of the wide gap between executive and middle-management salaries in the banking industry where he was employed.

## **Participant 6**

Participant 6 thinks that going into the future in the consulting industry, **compulsory leave** needs to be considered if the workforce is to be kept healthy, happy and productive. It may be a requirement in the future to force consultants to take leave so that they can recuperate before they embark on their next projects. He also warned about **the demise of affirmative action** in the future South African workplace. “At present, organisations are forced to window dress”, he

mentioned. He suggested that going into the future, organisations will have to do away with affirmative action.

This participant also spoke about legislation, and how it stipulated that workplace buildings should be designed and run in such a way that they can cater for **people with disabilities**. Going forward, organisations will have to have more people with disabilities on board. There is an ever-increasing need for **employees that arrive ready for work**. As such, training should be done in such a way that it is very detailed. This shortcoming needs to be addressed for the benefit of the young generations who will make up the workplace of the future.

## **Themes**

*Workplace inclusion:* Future workplaces will have to be more accommodative of people with disabilities. Employing people with disabilities will also help employers to look beyond people's limitations and focus on a person's ability to meet the mandate at hand, as required by the organisation.

*Legislation:* Participant 6 mentioned that legislation will play a key role in the future workplace by helping people to move away from the idea of entitlement. He also said that in the future workplace people will be employed based on merit. He added that in the future workplace people will want to comply with legislative law because, in his own words: "... you want your company to look good", and because you "... want to have the right people for the job". He warned that if legislative law is not properly regulated inside organisations, these organisations might start to "do as they please".

*Well-being at work:* This participant also referred to the possibility of compulsory leave for future organisations, especially in the consulting industry. He stressed that compulsory leave was something that will be a necessity in the future South African workplace if organisations are to maintain healthy physical, mental and emotional states amongst their employees.

*Women at work:* In his opinion, biased appointments towards women may cause more women workers to enter into the workplace. He mentioned that the future workplace will be more accommodative of female employees.

*Training:* He referred to the future need for “fit-for-today” employees. He explained a fit-for-today employee as a person who arrives ready at his or her job, and requires very little training, thus potentially saving organisations training expenses.

### **Participant 7**

According to Participant 7 once equal opportunities for workers are realised, there will no longer be a need to cater for certain groups of people while leaving out others. In the future South African workplace, **legislation will not be biased** towards serving interests of one race over another. Organisations will need to put into place better ways of dealing with an **unstable economic environment** so that they can deal better with changes in their environment. Change and adaptability are two qualities that future organisations will need to incorporate into their work policies and cultures.

Since organisations are starting to relocate their businesses to different parts of the country, some of which are areas with very high levels of crime, some “very good” employees will not want to work in crime-prone areas and industries, such as the banking industry. If the **crime rate in South Africa continues to escalate**, there will be a **loss of skilled workers** due to fear of working in areas with a high crime rate. The future South African workplace will continue to experience **large salary gaps** between employees. This will be due to other factors that will play a role in widening the gap between people’s salaries.

### **Themes**

*Legislation:* This participant mentioned that legislation could be used in an attempt to address the gaps and disparities that exist in society. He said that legislation must be taken into account when making important organisational decisions that will impact on the organisation in the future.

*Economic climate:* He also stated the fact that recessions have an economic and a political effect on society. Recession and education are related in that an educated workforce can be able to plan better for an unstable economic climate. Recessions may impact on organisations by forcing them into bankruptcy, retrenchments, downsizing and even liquidation.

*Education:* In future organisations there will be a greater need for a more educated workforce.

*Pay disparities:* He noted that pay disparities will cause inequality in societies. Pay disparities cause a social divide. In his view, pay disparities divide society into the “haves” and the “have-nots”.

*Social ills:* He spoke about crime as one of the social ills that South African workplaces will have to deal with going into the future. He likened crime to pay disparities, and mentioned that they were positively correlated because an increase in pay disparities might lead to an increase in the occurrence of crime. He warned that social ills, such as crime, were becoming more advanced and more complex with time. He provided an example of white-collar crimes. He also warned that crime could continue to be a problem for the workplace of the future because people use it to enrich themselves.

### **Participant 8**

“In the future workplace, trade unions will return to carrying out their initial mandate, which is to look out for the interests of employees”, said Participant 8. He also suggested that trade unions will also have more power than they have in today’s society. In his view, **trade union power** is definitely something to look out for in the future South African workplace.

**The effects of the recession** will continue to be felt going into the future. He said that the mining industry will definitely feel the effects of the recession, and as a result there will possibly be increased **uncertainty and job losses**. Market instability is something future managers and organisational leaders will need to prepare their organisations for. This participant also spoke about legislation, and said that in the future South African workplace, BBBEE polices, like every other piece of legislation will have to be **amended** to accommodate new developments in society. If equality is to be achieved, laws such as the BBBEE Act may no longer be necessary. Individuals will be **treated equally**, and no preference will be given to anyone.

Attention should be paid to trying to keep people in jobs where the skills are very rare. Organisations need to come up with more creative ways of developing and **retaining scarce skills**. **Education** will play a very important role in determining the “calibre” of leaders that people will want to have in their organisations. He placed much emphasis on the importance of having a well-educated workforce, even at the lower levels of an organisation.



## Themes

*Trade union power:* He placed emphasis on the power that trade unions command in workplaces and in societies. He also stressed the “undeniable” power of trade unions in contemporary society. He indicated that there was a close link between trade union power and South Africa’s political history.

*Job losses:* He warned that job losses might be a constant feature in the future South African workplace.

*Economic climate:* According to him, economic slumps usually affect people’s social lives mostly in a negative manner. He suggested that a long-term plan is needed to prepare organisations for an unstable economic environment. He also said that recession reveals the unpredictability of the economic environment.

*Education:* There is an increasing need for a more educated workforce. He identified education as one of the more important factors for the growth and development of the mining industry. He stressed that more specialised skills and black professionals were needed. He also mentioned that the better educated people are, the better they can afford to “job hop”.

*Legislation:* Legislation plays an important role in governing organisational decisions such as who to hire. Legislation also serves the function of regulating organisational policies.

### 3.3 An integrated focus towards the future South African workplace

*Workplace democracy and inclusion* were the most consistent factors which all participants referred to. While some saw it as a positive factor, others saw it as negative. Participants spoke about a wide range of changes which they felt were needed to be made to South African legislation. Amongst these were changes to the BBBEE Act and its policies. Some participants also spoke about how legislation can be used as a vehicle to drive economic and social change in South Africa. Participants made specific reference to how legislation could work to the benefit of the future South African workplace if it were less “politically charged”. By this they meant that legislation should have less influence from political forces, such as political parties. This influence is used to fulfil the mandate of these political forces, and usually run on agendas that are very different from that of legislation. The workplace is starting to witness an influx of

female workers into the working environment. Related to this was the discussion about an increase in the number of educated female workers who are entering the workplace.

*Trade union power:* Some participants spoke about the future of trade union power in the workplace. Most of them were of the opinion that trade unions will play a redefined role in the future South African workplace. Some also thought that trade unions would gain more power in the future South African workplace if they would become less influenced by the ruling party, the ANC and its policies. Most of the participants attributed immense power and status to trade unions, and spoke about trade union power in a positive manner. Some participants also saw trade union power as a driving force for change.

*The knowledge worker:* Education was also referred to by some of the respondents. Those who mentioned it spoke about it as a positive factor. These participants saw education as playing a key role in the development of the future South African workplace. In addition, education was also considered to be driving force for positive organisational change in that it will help to bring a better educated workforce into the future workplace. Linked with education is the issue of having employees who are “fit for today”, meaning that in the future workplace employees will possess the necessary skills by the time they enter the workplace.

*Poverty and (economic) instability:* Recession was also mentioned. While some of the respondents focused on the negative effects it could have on the economy, others touched on the effect it could have on societies and people’s salaries, as well as their work-lives in general. Some of the respondents formed links between unstable markets and pay disparities, and ultimately poverty levels in South Africa. Respondents repeatedly expressed their concern about how pay disparities could carry over into the future workplace, and thereby perpetuating poverty in South African societies. In addition, participants also spoke about the impact of inflation on pay which then again would link up with unstable markets, pay disparities and increasing poverty levels in South Africa.

*Social ills and challenges:* The impact that crime will have on the future workplace was discussed as a negative factor. The impact of inflation on worker salaries, and the demise of a skilled workforce were also discussed as negative factors.

*Work life versus home life balance:* Some of the participants expressed the opinion that in the future workplace it would become more difficult for people to strike a balance between their personal lives and their work lives. Although the majority of the studies on work-life balance have focused on the lives of female workers, it has become a reality that more men are starting to experience disconnectedness from their families owing to pressures from work.

*Well-being and workplace complexity:* The changing nature of work was also spoken about. Some of the participants stressed the point that work was becoming increasingly complex. Participants also spoke about the negative effects that this would have on people's work and family lives. Respondents argued that these changes would result in issues such as diluted organisational cultures, broken family structures and a lack of work-life balance. Lateral growth, like the formation of work social clubs, compulsory leave and employing people with disabilities were discussed as positive factors. One respondent maintained that the future South African workplace will be characterised by changes in perceptions regarding organisational ownership. In his view, race will no longer serve as a barrier to people for accessing good economic opportunities.

Collectively, the above factors were identified by the participants as the ones that will play a pivotal role in defining the emergence of the future South African workplace. An observation was made that these factors addressed the emergent socio-political and socio-economic situation in South Africa. Perhaps this also suggested a close link with the emergence of the future South African workplace, as well as the factors that will determine the setting and perspective of this prospective future workplace. The next chapter will therefore serve as a representation of the researcher's interpretation and sense-making of the results that the current research has yielded.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **INTERPRETATION AND SENSE-MAKING**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is an undeniable reality that organisations today are not the same as what they used to be 10, 50 or 100 years ago (Dawson, 2003). Organisations have undergone some changes in terms of work structures, communication patterns, organisational strategies and, ultimately, the direction of their overall focus (Ware & Grantham, 2003). In this chapter the researcher engages literature with the aim of interpreting and making sense of the themes that emerged from the participants' mental models.

#### **4.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

##### **Workplace democracy and inclusion**

Legislative law is designed to govern a country's social and political decision-making, and has become a constant feature in most South African workplaces. South African legislature is primarily concerned with serving the purpose of promulgating and implementing legislative laws that relate to public governance and labour relations (Nel et al., 2008). Most participants called for policy amendments in South African legislation. They explained that the future South African workplace will be affected by amendments to the BBBEE Act of 2003 and its policies. This issue has also been well researched, and is often written about in topics related to policy reformation.

Since the 1980s and 1990s developing countries, such as South Africa, have undergone policy reforms that encourage greater economic liberalisation and integration. As Borat, Lundall & Rospabe (2002) state, policy focus has shifted further towards job creation and the improvement of working conditions. In addition, the process of promulgating and amending legislative laws has become more inclusive than it was in the past. Nel et al. (2008) assert that the process now includes organised labour as well as organised business. According to O'Sullivan (2009), it is such developments, which are external drivers of change in legislation, which ultimately result in radical change in the workplace and in society in its entirety.

Recent additions to South African legislature include the BBBEE Act, no 53 of 2003, which is aimed at redressing the imbalances of the past that were fuelled by the previous apartheid government (Nel et al., 2008). Proponents of BBBEE state that it is necessary for the upliftment of previously disadvantaged black South Africans. Those who are against it may argue that BBBEE is an unnecessary policy which only works to exacerbate inequality in the workplace and in society. Participants in this study shared the same sentiments, and argued that that BBBEE is unnecessary, and works to create social divides in South African workplaces and societies.

An interesting observation that emerged from this study was that, although all of them were black, most of the participants spoke about BBBEE in a negative light. Usually, one would expect black people to be supportive of BBBEE, since it was originally formulated to benefit disadvantaged people in the country, most of whom are black South Africans. Perhaps the reason for this is that people are starting to move away from explaining issues from a race perspective, and from the idea of entitlement. Since one of the objectives in this study was to identify trends leading up to the future South African workplace, legislation was one of the trends that was highlighted by this observation.

A similar trend was observed when the issue of promoting workplace inclusion by employing people with disabilities was discussed. People with disabilities face many challenges in the employment environment, not only in South Africa, but in different parts of the world (Gillbride, Stensrud, Vanergoot & Golden, 2003). In South Africa, employment rates for people with physical disabilities are low. Disabled people are often prohibited from entering into what are usually referred to as “normal” jobs, or jobs that are done by able-bodied people. Despite the fact that people with disabilities will possibly face discrimination and stigmatisation as a result of their disabilities, there are those who may perceive them as weak, unproductive and hazardous to organisations. As a result, it is often very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for people with disabilities to secure some kind of employment.

Literature makes the point that in recent years, studies have begun to show positive development through those who advocate the importance of re-assessing disabled people’s standing in the economy, as well as public policy plans to afford them greater employment opportunities in the economy (Schur, 2003). This addresses the need for organisational leaders to seek out opportunities which will help them to prepare their organisations for development pertaining to

the workforce of the future. This is also supported by a study conducted by Gilbride et al., (2003) which investigated the characteristics of work environments and employers who are open to hiring people with disabilities. Gilbride et al., (2003) found that employers who were willing to employing people with disabilities emphasised the importance of diversity and inclusion, and how this was an important factor which endorsed organisational success. In addition, Gilbride et al., (2003) found that employers also placed emphasis on the importance of hiring workers based on merit such as skills and attitude towards their job, which has very little to do with that person's physical ability or disability

A "future-fit" organisation requires "future-fit" contingency plans that will help its leaders to develop an appreciation for the future workplace and the opportunities that it will possibly bring with it. Recently, there has been found to be an increase in the number of female workers who are entering the workplace, a trend known as the "feminisation of the labour force" (Casale & Posel, 2002). The reason for these changes in labour trends could be attributed to higher levels of education in the female population, as well as a greater availability of traditionally "male" jobs to young, educated female workers.

Although gender inequality is less extreme today than it was in earlier societies, women still find themselves occupying positions that are inferior to those of men (Hodson & Sullivan, 2009). On the contrary, there are those who argue that the future may bring about greater inequality for women in the workplace (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008). Participants also stressed the importance of encouraging biased appointment. Participants hoped that this would be done with the aim of redressing gender inequalities that were caused by past legislation that discriminated against women at work. Although large numbers of women are starting to enter into higher-paying jobs, with the aid of protective legislation, true equality in the workplace in terms of gender is yet to be seen.

### **Trade union power**

Trade unions exist because it is important to ensure that employees' needs are taken care of, and that there is a workable relationship between employers and employees (Nel et al., 2008). In addition, trade unions afford employees the chance to bargain with their employees to address specific grievances that they might have at work (Hudson & Sullivan, 2008). Participants in this

study expressed concern about trade unions gaining more power in the workplace and in society. Research indicates that trade unions are undergoing some changes in terms of the way in which they operate, a trend which is also likely to carry on into the workplace of the future. As Heery et al. (2003) state: "... at the heart of the societal argument is the belief that unions are undergoing selective pressure to adapt or evolve. The source of this pressure lies in deep-seated changes in economy and society that are altering the structure of interests and preferences that workers bring to their employment and, by extension, trade unions" (p. 3). Consequentially, a new form of unionisation is starting to emerge that will require trade unions to respond effectively to the needs of the changing work environment (Graaff, 2007).

This new form of organisation will also require organisational leaders to be sensitive to trade union changes as trade union activities affect organisational developments and decision-making processes with regard to government policy formation. In recent years, South Africa has begun to experience greater involvement with trade unions in terms of government policies pertaining to the labour market, working to create a more worker-friendly environment. The most recent labour reforms which have worked to the benefit of organised labour include the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and the Skills Development Act 89 of 1999 (Graaff, 2007; Nel et al., 2008).

Participants who spoke about trade union activity suggested that, going into the future, trade unions would continue to play a key role in South African workplaces. Literature also concurs with this observation by stating that trade unionism holds a strong culture in South African workplaces, and that trade unions in South Africa have experienced growth in recent years. For example, in 1999, the number of unionised members in South Africa increased by more than 273000 (Bhorat et al., 2002). In addition to that, trade unions' struggles have moved outside the boundaries of the workplace and into societies. According to Webster (1994; as cited in Graaff, 2007), this is referred to as "social movement unionism", which is a representation of the "two faces" of trade unions.

On the contrary, literature has also begun to reveal the rifts that exist within trade union structures. Graaff (2007) explains that in contemporary society, the "glue" that used to hold trade unions together is no longer there. This is leading to an erosion of grassroots unionism

(Buhlungu, 2001; as cited in Graaff, 2007, p. 51). This has implications for the composition of trade unions in future organisations.

### **The knowledge worker**

Education was a great concern for most of the participants. Some participants expressed concern about the deteriorating levels of education in South Africa, while others were more optimistic, and spoke about the positive impact that increasing levels of education would have on the future South African workplace. To put this matter into perspective, Borat et al., (2002) reported that in 1999 a person who completed a higher-education qualification had an increased chance of increasing his or her wages by up to 80%.

International literature has also begun to recognise an important link between the global economy and the new forms of knowledge and skills that employees need to have to function in this environment (Kraak, 2009). This has implications for the levels of education and training capacities that a country offers to its people. Furthermore, organisations will be required to provide environments where learning and improvement are continuously promoted. Kraak (2009) notes that the new working environment will experience a greater shift to more “mental” or intellectual forms of labour where value-adding activities such as design, branding and marketing are held in high regard. This has implications for the development of a more “future-fit” workforce in a continuously changing environment.

Another trend which can be linked to education is the idea of having “fit-for-today” employees. By this it is meant that employees come to work ready for their jobs, and receive minimal or very little training. One of the major goals of the education policy in South Africa is to “develop a highly educated workforce, and to provide education and training to a larger number of citizens than in the past” (Kruss, 2004, p. 61). Despite the development that has been documented by studies, employment and education remain challenges in many South African societies (Bhorat & Lundall, 2004). Some more positive developments indicate that a much better educated generation is starting to enter the workplace.

One of the aims of this study was to encourage organisational leaders to develop an appreciation of the “future-fit” concept. This can be linked to the idea that there is a need to cultivate future employees in such a manner that they arrive ready for work at their places of employment. It is



suggested that education of people in South African societies can help to combat this problem so that it does not remain a challenge in the workplace of the future.

### **Poverty and economic instability**

Turbulence in the economic market is often associated with uncertainty, chaos and disruption in the economic environment (Sparow, 2003). The workplace environment or system comprises different components that are often so interlinked that a change in the economic, political or social sphere will have an impact on the rest of the system. These challenges are regularly reported in literature that reflects on South Africa's current standing in the global economic environment. Poverty is not a simple phenomenon in that it has socio-economic, political and psychological dimensions (Graaff, 2007). In recent years it has been reported that the South African economy has continued to grow at a very slow pace leading to increased levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Bhorat, 2002).

Van der Merwe (2004) warns that high inflation can also have a negative impact on a country. He states that "... high inflation is detrimental to economic growth and employment creation. High inflation discourages saving and results in higher consumption" (van der Merwe, 2004, p. 2004). According to Kershoff and Smit (2002) changes in demand and supply often lead to higher levels of inflation. The impact of an unstable economic environment has effects far beyond the workplace. For example, trade unions build inflation expectations into their demands for wages (2002, p. 2). In addition, large gaps continue to exist between the salaries of employees and executives in most South African organisations.

Bhorat et al., (2002) report that for a long time, South Africa's Gini coefficient, which is a measurement of the levels of inequality in a country, was the highest in the world (Graaff, 2007). In addition, the highest levels of inequality were found in black South African households (Bhorat, 2002 et al., 2002). Nel et al. (2008) warn that if the South African economy continues to be sluggish, this will also have an effect on the country's education levels and skills shortage in the market and increased levels of labour unrest and different forms of political instability. As Graaff (2007) explains that "... economic inequality often translates into political resentment, unrest, and conflict" (p. 11).

Regulation theory stems from the principle that capitalism is an inherently unstable and unpredictable system (Graaff, 2007, p. 45). Although South Africa has already begun to experience depressions, the most recent commenced in the beginning of 2001. In addition, some of its after-effects can still be felt today, indicating that economic stability is far from having been achieved. Organisations and their leaders should therefore employ their past experiences, schemas and mental models to try and develop meaningful anticipation or forecast for the future economic environment.

### **Social ills and challenges**

South African citizens in many parts of the country are gripped with fear of violent crimes. This is corroborated by a recent study that was conducted by Kerr-Phillips and Thomas (2009) by using a web-based survey and interviews. This study found that amongst the top forces that perpetuated talent emigration in South Africa were violent crime and a fear for personal safety. The participants in this study noted that employees might choose to leave organisations, which resulted in skills shortages in the South labour market. In addition, Landman (2000; as cited in Lemanski, 2004) warns that by the year 2020, cities such as Johannesburg will resemble slum-like, crime-ridden inner cities.

Participants in the current study also expressed concern for the prevalence of crime in South Africa, and more specifically white-collar and organised forms of crime. Crime is a concern for organisations, especially because it has begun to spill over into the workplace. More importantly, crime works to a country's detriment in that it undermines democratic political development (Graaff, 2007). High crime rates also raise the question of the morality and ethical standing of South African organisations.

Many successful organisations often face ethical challenges which organisational leaders have to deal with. Failure to handle an ethical challenge often leads to the complete collapse of the organisation's moral fibre, and ultimately the downfall of the organisation in its entirety. A prime example of this is the collapse of Enron when its leaders failed to conduct business in an ethical manner. It is thus imperative for South African organisations to work towards developing and retaining ethical, talented employees who have the capacity to develop their mental models in a way that promotes new, dynamic and more advanced ways of thinking.

In addition to that, more specialised skills are needed if South Africa is to advance its ranking in the world market. As was reported by Kerr-Phillips and Thomas (2009), South Africa was ranked 53<sup>rd</sup> in the World Competitiveness Report. Although literature cites transformation, economic and global issues are the key drivers of talent loss. Kerr-Phillips & Thomas (2009) suggest that employee retention can be achieved through developing a high-performance work ethic and leadership development in organisations.

### **Work life and home life: an integrated future**

“Millennial employees” are younger workers who often prefer varying levels of fun and work-life balance in their working environments (O’Sullivan, 2009). Similarly, a phenomenon, known as the “kaleidoscope career” has begun to feature in organisational texts (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2006; as cited in O’Sullivan, 2009), and refers to different choices that people make in varying stages of their lives so that they may achieve a healthy work-life balance forcing employers to adopt a more flexible way of conducting work by determining their own hours of working (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008). These are some of the emergent trends that characterises many workplaces today.

Although theorists, such as Emile Durkheim have written about the importance of family life in establishing values and norms, family life, as well as its importance, has begun to be replaced with work-life. The reason for this could be that it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to live well-balanced lives where they are able to create sufficient time for both their work and family lives. It has also become evident that South Africa’s socio-political and socio-economic situations are undergoing a transformation that often leads to a spillover between people’s work and family lives (Nel et al., 2008).

Writers have often cited an intricate relationship that exists between people’s home and work lives. It therefore follows that similar changes are beginning to occur in people’s work and home lives. This leads to a lack of work-life balance and a breakdown of family bonds. Since the workplace is also a setting wherein socialisation, the process of learning norms, roles and skills (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008, p. 104) occurs, employees often form social clubs or “family structures” with their colleagues at work where they feel accepted and supported, as they would

in an ideal family structure. Hodson and Sullivan (2008) explain this as the development of informal work cultures which are formed out of social relations in the organisation.

### **Well-being and workplace complexity**

Compulsory leave was also seen by some participants as an important determinant of the future workplace, and can be linked to well-being at work. More importantly, the workplace has become such a highly-demanding environment that employees may often experience job stress and burnout. Burnout is “a response to long-term set of difficult job situations that might include overwork or an inability to perform the job successfully or have little control over continuously stressful conditions” (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008, p. 239). Stress and burnout are hazards to employee health and well-being, and often cause strain in one’s job, leading to what Hodson & Sullivan (2008) refer to as “time poverty” (p. 64).

It is therefore necessary for employees to be able to recuperate so that they can return to their jobs feeling rested. As the old saying goes: “A healthy worker is a happy worker”. Some more recent developments in the area of well-being at work are what European researchers refer to as “garden leave”. According to O’Sullivan (2009) this term refers to employees being relieved from their work duties for some time while they remain involved with the organisation, and receive their pay. This finding has implications for the emergence of the workplace of the future as well as for the health and well-being of employees of the future.

“We live in a time of great stirring storms, both natural and human-made. The daily news is filled with powerful changes, and many of us feel buffeted by forces we cannot control” (Wheatley, 1999, p. 137). It therefore follows that uncertainty, robustness and chaos are some of the words that are often used to characterise the future workplace.

Some participants spoke about more advanced forms of division of labour that will characterise the future workplace. This is corroborated by recent developments related to what Hodson and Sullivan (2008) refer to as heightened levels of “international division of labour” (p. 31). According to Hodson and Sullivan (2008), this phenomenon intensifies competition between nations, and causes some countries to be further developed than others. Other developments which will intensify the levels of complexity in the future workplace can be closely linked to technology, specifically automation. As Hodson and Sullivan (2008) have noted, automation will

lead to an increase in productivity and a decrease in the number of workers that are needed in certain industries.

Globalisation is taking over the work environment, and this could come with a lot of positive and negative outcomes for the future workplace. A globalised (future) workplace is a potential opportunity because skills and expertise brought in by new workers can increase a country's chances for competing successfully in the global market, leading to increased chances of growth and development which are much needed in South Africa. There is also an increased need for South African organisation to become more of a connected "network society" which promote flexibility in organisations around the world (Graaff, 2007). Graaff (2007) also warns that without putting in place contingency plans whereby the socio-economic environment can benefit, the future will remain a highly-contested and politicised terrain.

The current research's findings indicate numerous consistencies in the way in which participants identified and discussed future workplace trends. Some of the trends were more common than others, while others were uniquely discussed by certain participants. From the discussion, it can be gathered that the issues that have been considered have the potential to significantly impact on important considerations, topics and debates pertaining to the future South African workplace. Essentially, this discussion has also shown that there are many different ways in which people employ their mental models and schemas in an attempt to explain how organisational realities play themselves out in these complex and continuously changing organisational contexts.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research sought to understand, from black South African executives' point of view, their experience of the emergence of the future workplace. In the end, some conclusions were drawn about prospects regarding the future South African workplace. In this concluding chapter, a summary of the issues that emerged from this study are outlined. The research's implications for organisational practice, suggestions for future research as well as the limitations of this study are considered.

#### **5.2 TAKING STOCK AND MOVING FORWARD: PROSPECTS ABOUT THE FUTURE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACE**

It can be concluded that the issues that emerged from this study were much politicised, economic and formalised in nature. This can be attributed to the fact that organisations are starting to become more sensitive to change in their surrounding contexts, and are continuously evolving with this change. This change continues to have a political and socio-economic flavour to it. It has also become very clear that organisations need to start being proactive in the way that they respond to new developments in the social, political and economic spheres. As a result of these developments, the new workplace has forced the modern worker to adopt new ways of working (O'Sullivan, 2009).

The contemporary South African workplace is such that organisations are also faced with much more uncertainty, complexity and changes that often prove challenging to make sense of (Allcorn, 2003). In addition, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought with it new perspectives on the way in which people experience prospects about the future workplace. More importantly, this study unveiled a wide spectrum of social, political, and economic trends which are likely to play a key role in the emergence of the future South African workplace.

Although people may never agree with each other on the way in which the future workplace will turn out to be, one thing is certain, the future workplace promises to be more dynamic than what it has been in the past. Although it is often noted that change is unplanned and sudden (Dawson,

2003), it is also hoped that organisations will benefit from consistent organisational changes in many ways.

Chapter one was primarily concerned with introducing the background to the study, the problem statement as well as the research question. Chapter two outlined the research approach that was applied in this study. In this chapter, a background to qualitative research was presented as well as a discussion of the Repertory Grid as the chosen qualitative research method. This technique revealed a host of themes that the researcher was able to work with. The researcher's philosophical stance was also presented in this chapter. Chapter three was a representation of the results or the eight participants' mental models. Chapter four was dedicated to interpretation and sense-making. In this chapter previous research that was conducted on the future workplace was consulted and used to confirm the current study's results. Finally, Chapter five consolidated the issues that were discussed in preceding chapters and subsequently concluded this study.

### **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited in that the sample size of eight participants did not allow for appropriate comparisons of the results, thus limiting generalisability. Although a large number of participants was not necessary for the purposes of the research it would have been interesting to find out the similarities and differences of the Repertory Grid results across different industries.

Another limitation in this study is that the researcher was not able to secure a sample that included black, female participants. Had the group that was secured partly consisted of female participants, the responses could have been more representative of the Black South African executive population. A possible explanation for the researcher ending up with a male only sample is perhaps a reflection of the true transformation in the South African labour market. In addition, these male participants came from what are traditionally understood to be male work environments, as opposed to health, teaching and hospitality (Hodson & Sullivan, 2008) which are typically considered "female" environments.

An additional challenge which serves as a limitation is that the specified sample, executives, were not easily available, which often resulted in compromised time limits for the interviews. This study was also limited in that the researcher only made use of one data-collecting method.

An additional data-gathering method, such as an interview, could have been used to enhance information already acquired from Repertory Grid.

#### **5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICE**

The outcomes of this study have important implications for organisational practice. It is suggested that the findings of this particular study be used to foster a greater understanding of the future by involving leaders, employees and organisations in their entirety in projects related to the topics and issues raised in this study. Further, the significance of this research study transcends beyond workplace boundaries in that it provides insights into the future of South Africa's economic, political and social environment. In addition, this study is a good representation of the intricacies that exist between workplace and socio-economic and socio-political environments.

In effect, organisations can, from the outcomes of this study, learn to devise pro-active plans to deal with changes and demands of the emergent workplace, to embrace new ways of working and showing how they can be applied in workplace settings. Lastly, this study offers valuable insights into Black South African management.

#### **5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although the current research achieved what it was set out to achieve, there are still some areas that were left untapped that future research may wish to probe further into. Thus, future research could look to investigate the following issues:

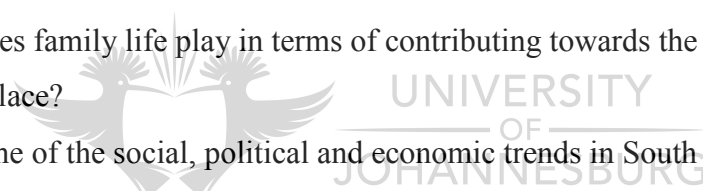
Future research may be interested in investigating what challenges and opportunities organisational leaders may be faced with in the future, contributing to the limited research that has so far been done on the future South African workplace. Future research can also consider studies involving the application of personal construct theory in organisational settings. As Fransella (1978) notes: "... a theory of psychology can only live by being knocked around, extended and, above all, used" (p. 3). Although much is known about the contemporary workplace, not many researchers have interested themselves in future trends, similarities and differences between different industries such as banking, mining and consulting to name but a few. Thus, more attention needs to be paid to comparative studies.



Although the “feminisation of work” (Bradely, Devadason, Fenton, Guy & West, 2005) is not new to Industrial Psychology research, an interesting development in trade union activity that Stewart (2005) notes is an increase in the number of women employees participating in trade union activities. The reason for this might be the challenges that women still face in what is characteristically known as “a man’s world”. Future research could therefore consider investigating the following question: What does the future workplace look like from a female trade unionists’ perspective in the South African context?

The impact legislation will have on women employees in the future workplace can also be a possible research avenue. In addition, the following research avenues can also be considered:

- What are some of the trends, similarities and differences that can be observed with regard to male and female participants’ views about the future South African workplace?
- What impact do environmental issues such as global warming have on the emergence of the future workplace?
- What role does family life play in terms of contributing towards the emergence of the future workplace?
- What are some of the social, political and economic trends in South African workplaces that emerged in the past that will re-emerge in the future?



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