

**ORGANISATIONAL ETHICAL REPUTATION AS A DECISION-MAKING
FACTOR IN JOB SEEKERS' ORGANISATIONAL CHOICE**

by

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Abstract

Little is known regarding the factors that South African Generation Y job seekers consider in choosing an organisation for which to work. The objectives of this study were to construct the mental models held by the research participants with regard to choosing an organisation for which to work, as well as to investigate the extent to which participants consider the ethical reputation of organisations in their organisational choice. The study was approached from a qualitative perspective. Interviews were conducted with ten participants, using the repertory grid technique. Participants were honours and masters students, between the ages of 21 and 32, studying business management at a tertiary institution in Gauteng.

It was found that the factors that are considered by contemporary job seekers are exposure to opportunity, personal and career growth and development, reputation, organisational characteristics, recruitment and selection, organisational innovation and entrepreneurship, recognition and rewards, employee-centricity, remuneration and benefits, as well as social awareness. Importantly, the findings suggest that ethics and the ethical reputation of organisations are of little consequence to young, South African job seekers.

The findings of this study have a number of academic and practical implications: firstly, they serve to augment the body of literature on the factors considered by job seekers in their choice of an organisation for which to work; secondly, they might allow organisations to tailor their employee value propositions to the demands and priorities of Generation Y job seekers; thirdly, organisations might attempt to give themselves an „edge“ by marketing themselves to job seekers on the basis of a positive ethical reputation; fourthly, findings suggest that ethics instruction at the tertiary level may have to be modified in order to provide young South Africans with an ethics vocabulary that might allow them to evaluate and express their views on the reputations of organisations; and, finally, these findings might

create awareness amongst job seekers and encourage them to be more discerning in their organisational choice.

Keywords: ethics, ethical reputation, organisational reputation, organisational choice, repertory grid technique, Generation Y job seekers



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CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction

The „war for talent“¹ is on the increase (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998; Guthridge, Komm, & Lawson, 2008). Contemporary organisations are having to compete within a global marketplace – not only in terms of custom and clientele but also in terms of the attraction of talented personnel (Earle, 2003). Since an organisation’s technical and marketing innovations are easily (and likely to be) replicated or imitated by competitors, an organisation’s real, and if carefully managed, lasting distinguishing characteristic is its human capital (Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002). Human capital is, thus, fundamentally important to organisational performance as it differentiates an organisation from competitors – not only in the minds of external stakeholders, such as consumers or investors, but also in the minds of prospective employees (Vance & Vaiman, 2008; Sutherland et al., 2002).

As if the task of attracting increasingly scarce talent at an ever-increasing price were not demanding enough, added to that is the notion that little is known with regard to what the „talent“ is attracted to, that is what the contemporary job-seeker looks for in selecting an organisation for which to work (Sutherland et al., 2002). This is further complicated by the presence of different generations within the contemporary workplace (the so-called Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) – each with different and, often, disparate values and priorities (Earle, 2003). As such, it becomes difficult for organisations to formulate a unique employee value proposition that both attracts, and is simultaneously in line with the priorities of these very different generations. That said, the reputation of the organisation

¹ The „war for talent“ refers to the growing competition amongst organisations to attract, select and retain the most qualified and competent employees.

has become a key means through which to attract and retain talent in the organisation (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Cable & Turban, 2003; Williamson, King, Lepak & Sarma, 2010).

1.2. Organisational reputation

Organisational reputation is defined as “the extent to which stakeholders would be comfortable to form relationships, business or otherwise, with the organisation” and is “contingent on how [the organisation] interacts with others” (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010, p. 109). Love and Kraatz (2009) define reputation as a “subjective evaluation of a firm’s overall quality relative to its peers” (p. 314). Alternatively, Rindova, Williamson, Petkova and Sever (2005) define organisational reputation as “stakeholders’ perceptions about an organization’s ability to create value relative to competitors” (p. 1033). Organisational reputation has been positively associated with the trust and loyalty/retention of customers (Groenland, 2002; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009), the attraction of investors (Groenland, 2002), organisational competitive advantage, the desirability of the organisation’s products and services, the organisation’s financial performance (Clardy, 2005; Roberts & Dowling, 2002) as well as in the attraction and retention of talented employees (Caliguiri, Colakoglu, Cerdin & Kim, 2010; Clardy, 2005; Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

Although the reputation of the organisation can vary in terms of the degree to which it is an accurate reflection of the internal happenings within the organisation (Lange, Lee & Dai, 2011), it may, perhaps, be speculated that the reputation of the organisation may be influenced by the strength of the ethical culture underpinning it. Ostensibly, thus, the stronger and more cohesive the ethical „core“ of the organisation, the more this might translate to the organisation’s reputation. Prior to determining whether job seekers consider

organisational ethical reputation in their organisational choice, however, it is important first to speculate about the other factors job seekers might consider in choosing an organisation.

1.3. Factors considered in job seekers' organisational choice

Potential job seekers might consider more obvious aspects, such as the nature of the work, remuneration, promotional and/or progress opportunities (Caliguiri et al., 2010); managerial style and/or process as well as opportunities for development (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Potential employees might also consider elements of organisational reputation such as the „brand“ created by the organisation (Dollinger & Saxton, 2004; Kowalczyk & Pawlish, 2002), which is the desired impression cultivated by the organisation with the aim of evoking within the stakeholder, especially current and prospective employees, a particular meaning or understanding of how the organisation functions and for what it stands (Edwards, 2010; Fan, 2005). In addition, job seekers might consider elements of organisational culture such as trust, respect, communication and relationships (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Since organisations seldom, if ever, market themselves based wholly, or in part, on the basis of their ethical behaviour and, by extension, the value ascribed to ethical behaviour within the organisation, it would be interesting to investigate whether job seekers take into account organisational ethical reputation in their choice of an organisation for which to work.

Assuming that this might be the case within an „ideal“ world, it must be considered how the specific realities of the current South African context might impact upon the tendency of job seekers to consider ethics in their choice of an organisation. The aim of the study, thus, was to discover the aspects considered by job seekers in their choice of an organisation for which to work and, more specifically, the extent to which a consideration of organisational

ethical conduct formed part of this decision – particularly within the unique South African context.

1.4. Research design

The study was approached from a qualitative perspective. Given the dearth of literature on the factors that South African Generation Y job seekers² might consider in their choice of an organisation for which to work, it was decided that an interpretive approach using qualitative methodology would best suit the research questions and objectives. As such, the literature overview provided in Chapter two is meant merely to provide the reader with an orientation to the constructs of importance in the study – namely ethics, organisational ethical reputation and organisational choice. Incorporating a brief, relatively general introduction to the literature as a means through which to contextualise the research study is consistent with other studies in which the repertory grid technique was used (see, for example, Aucamp, 2002; De Beer & Uys, 2006; Lyons, 2008; Meyer & Uys, 2006). More focused literature is incorporated into the discussion of the main findings of the study in Chapter five.

In order to investigate the factors that young job seekers consider in their choice of an organisation for which to work, interviews were conducted with a sample of ten individuals using the repertory grid technique. Participants were Generation Y honours and masters students, between the ages of 21 and 32, currently studying business management. Thereafter, following repeated perusal of the constructs recorded in the repertory grids, themes were extracted through an integration of the constructs obtained from the repertory grid interview, the field notes written immediately after each interview and general impressions gained from each participant. These themes were reported as stories – designed

² Generation Y generally refers to individuals born between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s. A more comprehensive description of Generation Y can be found in section 2.5.

to capture and convey each participant's mental model of organisational choice. Following this, ten second-order or common themes were extracted from the data through the reconciliation of first-order themes with similar meanings. Finally, the main findings of the study were explored and integrated with relevant literature.

1.5. Integration

In this chapter, an introduction and background to this research study were provided. The importance of the reputation of an organisation in terms of its interactions with stakeholders was discussed and the link between ethics, the ethical culture of the organisation, and organisational reputation was explored. Potential factors that contemporary job seekers might take into account when choosing an organisation for which to work were considered, as was the influence of the specific realities of the South African context on Generation Y job seekers' organisational choice.

In Chapter two, literature relevant to the study, particularly ethics, organisational ethical reputation and organisational choice are discussed. In Chapter three, the research design of the study, including the research approach adopted, the data collection technique utilised, as well as the data collection and data analysis processes are presented. In Chapter four, the research results are reported, interpreted and linked to relevant literature, and possible explanations for the findings obtained are explored. In Chapter five, conclusions are drawn in terms of the main findings of the study, the practical implications and limitations of the study are noted, and possible recommendations for future research are suggested.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE STUDY: ETHICS AND ORGANISATIONAL CHOICE

2.1. Introduction

In order to contextualise and position this research study, it was deemed important to provide an orientation to the research topic through a brief discussion of relevant literature. The literature study commences with a discussion of organisational reputation as it can be linked with ethics and the ethical conduct of the organisation. Following this, models of organisational choice are discussed and possible generational differences that might exist in the attraction and selection of talented employees are explored. Finally, the research questions and objectives underpinning the study are provided.

2.2. Organisational reputation

Organisational reputation is an intangible phenomenon that affects the perceptions and behaviour of stakeholders, including employees, shareholders, investors and customers (Friedman, 2009) and, owing to its intangible nature, is considerably difficult for competing organisations to replicate (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). It emerges as a result of a history or „track record“ of positive and authentic interactions with others, in such a way that trust is established between the individuals or entities party to those interactions. Reputation provides an element of predictability in terms of the manner in which the organisation is likely to act or react in response to various events or situations (Leblanc & Nguyen, 2001). Ostensibly, this then reinforces the trust relationship created as the organisation’s probable behaviour can be anticipated, which provides stakeholders an element of security in terms of their interactions with the organisation (Leblanc & Nguyen, 2001; Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

There is a substantial ethical component to reputation (Reuber & Fischer, 2010; Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010). A strong ethical climate within the organisation can affect the way in which the organisation is perceived from the outside. As previously mentioned, organisations that behave in an ethically sound manner engender trust in terms of their interactions and relationships with others, which may then bolster the organisation's reputation. In this way, there is an inextricable link between ethics, trust and organisational reputation (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

Ethics is not only of concern at the organisational level but also on a global level (Mawa & Adams, 2011). This is owing to the notion that businesses have begun to transcend the confines of national borders and extend or relocate their business operations to international locations. The combination of globalisation and increasingly depersonalised technology, as in the creation of global virtual teams, has led to a sense of distrust towards business on the part of stakeholders. This sense of distrust is reinforced through the mass media reporting of international high-profile corporate scandals. The greater the prevalence and consequences of these scandals, the greater the need for corporate governance reform. Beyond the immediate consequences for the stakeholders directly involved with ethically tainted organisations, the unethical conduct within these organisations, as seen by current and prospective stakeholders, may easily be extrapolated to other organisations, with the impression being that these organisations are as guilty but have simply not yet been „caught“ (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

2.3. Ethics and organisations

Ethics is defined as “what is good or right in human interaction” (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010, p. 4). Three concepts are fundamental to the definition of ethics, namely „good“, the „self“ and the „other“. As such, ethical behaviour refers to the result of action

taken on the basis of consideration for what is good or beneficial for oneself but also in terms of what is good for others. It should be noted that the self and the other could refer to an individual, a group or an organisation. Following from this, business ethics is defined as “the values and standards that determine the interaction between business and its stakeholders” (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010, p. 5).

Ethics cannot, and should not be dissociated from business endeavours (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010; Svensson & Wood, 2008). Ethics is fundamental to the success of the organisation, owing to the emphasis on the quality of interactions and relationships between individuals within the organisation as well as between the internal organisational context and its external environment. Ethics contributes to the establishment of a trusting relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders, which encourages a culture of respect and inclusion within the organisation (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010). This implies that individual behaviour within the organisation could be viewed as an extension of the individual’s personal morality to promote the good of the organisation, its constituent parts and its external context.

A sound ethical organisational culture refers to a culture wherein ethics is viewed as an integral component of the way in which the organisation functions (Kaptein, 2011). Ethics, thus, is seen not as something to be „name-dropped“ in policies and „managed“ on a superficial level but rather as a pervasive influence, a “collective moral conscience” (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010, p. 293) that underpins all aspects of the organisation’s functioning. The ethical culture of the organisation is composed of both obvious and implicit dimensions. Obvious elements include such aspects as policies, procedures, and codes of ethics, whereas implicit elements refer to the deep-seated, often informal practices within the organisation (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

There appears to be evidence that job seekers might consider organisational reputation, which is influenced by the strength of the organisation's ethical culture, in their organisational choice (Albinger & Freeman, 2000). In addition, it has been suggested that individuals compare their personal values to those of the organisation (Cable & Judge, 1996). Strobel, Tumasjan and Welpel (2010) found that ethical organisational leadership was associated with a greater intention on the part of prospective employees to seek employment with organisations. Coldwell, Billsberry, Van Meurs and Marsh (2008) found, in their study on person-organisation fit, that a mismatch between the ethical orientation or values of the individual employee and the organisational ethical reputation and perceived ethical performance of the organisation has a negative influence on the extent to which the organisation is able to attract and retain employees. These findings suggest that potential employees may, indeed, consider organisational ethical reputation in choosing an organisation for which to work.

2.4. Organisational choice



Two decision-making models are particularly relevant to the process of organisational choice (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2007). These are expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) and unprogrammed decision making (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Vroom (1964) posits a logical and calculative model of the organisational choice process, in which individuals make the decision to enter an organisation based on the expectation that the decision will result in desirable consequences and allow the individual to avoid undesirable consequences. Expectancy theory is based on the notion, firstly, that individuals approach vocational decisions with a clear, established set of goals, to which they ascribe a mental value and, secondly, the instrumentality or the usefulness of the available options in terms of producing the desired outcomes, is also ascribed a mental value (Carless & Imber, 2007).

The proponents of expectancy theory postulate that, in order to make a decision, individuals multiply the value of the goals and the perceived instrumentality of the options in producing those goals in order to assess the overall attractiveness of each option. In addition, when making a decision, individuals also consider their ability to enter into a particular occupation or organisation successfully (cf. Griffin & Moorhead, 2011). In selecting an organisation, thus, the individual is likely to weigh up which organisation would provide the greatest opportunity for the attainment of desired outcomes; in other words, which organisation is perceived to be most compatible with the values and priorities of the individual (Vroom, 1964).

In contrast to the rationality and logic associated with expectancy theory, proponents of unprogrammed decision making suggest that individuals tend to select the organisation that meets their standards according to just one or two essential outcomes. As such, it is asserted that an individual makes an implicit decision regarding organisational choice and then substantiates and reinforces this choice through perceptual distortion (Greenhaus et al., 2007; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006).

Other theories of organisational choice include the position selection process (Behling, Labovitz & Gainer, 1968), social comparison theory and Donald Super's theory of vocational choice (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Behling et al. (1968) proposed three, now well-established, classifications of theories on organisational choice, namely objective factor theories, subjective factor theories and critical contact theories.

Objective factor theories are premised on the notion that individuals choose organisations by weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of each organisation in terms of various objectively measurable criteria, such as remuneration or benefits (Maier & Youngs, 2009). In contrast, subjective factor theories disregard the importance of objectively measurable

factors and, instead, suggest that individuals choose organisations on the basis of the extent to which the organisation, or more specifically, the organisation's image is able to satisfy entrenched but often unrecognised personal and emotional needs. It is suggested that objectively measurable factors are used only to confirm or deny aspects of an already preconceived image of the organisation but, that being so, the image the individual holds regarding the organisation is unlikely to change significantly (Behling et al., 1968).

Differently from the objective and subjective factor theories, proponents of critical contact theories assert that job seekers choose organisations neither on the basis of objective nor of subjective factors as they are, in essence, incapable of distinguishing between organisations in terms of either of these aspects owing to their lack of experience (Behling et al., 1968). Instead, they propose that job seekers base their decision with regard to the most suitable organisation for which to work, on the limited contact with, and amount of information received about an organisation during recruitment (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Job seekers might also consider organisations in terms of what they have read, or otherwise have been exposed to via mass media (Davies, 2003).

An alternative model of organisational choice is that of Donald Super (Super, 1957). Tom (1971) extrapolated Super's theory of vocational choice to occupational choice in that he hypothesised that organisational choice, like vocational choice, would also represent an attempt on the part of individuals to implement their self-concepts. He hypothesised that the similarity between self-concept (or description) and most preferred organisations should be greater than the similarity between self-concept and least preferred organisations for which to work. He concluded that Super's theory of vocational choice could be extended to include occupational choice as he determined that university students preferred organisations with characteristics that they perceived to be congruent with their own personality characteristics over organisations with dissimilar characteristics (Tom, 1971).

2.5. Organisational choice in South Africa

The South African labour market is characterised by certain peculiarities that may not be applicable in other employment contexts, one of which is a high unemployment rate. This is the case when both the broad and the narrow definitions of unemployment are applied. The narrow definition of unemployment refers to those job seekers who actively sought out a job within the reference period utilised by Statistics South Africa. The broad definition of unemployment includes those individuals subsumed within the narrow definition but also incorporates those individuals who desire a job but did not actively seek one out within the relevant period (StatsSA, 2011). South Africa's current unemployment rate, according to the narrow definition, is 25% whilst unemployment according to the broad definition is approximately 36% (StatsSA, 2011).

The current unemployment statistics illustrate differential unemployment rates by population group, such that in the third quarter of 2011, 28.9% of unemployed South Africans were Black, 23.6% were Coloured³, 10.8% were Indian/Asian and 5.6% were White (StatsSA, 2011). Between the second and third quarters of 2011, the unemployment figures for the Black population decreased, the unemployment figures for the White and Coloured populations increased, whilst those for the Indian/Asian population remained unchanged. A similar pattern has been observed in the unemployment figures over the last few years (StatsSA, 2011). This appears to indicate that the South African workplace is characterised by fierce competition for employment, perhaps even more so since the implementation of affirmative action measures⁴. As such, it could, perhaps, be asserted that even if South African job seekers value organisational ethical reputation, they may not be

³ In the South African context, „Coloured“ refers to persons of mixed race.

⁴ Affirmative action measures are defined as “measures designed to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce of a designated employer” (Government Gazette, 1998, p. 9).

afforded the luxury of being able to express this in a particular organisational choice, given that jobs are not easily obtained.

2.6. Generational considerations in talent attraction and retention

According to generational theory, each generation is associated with different characteristics or core values (Codrington, 2008; Macleod, 2008; McCrindle, 2006; Sheahan, 2005; Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007). Understanding the values that define the different generations and the context from which these generations emerge, may assist organisations in catering to the needs of prospective employees as well as assisting current employees to function more efficiently. The workforce is currently composed of individuals from three generations: the „Baby Boomers“, Generation X and Generation Y (Earle, 2003). Generation Y are also referred to as „Millenials“, the „Dot. com Generation“, „Nexters“, the „Digital Generation“, „Generation E“, „EchoBoomers“ and „N-Gens“ (Martin, 2005). There does not appear to be any agreement on the definition of Generation Y (Woodruffe, 2009), with individuals born anywhere between 1975 and the year 2000 being included in the definition (Erickson, 2008). Even though certain researchers, such as Treuren and Anderson (2010) are quite specific in their definition of Generation Y as incorporating individuals born between the years of 1977 and 1992, for the purposes of this research study, however, Generation Y has been accepted as referring to any individual born from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s.

Given the rate at which the global workplace is changing, it is imperative that organisations attempt to attract and retain talented, young employees (Sheahan, 2005). Differently from the older generations, Generation Y individuals may seek organisations that can continue to challenge them, encourage the development of new skills and offer promising career prospects (Macleod, 2008; Terjesen & Frey, 2008). Generation Y individuals tend to

be self-reliant, may seek instant gratification, are typically technologically proficient, may be entrepreneurial, may seek responsibility and flexibility, and have a sense of immediacy with regard to the contributions they are able to make „today“ (Martin, 2005). Although Generation Y employees may tend not to remain in the same organisation for any length of time, they seem to place considerable emphasis on working for organisations that have strong core values and represent a cause with which they can identify (Macleod, 2008; Martin, 2005). Generation Y individuals seem to value corporate social responsibility and appear to wish to contribute meaningfully to society as well as to bring about positive change through their work (Eisner, 2005).

Consideration of generational factors in the attraction, selection and retention of employees leads to a description of what types of individuals make up the job-seeking population in South Africa. For the purposes of this study, job seekers include individuals who currently hold positions within organisations but wish to seek a position in a different industry and/or organisation; individuals who have recently completed their secondary education but do not yet wish to embark on studies for formal qualifications; as well as those individuals who have recently obtained or are in the process of obtaining formal qualifications and are seeking employment.

2.7. Research questions

Although there are several theories outlining the process that an individual negotiates when making a choice regarding a preferred organisation, relatively little is known with regard to the actual aspects, dimensions or factors considered by individuals when choosing an organisation for which to work (Cable & Turban, 2001; Sutherland et al., 2002). Thus, the research questions that formed the basis of this study were as follows:

- what aspects are considered by Generation Y job seekers when they make the choice to work for a particular organisation?
- do Generation Y job seekers consider the organisation's ethical reputation when choosing organisations?

The objectives of the research study were to:

- construct and explain the mental models held by Generation Y job seekers with respect to the factors that they would consider in choosing an organisation for which to work
- investigate the extent to which South African, Generation Y job seekers consider organisational ethical reputation in their organisational choice.

2.8. Integration



In this chapter, literature pertinent to this research study was presented and discussed as a means through which to contextualise the study as well as to reinforce its relevance to both the South African and global business environments. Ethics was defined and discussed, and the importance of ethical conduct as contributing to stakeholder trust and ultimately organisational reputation was emphasised. Models of organisational choice were presented and generational differences with regard to the attraction and retention of talented personnel were discussed. Finally, the research questions and objectives forming the basis of this research study were stipulated. In the chapter to follow, aspects of the design and practical execution of the research study are discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Introduction

A research design refers to the plan or blueprint in terms of the manner in which the research is to be conducted (Myers, 2009). It involves decisions with regard to each step of the research process. In this chapter, the philosophical and meta-theoretical assumptions underpinning the study are discussed and the rationale behind the choice of qualitative methodology is provided. The data gathering technique and the theoretical foundations on which it is based are discussed. The sampling strategy utilised in the study is provided, as is a brief introduction to the research participants. The data gathering, capturing and analysis processes are detailed and the strategies used in order to ensure the integrity of the study are explained. Finally, ethical considerations pertinent to the study and the means through which these are addressed in the practical execution of the design of the research study are outlined.

Figure 1 represents the research design used in this study. It includes the relativist-constructivist ontology, social constructionist epistemology and interpretive paradigm that inform the perspective from which the study was approached. It also details the research method (qualitative), the strategy (a multiple case study), the method of data collection (the repertory grid technique) and the sampling strategy (purposive sampling) used. Finally, it includes the way in which data analysis and the interpretation of the results were conducted.

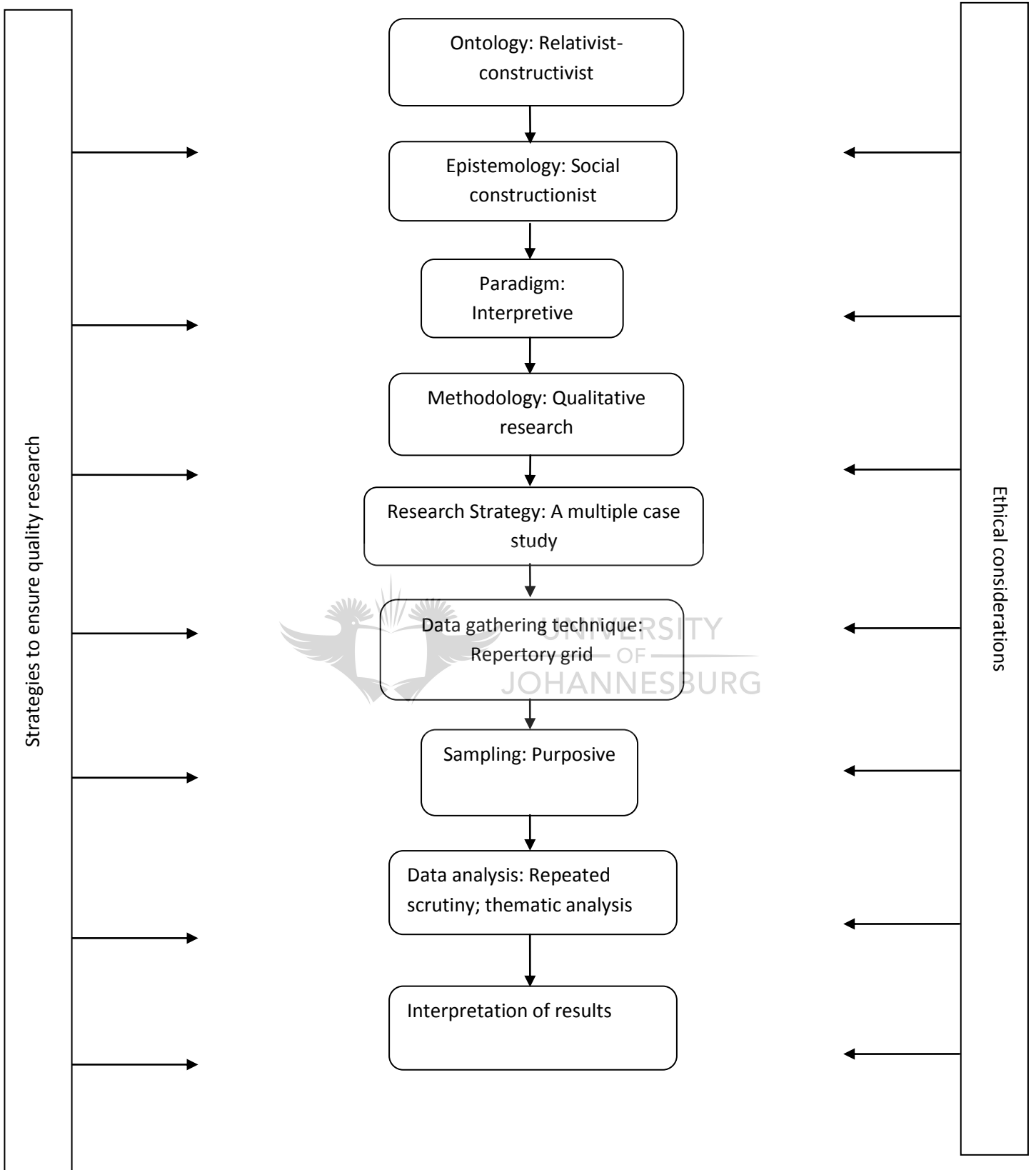


Figure 1

Research design

3.2. Ontology, epistemology and research paradigm

Ontology refers to a theory of the nature of reality, in other words what exists (Crotty, 2003). The ontological perspective to which I⁵ subscribe is relativist and constructivist, such that I believe that individuals construct their own versions of reality through interaction with other individuals within their environment. I view reality, thus, as relative to the interactions and experiences of each individual (Crotty, 2003). Through their experiences and interactions with others, individuals construct „mental models“ or „schemata“ as a method of understanding and interpreting aspects of the world around them. According to this perspective, epistemology, or the way in which knowledge is gathered and understood (Crotty, 2003) is achieved by eliciting and attempting to understand the mental models that individuals hold with regard to aspects of the social world. It is only by probing these individually held mental models and the constructs of which they are composed that the researcher is able to know and understand phenomena. As such, knowledge is socially created through individuals“ interpretations of the world around them (Neuman, 2000).

The objective of the current research, which was both exploratory as well as descriptive in nature, was to construct the mental model that each participant holds with regard to organisational choice. The focus of this study, thus, was on individuals“ interpretations of reality and how these interpretations inform their theoretical framework with regard to choosing an organisation for which to work. As such, the research method selected for use in the study had to allow for the mental models of participants to be constructed and explored. The research study was consequently approached from an interpretive perspective through the use of qualitative methodology.

⁵ Webb (2006) asserts that it is not merely recommended but that it is necessary for qualitative researchers to report on their research process and findings using the first person. She explains that the use of the first person ensures the integrity of the ontology and epistemology underpinning the research study, and promotes reflexivity.

3.3. Research method

Bearing in mind the research questions and objectives of the study, it was decided that the most appropriate research method would be qualitative, owing to the notion that little is known with respect to the factors considered by job seekers in their choice of an organisation for which to work. As such, the use of a qualitative research method allowed for the exploration of factors considered important in organisational choice, through the construction of the mental model of each participant with regard to choosing a preferred organisation for which to work.

Although attempting to approach data collection by means of a questionnaire was considered in the initial stages of the conceptualisation and design of the study, it was deemed to be probable that respondents, once alerted to the ethical focus of the questionnaire, might tend to provide socially desirable responses – a tendency that might be difficult to avoid without deceiving participants regarding the motivations and intentions of the study. Thus, a data gathering technique within the qualitative method was deemed more appropriate as it enabled the exploration of the topic of organisational choice and provided participants the opportunity to relate their experiences and perceptions of organisational choice in the manner they wished to; that is by addressing the factors of organisational choice that they, themselves, perceived to be important. In so doing, the potential influence of my motives and priorities as they may have impacted upon, tainted, or circumscribed the perceptions and experiences of the research participant was reduced.

3.4. Data gathering technique

Within the qualitative method, a number of data gathering techniques can potentially be used (Myers, 2009). The data gathering technique that appeared to be most appropriate to the study in terms of answering the research questions is the repertory grid technique. This technique is closely associated with the Personal Construct Theory of George Kelly (1955). Kelly (1955) acknowledged the existence of two fundamental worlds: firstly, an external world that cannot be fully understood by human beings and, secondly, interpretations or constructions of that world. Kelly (1955) expanded the perspective of „constructive alternativism“ in that he claimed that individuals construct, interpret or translate meaning from one entity or phenomenon to another such that some aspect of the phenomenon to which individuals wish to ascribe meaning is bound to be lost in the process of meaning-making. He posited that individuals cannot, however, given the abstract nature of concepts such as reality, identify what aspects have been omitted from the meaning derived. As such, Kelly (1955) asserted that individuals construct or interpret their own meanings of phenomena, in part, through the past experiences, assumptions and expectations through which they approach the world. Consequently, the emphasis is on the uniqueness inherent in the individual's personal construction of the world (Fransella, Bell & Bannister, 2004).

According to Kelly (1955), a phenomenon may only be studied through individual constructions or interpretations thereof. The repertory grid technique allows the researcher to understand individuals' worlds exactly as they see them or, in other words, to „step into“ individuals' constructions of reality and specific phenomena within that reality (Fransella et al., 2004). The technique allows for the exploration and understanding of an individual's way of interpreting events or phenomena (the mental model) by defining or eliciting a set of elements (in other words, aspects of a particular phenomenon), then eliciting a set of

constructs in response to those elements and, thereafter, investigating the way in which the elements relate to the constructs (Bell, 2005).

In terms of this research study, the repertory grid technique enabled me to construct the mental model that each participant holds regarding organisational choice or, more specifically, the particular aspects or dimensions considered by each individual when choosing an organisation for which to work, by probing the constructs elicited within the repertory grid interview. In this particular research study, the elements referred to the five organisations chosen by the research participants: three organisations for which they wanted to work and two organisations for which they did not want to work. The decision was made not to circumscribe the participants' options with regard to their choice of the elements and, as such, participants were encouraged to choose any organisations that came to mind. Whilst in this case the elements referred to organisations, the constructs referred to factors that contributed to the individual's decision to choose an organisation as a preferred employer as compared with aspects of the individual's decision to label an organisation as a less-preferred employer.

Kelly (1955) defined a construct as the manner in which two or more entities are alike and thereby different from a third or more entities. Importantly, a construct should allow an individual to anticipate or develop expectations regarding future events or situations. In addition, a construct should not be seen as static but rather as an ongoing process of construing or making meaning. It is also important to note that a construct is bipolar or, in other words, by defining what something is, a construct simultaneously defines what that something is not (Fransella et al., 2004).

3.5. Sampling strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was used in this study (Marshall, 1996; Polkinghorne, 2005). The choice of this strategy was made given that the objective of the study was to understand the dimensions underlying organisational choice from the perspective of individuals who may have given the process of organisational choice a reasonable amount of thought. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, the most appropriate participants and, indeed, the participants that were likely to yield rich information and, thus, an in-depth understanding of the topic (Polkinghorne, 2005), were honours and masters students studying business management at a tertiary institution in Johannesburg, Gauteng. It was believed that, owing to the field in which they are studying, these individuals might consider organisational choice important, be familiar with a wide range of organisations, be more familiar than other students with the reputations of organisations, have given some thought to the choice of an organisation; and may have had some experience working in at least one organisation.

Arrangements having been made with the appropriate faculty members of the tertiary institution at which the study was conducted, my supervisor and I made a presentation to the honours and masters students in business management during one of their lectures. Students were given a brief introduction to the study and their responsibilities as potential research participants, should they wish to participate, were discussed. Students who were interested in participating were asked to write their names, contact details and ages on a list distributed after the briefing. The prospective participants were advised that they would be contacted in one to two weeks and, were they still interested in participating in the study, they would be offered the opportunity to schedule an interview with me at the time and place of their choice.

Given the focus in the research questions and objectives on Generation Y, it was important that the participants chosen to be included within the study were born between the

mid-1970s and the early 1990s. As such, individuals chosen to participate in the study, from those who indicated their interest, could be no older than approximately 36 and no younger than approximately 20 years of age. From the individuals who indicated their interest in participating in the study, thus, only those individuals between the ages of 20 and 36 were telephoned and/or emailed in order to arrange interviews. A total of ten participants took part in the study. The ten participants were those individuals who, once contacted, indicated their willingness and availability to be interviewed regarding the factors they might consider when choosing an organisation for which to work. A description of the research sample is provided in table 1.

Table 1

Research sample

Participant	Age (years)	Gender	Sector	Work Experience (years)	Degree (currently completing)
1	30	Female	Public; financial	8	Honours
2	24	Male	Not currently working	No information provided	Honours
3	21	Male	Mining	2	Honours
4	23	Female	Not currently working	No information provided	Honours
5	24	Female	Educational	2	Honours
6	32	Male	Educational	3	Masters
7	30	Male	Financial	5	Masters
8	25	Male	Financial	3.7	Masters
9	26	Male	Financial	8	Honours
10	27	Male	Financial	2.7	Masters

3.6. Data gathering process

As previously mentioned, the data gathering technique used in the study was the repertory grid technique. After securing the sample, the first step in the data gathering process was the design of the repertory grid. In light of the discussion on Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct

Theory, the definition of the elements (the events or situations) from which the constructs would be elicited was of paramount importance to the study, in that the elements selected for discussion dictated the constructs identified by the research participants. As far as possible, the repertory grid interviews took place in small, quiet conference rooms on the University campus or at a location of the participant's choice. The interviews were generally 45 to 60 minutes in duration.

Prior to commencing the interview, I provided the participant with a brief explanation of the research study as well as an introduction to the repertory grid technique. For each interview, I had a grid containing seven columns, the first labelled „pairs“, the second through to the sixth labelled „organisations one to five“ and the final column labelled „single“. Table 2 represents the format of the repertory grid utilised in the study. Participants were asked to select three organisations for which they might like to work (labelled as elements one, two and three), and two organisations for which they would prefer not to work (labelled elements four and five). Each organisation's name was written on a separate index card, and displayed to the research participant with each new comparison of the elements. Column one contained the constructs that emerged from the participant's categorisation of two organisations as similar, whilst the seventh column consisted of constructs that emerged from the individual's characterisation of the third organisation as different to, or dissimilar from the pair of similar organisations.

Table 2

Repertory grid format

Pairs	Organisation 1	Organisation 2	Organisation 3	Organisation 4	Organisation 5	Single

Following their choice of five organisations, I asked participants to explain their choice of each organisation. This not only served as an „icebreaker“ or a means of establishing rapport with the participant, but also provided me with an indication of to what extent the participants“ choices of the organisations were random rather than carefully considered, as well as to what extent the participant had had exposure to certain organisations. Following this, I drew comparisons between the organisations chosen by each participant, by asking the participant to compare, for example, organisations one, two and four (in other words, the first two of the three organisations for which the individual would prefer to work and the first of the two organisations for which the individual would prefer not to work). I asked the following question to participants for each possible combination of the chosen elements:

“Describe one way, or more than one way, in which two of these organisations are similar, and different from the third organisation in terms of the factors that you would consider in choosing an organisation for which to work”.

Wherever possible, this question was asked of the participants in terms of ten different combinations of organisations in order to elicit as many constructs or dimensions of organisational choice from each participant as possible. It is important to note that participants were not informed of the ethics „angle“ or „interest“ of the study at the outset of the interview. This was, firstly, to avoid socially acceptable answers being given by

participants and, secondly, to establish whether participants regard ethics as an important consideration in organisational choice, preferably without having to be prompted to consider its potential significance.

It was decided that, should participants fail to mention ethics or ethics-related constructs in the repertory grid interview, unprompted, they would be asked directly at the close of the interview to comment on the following three ethics-related questions:

“What is your definition of/how do you understand ethics?”

Is the ethical reputation of the organisation important in your organisational choice?

Would you exclude an organisation on the basis of a tarnished ethical reputation?”

A summary of the interview protocol is presented in Figure 2. Although the intention was not to deceive participants, the concern was that, once informed of the ethics interest within the study, participants might attempt to present themselves in a socially desirable manner, thus negatively influencing the validity of the information obtained. Consequently, the decision was made to address the topic of ethics directly with the participant immediately prior to the close of the interview. Ethics clearance was obtained from the tertiary institution at which the study was conducted to approach data gathering in this manner.

My role within the data gathering process was to establish rapport with the research participants in order to promote a level of comfort or ease that enabled participants to share their experiences and preferences openly with me (cf. Creswell, 2003). This allowed for the production of rich data on important factors in organisational choice. Aside from establishing rapport with participants, my role was to remain objective, merely recording the participants’ viewpoints rather than engaging and actively participating in the discussion and,

in so doing, potentially contaminating the views of the participants with my own views (cf. Bryman & Bell, 2007).



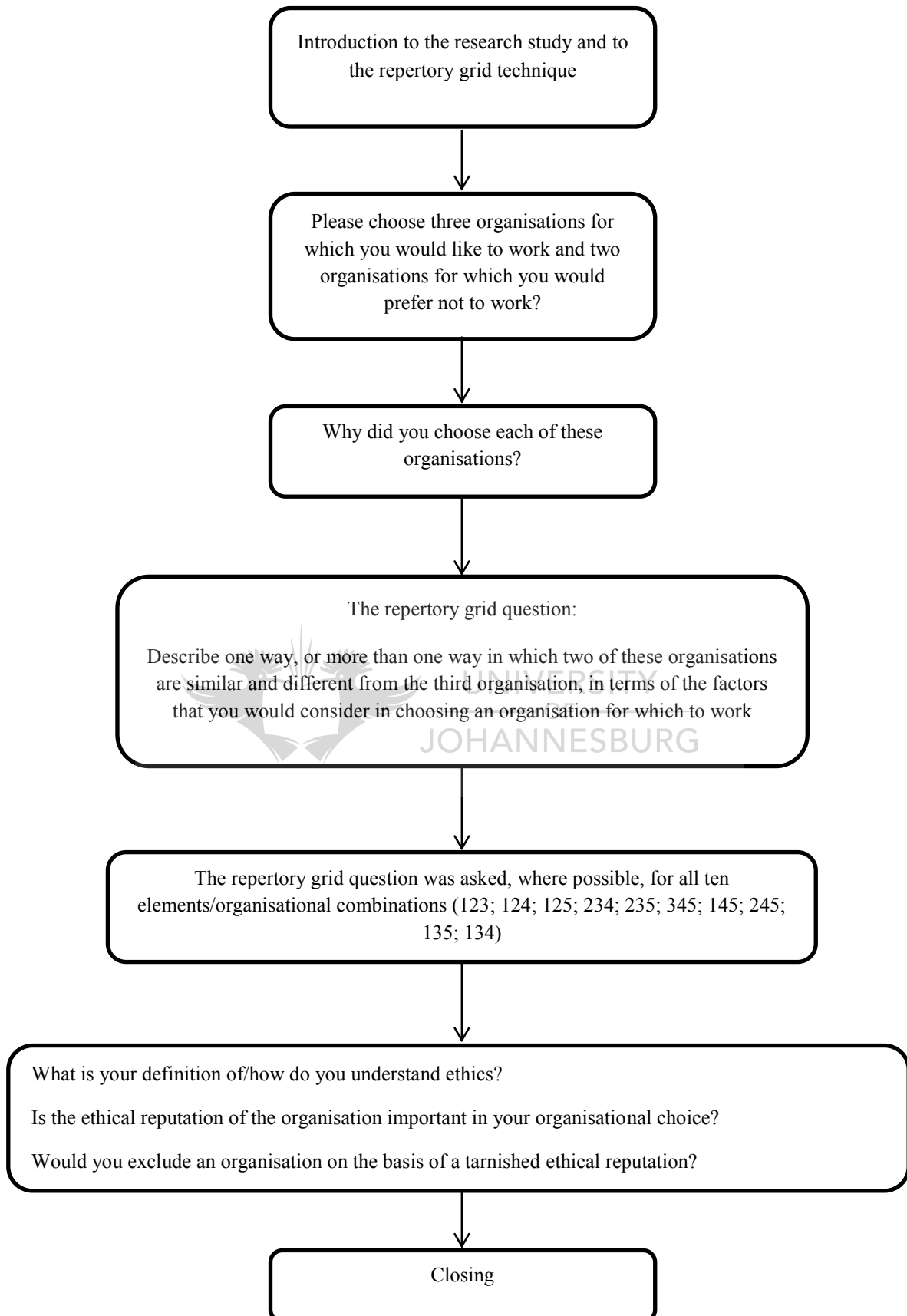


Figure 2
Interview protocol

3.7. Data capturing and data analysis

The data gathered was analysed in four different stages. The first stage of data analysis occurred during the repertory grid interview itself wherein the constructs developed by the participants were recorded in the appropriate columns of the repertory grid. This first stage involved analysing the information obtained from the participant in terms of each combination or element-comparison and identifying constructs underlying organisational choice according to that particular participant. Wherever possible, my interpretation of the labelling of the constructs that emerged from the comparisons was verified with the research participants in order to ensure the accurate representation of the views of the participants and thereby the trustworthiness of the study. The second phase of data analysis occurred in the writing up of field notes immediately following the completion of each interview. These field notes included such aspects of the interview as the setting, the attire of the research participant, the demeanour of the participant, as well as an overview of the main views expressed by the participant.

The third phase of data analysis occurred only once all ten interviews had been conducted. Owing to the notion that the research participants could select their own elements (in other words, organisations) as well as their own constructs (in other words, the factors they deem to be important in choosing an organisation for which to work), a wide variety of themes emerged in each participant's repertory grid. A combination of repeated scrutiny, also referred to as „eyeballing“, and thematic analysis was used to extract the themes underlying the constructs identified during the interview in order to construct the participant's theoretical framework regarding organisational choice.

Thematic analysis refers to the process of “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” such that rich descriptions of phenomena can be constructed (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis can occur at both the manifest and latent level, in other words merely counting the frequency with which explicit references are made to a particular idea or inferring implicit references to the idea (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). As such, thematic analysis allows for an exploration of, and investigation into, the individual assumptions underpinning, and meanings ascribed to the constructs elicited in the repertory grid interview (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final stage of data analysis occurred in my construction and interpretation of second-order themes that seemed to represent the first-order themes that emerged from the interviews.

3.8. Strategies to ensure quality research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four constructs that reflect the quality of qualitative research. These include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to the extent to which the researcher provides an accurate representation of the views and opinions of research participants. Dependability refers to the thoroughness with which the research process is conducted, recorded and reviewed, such that the researcher is able to demonstrate that the research conducted can be trusted. Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings are applicable or transferable from one situation or context to another (Schurink, 2009). Finally, confirmability refers to the extent to which the research findings can be confirmed through evidentiary support from the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a qualitative study, these four constructs replace the traditionally positivist criteria for quality of research, namely reliability, validity, generalisability and replicability (cf. Whitley, 2002).

The credibility of the study was ensured through the use of peer debriefing in that my constructions of the mental models of the research participants were checked and corroborated by my research supervisors (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured that all

actions and decisions taken in the study were reflected upon for their potential impact on the study. This was done through reflections, both in terms of methodological considerations and personal considerations, such as the potential influence of my thoughts and feelings, as well as my ontology and epistemology (Schurink, 2009). Dependability and transferability were ensured through the rigour displayed in the conceptualisation, data collection and recording, data analysis and the reporting of the results and findings of this study. The findings of this study were peer-reviewed on several occasions in order to ensure their trustworthiness. Additionally, wherever possible, I ensured that I checked my interpretations with the research participants during the repertory grid interview in order to confirm that I had understood them correctly. Finally, the participants' stories were reported as the means through which to corroborate the research findings and, thereby, to ensure the confirmability of the study.

3.9. Ethical considerations



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There were a number of ethical considerations that were important within this study. These included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, transparency, objectivity and respect (Myers, 2009). In terms of voluntary participation and informed consent, an informed consent form outlining the objectives of the research study was drafted and distributed to participants, requesting their participation. It was stated that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any point, without penalty. The participant's signature in this regard indicated acceptance and understanding of these stipulations. The informed consent form also stated that the names and identifying particulars of participants would be kept confidential and would be omitted from the research report, thus ensuring the preservation of their anonymity (Myers, 2009).

In addition, it was explained to participants that they were entitled to receive a copy of the research report, should they so desire.

It was imperative that I maintained an objective perspective on the views of research participants by refraining from judgement with regard to participants' expression of opinions. In addition, it was important that the themes extracted from the constructs elicited from the repertory grid interview were an accurate reflection of the actual data collected rather than a reflection of what I deem important in organisational choice. This was ensured through strict adherence to the principles and methods underlying thematic analysis as well as peer debriefing (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), in which I was required to check interpretations made with my research supervisors in order to verify their accuracy. In addition, I was required to ensure thoroughness through methodological rigour and truthfulness by means of the conscious avoidance of deception of the research participant (Myers, 2009).



3.10. Integration

In this chapter, an overview of the research design and practical execution of the research study were presented. The meta-theoretical assumptions underpinning the research study were discussed and the choice of qualitative methodology as the means through which to conduct the study was justified. The data gathering technique and the theoretical foundation on which it is based were discussed. The processes followed in terms of data gathering, data capturing and data analysis were detailed. The sampling strategy utilised in the study was reported and a brief introduction to the research participants was provided. The strategies employed to ensure the quality of the research were outlined. Finally, the ethical considerations pertinent to the study and the manner in which these were addressed in the execution of the study were discussed. In the chapter to follow, the results of the study are

reported in terms of the themes that emerged from the repertory grid interviews with the ten research participants.

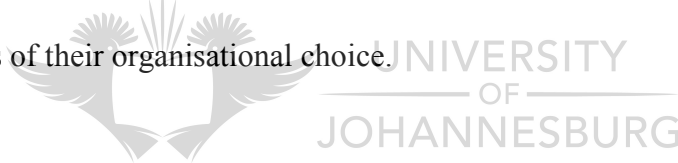


CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the constructs that emerged from the repertory grid interviews are reported for each participant and substantiated, where possible, with direct quotations from participants. In order to ensure transparency and trustworthiness, the data section is written in a manner that portrays as accurately as possible the constructs to which the participants referred as they were captured in the repertory grid interviews. These constructs were then integrated with my field notes as well as my impressions of the participants in order to form themes, structured in the form of „stories“ that contain the mental models of the ten research participants in terms of their organisational choice.



4.2. Data

Participant 1

Growth and development: The participant referred to organisations that, for the sake of their competitive advantage, focus on attracting skilled individuals but also assist those individuals in equipping themselves with new skills, for example, by providing employees with assistance in terms of bursaries. She appeared to view these organisations as offering support to employees in respect of skills development in order to facilitate their upward mobility and personal growth within the organisation. She contrasted these organisations with an organisation in which considerable skill is required in order to be eligible for employment there. She commented: “Because they sell skill, they will want a skilled person, but by virtue of moving from one project to another, that’s how you’ll get upskilled”. She

asserted that this particular organisation would not necessarily nurture individuals in the way that other organisations might, but would instead require individuals to assume responsibility for their own skills development and growth opportunities. She also reiterated the importance of seeking out organisations which offer development opportunities that are consistent with her own growth path.

Organisational reputation: The participant, in discussing organisational reputation, compared and contrasted an organisation in the alcohol industry with a state-owned auditing entity. She asserted that the alcohol distributor displays good citizenship behaviour or, what will be termed here, corporate social responsibility through the creation and dissemination of advertisements that encourage patrons not to drink and drive which, she commented, would “at face value...be detrimental to their company”. She referred to the decision to advertise in this manner as a demonstration of the organisation’s ability to go “beyond what their product is”. She asserted that reputation is built on good citizenship and, in displaying such behaviour, the organisation becomes known for having a positive impact.

With regard to the state-owned auditing entity, she asserted that the objective in the organisation is to strive to safeguard its reputation as an independent auditor, even though it is its role to audit other public sector organisations. She commented: “It goes beyond just auditing. You want, when you put your signature there to say „yes, indeed, [organisation X] spent the money the way they were supposed to” and therefore the country can move forward”. She asserted that these two organisations were similar in the sense that they both encourage responsible consumption within their respective industries and appear to assist in the regulation of that consumption.

She explained, in respect of the alcohol distributor, that she had heard that at the end of the month employees were given some of the products to consume, but noted that should

these employees be “caught” drinking and driving, they were dismissed from the organisation. She utilised this example in order to illustrate that the organisation appeared to be “serious about not being seen to contribute to the death toll”. She further discussed organisational reputation in terms of the calibre of the products and services offered as well as the extent to which those products are well represented by the employees presenting the products. She distinguished organisations which offer desirable products that are well represented by the calibre of staff employed to sell those products, from organisations that offer desirable products but employ staff who „let the product down“.

The participant differentiated between organisations that do not require uniforms, such that people external to the organisation cannot identify individuals who do not represent the organisation well, and organisations that require a uniform and, as such, the employees bringing the organisation into disrepute are easily identifiable. The participant asserted that for some organisations, reputation is vital to their survival such that if they engage in corruption “they can vanish...If they don’t provide a good service then the need for them could eventually just die”.

Personal association with organisational reputation: Building on the importance of organisational reputation in her choice of an organisation for which to work, the participant reiterated that she, in her personal and professional capacity, would not want to be associated with an organisation that has a “bad name”. She commented in this regard: “you can never tell a good police from a bad one” (*sic*) and asserted that she would actively disassociate herself from a disreputable organisation. She implied that a „good name“ is not merely the absence of unethical or unlawful conduct but, rather, active engagement in moral and legal behaviours and the upholding of morally sound principles.

Organisational values: The participant discussed the values to which organisations subscribe and distinguished between the values to which organisations should adhere and those to which they actually adhere. She likened two organisations to each other in the sense of the principles to which they are supposed to subscribe, but distinguished between the two organisations to the extent that one of the organisations upholds and adheres to these principles whilst the other fails to do so.

Holistic focus on the employee: The participant referred to organisations that maintain a holistic view of the employee, such that they understand that there are other demands on individuals' time while they are at work. She asserted that these organisations promote and encourage work/life balance amongst employees by facilitating a flexible approach to work in order to reduce the tension between the respective demands of the employee's work and social/home life. She explained that in certain organisations, the onus is on employees to create their own flexibility whilst still adhering to the completion of projects, as the criterion through which performance is measured.

Exposure to opportunity: The participant differentiated between organisations based and operating solely within South Africa, and organisations operating multi-nationally. She asserted that obtaining employment in an organisation that operates multi-nationally would enable her to explore the business world beyond South African borders, which would ultimately contribute to her career advancement and progression.

External influence on organisations: The participant referred to the extent to which national legislation facilitates or hinders organisations' success and continued existence. When referring to a state-owned auditing entity with the responsibility to audit other public sector organisations, she explained that national legislation protects the continued existence of the state-owned auditing entity and asserted that the lack of competition experienced by

this auditing entity ensures its long-term survival. On the contrary, when referring to an organisation specialising in the manufacture and distribution of alcohol, she asserted that national legislation by means of, for example, a ban on the advertising of alcohol, could play a central role in the demise of an organisation. As such, much of this organisation's future success hinges on the legislation of the country.

Participant 2

Growth and development opportunities: The participant discussed the opportunity for growth and development from both an individual and organisational perspective as being important. Focusing on the organisational perspective, he distinguished organisations possessing room for expansion (in other words, organisations that have not yet realised their full potential) from organisations that possess limited room for improvement, perhaps owing to the specific markets to which they cater. Focusing on the individual perspective, he referred to the range of positions or career avenues offered by the organisation.

Organisational reputation: The participant discussed the reputations of organisations with regard to the extent to which organisations are well-known and well established, their appeal as organisations in which to invest, the adequacy of their profits and the reliability of their products and services. The participant referred to organisations reputed to be multi-national leaders in their industries and dominant in their respective markets. He also referred to the extent to which organisations are reputed to encourage employee participation – “your voice is heard” – as well as the degree to which they are reputed as being customer-focused and meeting the needs of their clientele.

Organisational stability: The participant appeared to value well-established, stable and generally big organisations and appeared to associate such organisations with safety, security, comfort and support. He appeared to value the idea of job security as well as the sense of

belonging and camaraderie which he seemed to associate with organisations that he perceived to possess a more interested and involved workforce.

Employee benefits: The participant made no reference to the remuneration offered by the organisation but did mention the benefits or “perks” offered to employees. He appeared to associate two organisations in particular with the allocation of monthly “gifts” to employees.

Exposure to opportunity: The participant drew attention to the location of organisations as well as the areas within which they operate as being important in his organisational choice. He appeared to value the idea of having the choice to work either in South Africa or abroad but still being able to work for the same organisation. He also commented on the importance of organisations adapting their functioning to specific countries within which they are located.

Organisational innovation and entrepreneurship: The participant referred to organisations that appeared to be entrepreneurial in their start-up and that pride themselves on being creative and innovative and, thus, employ individuals who can contribute to their competitive edge in respect of innovation.

Personal association with organisational reputation: The participant described the sense of self-esteem and personal accomplishment he would feel if he were to be associated with particular organisations. He appeared to hold the view that any prestige associated with these organisations would be extended to him if he were to be able to gain employment there. He referred also to the sense of personal achievement that would result from being selected to represent these organisations as an employee.

Upward mobility through the organisation: The participant noted, albeit briefly, the increased career mobility or progression associated with particular organisations and added

that these organisations might be desirable choices if one were to be seeking exposure and the opportunity to progress through the organisation rapidly.

Participant 3

Organisational size: The participant juxtaposed larger, well-known organisations – “being a part of something that’s maybe already successful” with smaller, developing organisations, with the latter being associated with considerable potential for growth.

Entrepreneurial spirit: The participant emphasised organisations that “do new things all the time”. Although he referred to these organisations as possessing an entrepreneurial spirit, this seems more closely to approximate innovation.

Organisational culture: The participant distinguished between organisations in which there is a culture of achievement and performance as opposed to organisations in which there is a “lazy” culture. He described the latter as being a culture of “why do today what you can do tomorrow?”. He asserted that this culture could be explained as being a function of the people working at these organisations. He emphasised that it is important for him to surround himself with like-minded, equally driven and ambitious individuals.

Industry sector: The participant appeared to distinguish large, private sector corporate conglomerates from government-run or funded institutions, with the perception that the latter are not as efficient and effective as the former. He also mentioned that working for organisations in the private sector allows for more rapid personal growth and development.

Personal status: The participant claimed that working for certain organisations would afford him greater personal status – “when you work at a company like that people look at you differently” – and would enable him to move up within the organisation to positions

associated with greater status – “your status as a lecturer just isn’t the same as being Managing Director of a company”.

Recognition and rewards: The participant emphasised that performance within certain organisations is associated with greater rewards and recognition, especially those within which one is required to compete against other people. The participant appeared to place value on the prestige associated with material rewards – “if you perform, you get the money and the status and the power”...“whereas at [that organisation] if you’re a lecturer and you don’t work as hard as the next guy, you’re still going to get paid anyway”. “There are lecturers who shine above the rest but at the end of the day you’re just a lecturer at [organisation X]” – again emphasising the status and prestige, or lack thereof, associated with a particular level of employment and a particular set of benefits.

Personal association with organisational reputation: The participant highlighted organisational reputation as being important, with the implication being that he would automatically adopt that reputation merely by being associated with a particular organisation – “you can move up in [organisation X] but the perception is that it is inefficient and that is not something I want to align myself to. I want to work for a company that is seen as being the best, not for one that is seen as being the worst”. The participant mentioned organisational reputation as being informed by what he had heard about the organisation, with positive feedback from others about the organisation contributing to its favourable reputation. He noted in this regard: “you’ve only ever heard good things about these organisations, unless it’s price-fixing”. Through this comment, he appeared to allude to the ethical reputation of the organisation but, his having said this quite nonchalantly, the ethical reputation of the organisation did not seem especially important as a factor that he might consider in his organisational choice.

Building a future: The participant emphasised being able to contribute to the future of the country in a visible manner as being important to him and that contributing in this way would be more fulfilling for him. He noted in this regard: “it is something real, something tangible. It’s not just numbers on a screen”.

Remuneration: The participant stated that particular organisations offer higher salaries than others “which, I suppose, is something that needs to be mentioned.... I can’t believe I didn’t say that before”, implying that the remuneration offered by the organisation might play a central role in the participant’s decision to work for that organisation.

Growth and development opportunities: The participant drew attention to organisations that would provide growth and development opportunities, especially those organisations that would enable him to grow more easily and more rapidly than he might when working for other organisations.

Upward mobility through the organisation: The participant discussed organisations in which upward mobility or progression therein is based on the quality and quantity of personal output rather than on the amount of time spent at the organisation. His perception seemed to be that performance-based progression would enable him to move up in the organisation more rapidly – “at the end of the day, guys that are the senior lecturers are still going to stay the senior lecturers until they decide to move on”.

Personal accomplishment: The participant highlighted the idea of his personal accomplishment/success, irrespective of the organisational environment in which that might take place – “making the business successful is important but it is actually about being personally successful”; “I want to be the Managing Director of a company, or CEO or whatever, but it’s not necessarily the setting in which that takes place, it’s more about the fact that I’m able to do that”.

Organisational branding: The participant emphasised organisations that possess names that are well-known and recognised, as being important to him – “people are not gonna look down on you or think...he’s in sheltered employment” (*sic*). The brand created by the organisation appeared to be important in order for him to cultivate a sense of personal legitimacy through his association with well-known, credible organisations.

Organisational bureaucracy: The participant made the distinction between organisations that are bureaucratic and in which it is “harder to get things done” and organisations in which decisions are made more rapidly. He appeared to associate the level of bureaucracy with the size of the organisation, with larger being associated with greater bureaucracy.

Participant 4

Value placed on employees by the organisation: The participant stressed the value that organisations place on their employees and spoke about organisations which not only view their human talent as their most important resource but also treat their employees as such. Her description in this regard included organisations that provide good employee benefits and that recognise individual differences amongst their employees.

Recognition of merit: The participant referred to organisations that recognise individuals on the basis of their merit and the calibre of their potential contributions. Organisations such as these were distinguished from organisations in which recognition and employment opportunities are based on ethnicity and/or “who you know”.

Organisational values: The participant spoke about organisations that not only possess good, clearly defined values but prefer to associate with other entities displaying such good values. In order to illustrate her point, she referred to a recent incident in which a large

consulting firm withdrew its sponsorship from a well-known sportsman, following the discovery of his engagement in several extramarital affairs.

Organisational reputation: The participant mentioned certain organisations as best companies for which to work, referring to those organisations recognised in the Deloitte Best Company to Work For survey. The participant also referred to the impressions she has gained about various organisations from personal exposure as well as from what other people have said about the organisations. In order to illustrate her point, when describing one particular organisation, she noted that “employees seem to go the extra mile”.

Exposure to opportunity: The participant discussed organisations that provide employees with a breadth and depth of exposure, allowing them to grow and develop in a variety of areas. The participant also referred to travel opportunities as well as the location within which organisations operate as being important. The emphasis placed on opportunities and exposure appeared to supercede that placed on remuneration. She did mention organisations that offer desirable remuneration but noted that the experience and exposure provided in these organisations “does not match the pay”.

Organisational leadership: The participant emphasised the calibre of the leadership of the organisation as being important, with the participant commenting unfavourably on those organisations the leadership of which is “not right”. The participant referred to organisations that possess potential but that this potential is not realised owing to the poor leadership within the organisation.

Realistic impressions: The participant mentioned a particular organisation in the banking industry that creates expectations to which it fails to live up. She stated that although she would continue to bank with this organisation, she would not consider working there.

Cultural sensitivity: The participant commented on the diversity of the employees working at a particular organisation and remarked on the manner in which that organisation, owned by an international parent company, adapted to South Africa. She appeared to value the notion that the organisation hired local individuals and chose not to impose Western methods of functioning on an organisation based in South Africa.

Visual appeal and culture of the organisation: The participant remarked upon the attractiveness of organisations from a visual and design perspective. She also referred to the “atmosphere” in the organisation as well as the extent to which she might be compatible with the organisational culture.

Participant 5

Exposure to opportunity: The participant discussed the location within which various organisations operate, for example South African organisations as opposed to those organisations operating internationally. The participant appeared to view the opportunity provided by the organisation to relocate or to travel abroad as important.

Organisational branding: The participant discussed the degree to which the organisation is well-known and well-recognised, as well as the extent to which and how effectively the organisation’s brand is marketed.

Organisational recruitment strategies: The participant commented on the extent to which the organisation creates interest amongst prospective employees and encourages them to apply to and, ultimately, join the organisation.

Organisational recognition of, and reward for prior education: The participant highlighted those organisations that appear to value education and seek out prospective employees who are well educated – “[these organisations] want you *because* you have a

BCom” (author’s emphasis). She noted that these organisations appear to recognise and reward the effort required by educated individuals in acquiring their qualifications.

Growth and development opportunities: The participant emphasised organisations that provide individuals with the opportunity to acquire new skills, to advance within the organisation, and to grow and develop rapidly. In this regard, the participant referred to the scope of the organisation and, thus, the variety of potential career paths offered to prospective employees. The participant appeared to value organisations in which she would be able to explore multiple career avenues, whilst remaining in the employ of the same organisation. Additionally, the participant also considered the stability of the organisation as well as its ability to make a profit.

Personal challenge: Closely linked with the previous theme, the participant differentiated those organisations that would provide her with a sense of personal challenge from those in which she might be prevented from realising her full potential. She noted both the current functioning of the organisation (for example, the financial status of the organisation or particular difficulties being experienced by the organisation) as well as the scope for development (from both an individual and organisational perspective) as variables that might affect her likelihood of experiencing sufficient personal challenge.

Industry sector: The participant differentiated between organisations operating within the public sector and organisations operating within the private sector. She appeared to associate government-run organisations with the opportunity to “make money”, with the ethical implications of this assertion not being explored.

Networking: The participant referred to organisations in which ease of entry into the organisations depends on the extent to which job seekers possess the “right contact”.

Organisational reputation: The participant noted, although briefly, that a particular organisation is regarded as one of the „top“ organisations in South Africa in which to gain entry. The participant appeared to associate being employed by the organisation with a sense of prestige as well as a sense of personal accomplishment.

Participant 6

Organisational dynamism: Important for this participant was the notion of an organisation that is characterised by dynamism in which the employee is required to be flexible and adaptable with regard to content and process, as opposed to one that is characterised by routine, in which the employee is required to work with established content, systems and processes. The participant referred to dynamic organisations as seeking dynamism from their current and prospective employees, and made specific mention of consulting organisations that require their employees to select and/or design the most appropriate solution for their clients. The participant described this type of organisational environment as personally and professionally challenging and asserted that the dynamism in these organisations encourages and perhaps even compels employees to become more innovative and creative in their work. He appeared to associate innovative and dynamic organisations with shorter decision-making processes.

Growth and development opportunities: The participant emphasised the exposure and growth opportunities, from both a personal and career perspective, to be gained from certain organisations as opposed to the limited experience and exposure afforded by other organisations. The participant referred to the emphasis placed on personal performance for the sake of improving oneself as opposed to personal performance for the salary. In this regard, organisations that facilitate the development and improvement of employees were distinguished from those in which the focus is on remuneration alone. He highlighted

organisations in which employees are provided with personalised development plans that encourage and motivate them to perform in order to „upskill“ and improve themselves. He asserted that this self-improvement would be likely to lead to better prospects for the future. He also stated that organisations in which established systems and procedures and „routine“ ways of completing „routine“ tasks are encouraged and even insisted upon, are likely to result in diminished opportunities through which individuals can learn, grow and develop.

Building a future: The participant mentioned his desire to seek organisations that might provide him with the opportunity and platform in order to become involved in making decisions that influence the future of the country.

Exposure to opportunity: The participant referred to the location of organisations as well as to the areas within which they operate. He appeared to associate organisations with a global presence with increased opportunities for personal and professional growth and development. The participant discussed organisations that offer similar products and services and appeared to associate these organisations with an opportunity to gain experience and exposure as well as to transition easily from one organisation to another.

Organisational bureaucracy: The participant described organisations that are highly bureaucratic and appeared to associate this bureaucracy with slower decision-making, a sense of restriction, owing to the emphasis on adherence to rules and regulations, as well as with a diminished opportunity to improve one's knowledge, skill and calibre of output.

Risk and uncertainty: The participant drew attention to organisations that offer products and services that are associated with a high level of risk. Specifically referring to an investment organisation, he commented on the competitive nature of the industry as well as on the notion that organisational success is largely dependent on the national and global economy. He noted also the sense of insecurity associated with being employed by this

organisation, as a result of having to work on commission rather than receiving at least a basic salary, and discussed the disadvantages of not knowing whether one is able to meet pre-established sales targets.

Participant 7

Organisational stability: The participant referred to organisations that are well established and possess a “stable and solid foundation”.

Organisational structure and innovation: The participant emphasised the importance of organisations in which there is a “balance between innovation and structure”, with organisational structure referring to the extent to which roles and responsibilities are defined. As such, the structure of which the participant spoke could also refer to the degree of autonomy the individual is ascribed within the organisation.

Individual and organisational professionalism and career challenge: The participant emphasised organisations that demand that the prospective employee be highly competent but that also provide developmental or career growth opportunities for employees. In addition, he distinguished organisations that possess the wherewithal to recruit, select and manage highly skilled professionals from organisations that possess the finances to hire skilled professionals but do not possess the capability to manage that talent effectively.

Organisational capacity to deliver on innovation: The participant placed emphasis on organisational innovation and distinguished organisations that possess the potential to innovate, as well as the capacity to manage and deliver on innovation, from those organisations that possess the intention to innovate but do not possess the capabilities to manage the process of innovation from a practical perspective.

Organisational dynamism: The participant differentiated between organisations that are dynamic, fast-paced and full of energy in which “you can feel the places are alive”, and organisations in which the pace is significantly slower, describing the latter as “like an old age home; you get sucked into a black hole where the time just goes so slowly”.

Organisational bureaucracy and sense of direction: The participant placed importance on the level of bureaucracy in the organisation and commented on companies in which there is no structure, no organisation and no direction, yet that are highly rigid and bureaucratic. He emphasised this point through the following comment: “who do you even bribe?” He distinguished organisations such as these from organisations in which the structure is „flatter“ and in which there is a clear sense of direction and explicitly stated organisational objectives.

External influences on organisations: The participant mentioned the extent to which organisations are influenced by external factors, such as political leaders and noted that organisations and the individuals within them “could easily be victims of corruption because of political involvement”.

Eligibility for selection: The participant commented on organisations in which prospective employees are required to be competent and in which selection occurs on the basis of merit, as opposed to organisations in which selection is based, not on whether the individual is competent but rather on the basis of the individual’s personal connection to those individuals with the authority to make selection decisions.

Participant 8

Growth and development opportunities: The participant emphasised organisations that provide employees with the opportunity to develop new skills as well as the opportunity to grow and develop rapidly. In this regard, the participant described organisations in which

upward mobility in the organisation is performance based and can occur rapidly, depending on the calibre of the individual. He referred to organisations that emphasise the need for individuals to develop a new set of skills as they move to different organisational environments (for example, transferring from a branch of an organisation based in South Africa to a branch based in Singapore), and termed this “career stretching”. The participant also distinguished organisations in which there is growth restriction, particularly from managers, from organisations in which growth is encouraged and facilitated, for example, through the allocation of mentors to assist individuals in directing their own careers.

Training: Differently from growth and development opportunities which appeared to be future focused, the participant also drew attention to the extent to which organisations offer their staff training opportunities in order to enable them to “do their [current] jobs in an efficient and effective manner”. He distinguished organisations that only offer training to their frontline staff (those individuals who have direct contact with customers on a regular basis) from organisations in which training is offered at all levels. The participant referred to organisations that offer training as those that have good relationships with their employees and “look after” their employees so that they are better able to cater to the needs of customers.

Organisational stability: The participant emphasised the stability of organisations “from a presence and retrenchments perspective” and described the sense of security experienced by employees when working for a “well established” organisation. The participant also placed importance on the need for support from the organisation as well as the need for the organisation to define and articulate its values and guidelines clearly.

Exposure to opportunity: The participant made reference to the location of organisations and the areas in which they operate, as well as to the extent to which

organisations provide employees with the opportunity to relocate or travel. The perception appeared to be that being employed by an organisation with a global presence would allow individuals to travel as well as to grow and develop from both a personal and professional perspective.

Autonomy: The participant emphasised organisations in which employees are expected to assume a high level of responsibility and accountability as well as in which employees are expected to work independently (as individuals or in groups) and to take ownership of their own work. The participant appeared to associate this increased level of responsibility with the opportunity to develop leadership skills and to “...shine better” owing to the increased opportunity to leave an impression. This particular theme seems to be at odds with the participant’s emphasis on organisational stability as well as with his emphasis on the willingness of organisations to lend support to their employees. It could, perhaps, be suggested that the participant might only be comfortable to assume the level of autonomy required by some organisations in a stable and supportive environment.

Visibility and recognition: The participant appeared to associate the level of accountability required of the individual with the opportunity to gain visibility and, ultimately, recognition. He asserted that these organisational environments allow individuals to “really showcase” themselves. It appeared to be important for him to be provided with the opportunity to be recognised for his performance.

Organisational reputation: The participant emphasised the information he had gathered about organisations from friends or acquaintances working there as well as the information he had gleaned from personal experience with various organisations. He asserted that if more than one individual complains about the same aspect of the organisation, then it may be prudent to be wary of that organisation as a potential employer. He also referred to a

particular organisation as being desirable owing to its standing as one of the best employers for 2010. Additionally, he described a certain organisation as being “under the radar” in terms of public knowledge and explained that this air of mystery might attract him as an employee.

Remuneration and benefits: The participant distinguished organisations in which good remuneration packages are offered from those in which the remuneration package offered is less desirable – “we have to live”. He appeared to attach particular value to organisations in which the remuneration is not fixed by hierarchical level but rather is proportional to the individual and team contributions and performance. The participant referred to organisations offering what he termed “freebies” as well discounted rates on properties or motor vehicles and assistance with monthly medical aid contributions.

Holistic focus on the employee: The participant drew attention to organisations that focus on the holistic wellbeing of their employees by, for example, providing employee wellness programmes. He emphasised organisations that highlight their desire to care for their employees and seemed to view organisations such as these as a source of support – a “lifeline”.

Organisational innovation: The participant commented on the importance of working for an organisation that is innovative and that “grows your mind towards innovative thinking...out of the box thinking”. He asserted that individuals working for innovative organisations are constantly exposed to new ideas from their own organisation as well as other organisations, making their jobs more exciting.

Realistic impressions: The participant dismissed organisations that create expectations to which they cannot or do not live up. When commenting on the visual design and architecture of one organisation in comparison with the way in which employees at that

organisation complain about aspects of its functioning, he asserted “nice face but behind the scenes it’s not so lekker” (*sic*).

Participant 9

Exposure to opportunity: The participant referred to the location within which organisations operate, whether they are based and operate only within South Africa or whether they possess “a footprint in all continents”. The participant appeared to value the opportunity to work in different parts of the world, to travel and to broaden his personal and professional capabilities through exposure to new people and places.

Growth and development opportunities: The participant emphasised the extent to which the organisation is able to provide employees with opportunities for growth and development and whether the organisation provides a culture in which the individual is encouraged to develop and to seek access to new and different opportunities.

Organisational reputation: The participant emphasised the reputation of the organisation as inferred from the opinions of others (for example friends or acquaintances) or formed through his personal experiences with the organisations. He asserted that individuals who seem happy working at a particular organisation and who share their positive experiences of that organisation draw his attention and create a favourable impression of the organisation.

Organisational leadership: The participant referred to the management or leadership of organisations in terms of the efficacy with which organisations are being directed and the extent to which the leadership of the organisation promotes the latter’s good performance. The participant highlighted a particular organisation in which unsound leadership has contributed to the organisation making a loss for consecutive years. The participant

commented that he would prefer not to be associated with an organisation such as this as it “clearly indicates a sinking ship”.

Personal association with organisational reputation/unethical conduct: The participant referred to a particular organisation in which there has recently been media coverage concerning a number of scandals that have occurred in the organisation. The specific scandal to which the participant referred involved money being embezzled from the organisation’s shareholders. The participant asserted that he would not want to be associated with an organisation that engaged in such unethical conduct and commented “it would be a shame to have Organisation X on my CV, same as it would be a shame to have Enron on my CV” (*sic*). He asserted that organisations in which the leadership is unsound and in which unethical conduct is engaged in “let[s] the employees down”.

Organisational commitment to transformation: The participant drew attention to the extent to which organisations are committed to transformation, in other words to the economic empowerment and equal representation of previously disadvantaged individuals. The participant placed importance on organisations in which transformation is encouraged and promoted throughout the organisation.

Participant 10

Organisational structure and innovation: The participant contrasted „traditional“ hierarchical organisations with organisations that have a „flatter“ structure. He commented on a particular organisation that he described as having „military“ processes and asserted that having to follow these systems and processes “to the letter” stifles creativity and innovation. He claimed that working at this particular organisation could make for a desirable start to one’s career but noted that should one want to contribute above and beyond the value-add that one is able to make during a standard eight hour working day, it would be advisable to

seek employment with an organisation that values flexibility, creativity and innovation. He appeared to associate „flatter“ organisations with a greater entrepreneurial focus as well as a greater emphasis on the „people“ aspect of the organisation. He seemed to value organisations that are pioneering in their industries.

Upward mobility through the organisation: The participant emphasised organisations that enable individuals to progress through the organisation, especially those that allow for rapid individual progression and those in which the efforts of employees are recognised and rewarded. He appeared to associate the likelihood of upward mobility with the size of the organisation, with smaller organisations being associated with a greater opportunity for one’s efforts to be noticed and recognised. He asserted that in smaller organisations composed of small teams, given the appropriate experience and “hunger”, individuals are likely to be able to progress rapidly up through the organisation.

Exposure to opportunity: The participant discussed the location of organisations as well as the countries within which they operate and spoke about the extent to which organisations are able to give him exposure to other emerging markets, such that he might be able to apply his knowledge to the South African context. He emphasised the opportunity to work elsewhere in the world and to seek broader exposure as well as personal challenge. He seemed to view as important the opportunity to interact with the best individuals in the industry and to learn from their years of experience. He implied that individuals who are recognised as being the best in the industry are likely to be found in organisations that have stringent entry requirements.

Eligibility for selection: The participant differentiated organisations in which there are stringent entry requirements and in which there is considerable emphasis placed on education from organisations that are “not very difficult to get in[to]”. He commented on a particular

organisation that seeks not only high performing academic achievers but also high performing academic achievers who also excel in extra-curricular activities, “people who do extra”, for example, community service. He remarked on organisations that emphasise unusual and innovative thinking and, in so doing, recruit individuals that are able to create and innovate.

Organisational reputation: The participant discussed his perception of various organisations as formed through stories told by other individuals, such as friends or acquaintances. He seemed to evaluate the reputation of organisations by the absence of negative comments concerning these organisations in the circles within which he moves. He commented on the reputation of organisations with regard to the extent to which they advertise in order to attempt to alter public perceptions of them. He dismissed an organisation that has now become inferior to its closest competitor owing to its lack of effort with regard to continuous growth, development and market repositioning.

Personal association with organisational reputation/unethical conduct: The participant discussed an organisation that has recently been involved in a number of “shady transactions”, for example, dubious government tenders. He asserted that this organisation is corrupt and that staff turnover, particularly at the executive level, is high owing to a general unwillingness to be associated with unethical conduct. On the contrary, the participant also referred to the benefits of being associated with an organisation with a positive reputation and, more specifically, how having worked at a reputable organisation might assist individuals in obtaining employment at other (equally reputable) organisations.

Industry sector: The participant drew a distinction between public sector organisations and private sector organisations, with the former being associated with less work and more remuneration. He appeared to hold a negative view of government-run organisations that he

believed to be shared by a number of other individuals. He asserted that it is difficult for individuals to be employed by organisations in the private sector once they have worked for government-run organisations, ostensibly owing to their association with a less than favourable organisational reputation.

Corporate social responsibility: The participant distinguished organisations that engage in and promote corporate social responsibility, specifically those organisations driving „green“ initiatives from organisations that do not stress their responsibility to entities beyond themselves.

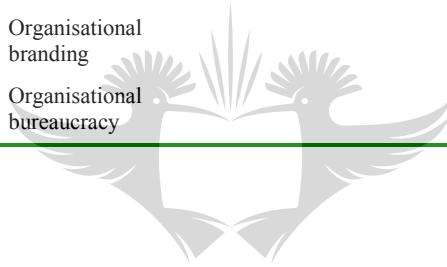
A summary of the first-order themes emerging from the study are contained in Table 3. The first-order themes were consolidated to form ten second-order themes. In order to do so, the first-order themes were scrutinised for commonalities in the subject matter (derived from the participant „stories“) and first-order themes with similar meanings were reconciled to form broader thematic categories. The first-order themes as they contributed to the formation of the second-order themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 3

Summary of first-order themes for each participant

Themes	Participant									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Growth and development opportunities	Growth and development opportunities	Growth and development opportunities	Organisational size	Value placed on employees by the organisation	Exposure to opportunity	Growth and development opportunities	Organisational stability	Growth and development opportunities	Exposure to opportunity	Organisational structure and innovation
Organisational reputation	Organisational reputation	Entrepreneurial spirit (innovation)	Recognition of merit	Organisational branding	Organisational dynamism	Organisational structure and innovation	Training	Growth and development opportunities	Upward mobility through the organisation	
Personal association with organisational reputation	Organisational stability	Organisational culture	Organisational values	Organisational recruitment strategies	Building a future	Individual and organisational professionalism and career challenge	Organisational stability	Organisational reputation	Exposure to opportunity	
Organisational values	Employee benefits	Industry sector	Organisational reputation	Organisational recognition of, and reward for prior education	Exposure to opportunity	Organisational capacity to deliver on innovation	Exposure to opportunity	Organisational leadership	Eligibility for selection	
Holistic focus on the employee	Exposure to opportunity	Personal status	Exposure to opportunity	Growth and development opportunities	Organisational bureaucracy	Organisational dynamism	Autonomy	Personal association with organisational reputation/unethical conduct	Organisational reputation	
Exposure to opportunity	Organisational innovation and entrepreneurship	Recognition and rewards	Organisational leadership	Personal challenge	Risk and uncertainty	Organisational bureaucracy and sense of direction	Visibility and recognition	Organisational commitment to transformation	Personal association with organisational reputation/unethical conduct	
External influence on organisations	Personal association with organisational reputation	Personal association with organisational reputation	Realistic impressions	Industry sector		External influence on organisations	Organisational reputation		Industry sector	

Building a future	Cultural sensitivity	Networking	Eligibility for selection	Remuneration and benefits	Corporate social responsibility
Remuneration	Visual appeal and culture of the organisation	Organisational reputation		Holistic focus on the employee	
Growth and development opportunities				Organisational innovation	
Upward mobility through the organisation				Realistic impressions	
Personal accomplishment					
Organisational branding					
Organisational bureaucracy					



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Table 4

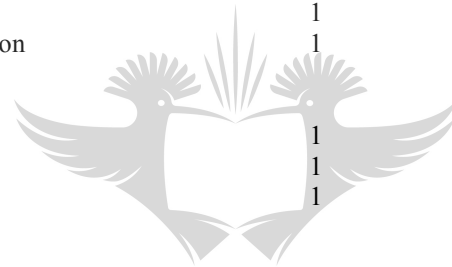
Conversion: first-order to second-order themes

First order themes	Frequency	Second order themes
Exposure to opportunity	8	Exposure to opportunity
Growth and development opportunities	7	
Upward mobility through the organisation	2	
Personal accomplishment	1	
Networking	1	Personal and career growth and development
Training	1	
Personal challenge	1	
Individual and organisational professionalism and career challenge	1	
Organisational reputation	7	
Personal association with organisational reputation	5	Reputation
Personal status	1	
Organisational bureaucracy	3	
Industry sector	3	
Organisational stability	3	
Organisational branding	2	
Organisational leadership	2	
Organisational values	2	
Organisational culture	1	
Visual appeal and organisational culture of organisation	1	Organisational characteristics
Realistic impressions	2	
Organisational dynamism	2	
Organisational size	1	
Risk and uncertainty	1	
External influence on organisations	2	
Organisational recruitment strategies	1	
Eligibility for selection	2	Recruitment and selection



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Entrepreneurial spirit (innovation)	1	
Organisational structure and innovation	1	
Organisational capacity to deliver on innovation	1	
Organisational innovation and entrepreneurship	1	Organisational innovation and entrepreneurship
Organisational innovation	1	
Recognition of merit	1	
Recognition and reward for prior education	1	
Visibility and recognition	1	Recognition and rewards
Recognition and rewards	1	
Holistic focus on the employee	2	
Autonomy	1	
Value placed on employees by organisation	1	Employee-centricity
Employee benefits	1	
Remuneration	1	
Remuneration and benefits	1	Remuneration and benefits
Cultural sensitivity	1	
Corporate social responsibility	1	
Organisational commitment to transformation	1	Social awareness
Building a future	2	



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4.3. Integration

In this chapter, the data obtained from the repertory grid interviews were reported in the form of „stories“ that represent the mental models of the research participants with regard to organisational choice. The 48 first-order themes (cumulative total across all ten participants) that emerged from this data were condensed into ten second-order themes. In the chapter to follow, the ten second-order or common themes as condensed from the first-order themes are discussed and linked to relevant literature.



CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION AND SENSE-MAKING

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the ten second-order or common themes as condensed from the first-order themes that emerged from the repertory grid interviews are discussed and linked, where appropriate, to relevant literature. Possible explanations for the findings obtained in the study are also explored.

The objective of the research study was to investigate to what extent Generation Y job seekers consider the ethical reputation of the organisation in their choice of an organisation for which to work. Interviews were conducted with the ten research participants, using the repertory grid technique, in order to discover the important factors comprising the mental models of the participants with regard to their organisational choice. The mental model of each participant in terms of organisational choice is contained in Table 3. Table 4 indicates that ten themes or factors emerged consistently from the interviews. These are as follows: exposure to opportunity, personal and career growth and development, reputation, organisational characteristics, recruitment and selection, organisational innovation and entrepreneurship, recognition and rewards, employee-centricity, remuneration and benefits, and social awareness.

Exposure to opportunity

The vast majority of the participants referred to the degree of exposure that organisations are able to provide to them. The term „exposure to opportunity“ includes the location of organisations, the countries or areas within which they operate, the extent to which they

provide travel opportunities as well as, to some degree, the extent to which organisations promote and facilitate the career advancement of employees. The participants' quest for breadth and depth of exposure appeared to allow them to broaden their personal and professional horizons as well as to seek novelty and constant change. Martin (2005) asserts that Generation Y employees demand fast-paced, dynamic work and actively seek out organisational environments that will allow them to move rapidly between positions, departments, and locations. These findings appear to be in line with the assertions of Martin (2005) as well as the findings of Terjesen et al. (2007) in terms of the variety seeking behaviour of Generation Y employees in the workplace.

Personal and career growth and development

Participants emphasised the pursuit of organisations that offered development opportunities consistent with their own career paths. They appeared to be drawn to organisations offering multiple career avenues within the same organisation in order to allow for rapid, performance-based growth and development. Participants appeared to value personal and career challenge and placed significant emphasis on their determination to achieve personal and professional success. These findings appear to be consistent with the assertions of Earle (2003) in respect of Generation Y job seekers' focus on personal accomplishment and their search for ongoing developmental opportunities.

Organisational characteristics

The participants seemed to be fairly clear with regard to the components or characteristics that the organisation should possess in order to be perceived as desirable by Generation Y job seekers. Several participants discussed the level of bureaucracy in organisations, the industry sector in which they operate and the stability of organisations as being particularly important. Participants tended to view organisations operating within the public sector as

associated with inefficiency, corruption and political interference. There appeared to be a tenuous link between ethics or the ethical reputation of organisations and the factors discussed by the participants in terms of the organisational characteristics that they might find appealing. Ethics appeared to be addressed superficially in participants' discussion of organisational values but was almost non-existent in their discussion of organisational branding. No mention was made by any of the participants of the importance of organisations branding themselves as ethical.

Recruitment and selection

Participants referred to the extent to which organisations put in effort in order to motivate and encourage prospective employees to apply for employment. Organisations that do not appear to market themselves actively to Generation Y job seekers seemed to be viewed, for all intents and purposes, as apathetic – a sentiment to which Generation Y seekers appeared to respond with equal disinterest. Linking closely with the theme of employee-centricity, the participants appeared to desire organisations that perceived Generation Y job seekers to be valuable enough in which to invest in terms of recruitment, selection and development. The participants discussed the eligibility or entry requirements at various organisations and appeared to associate being employed by those organisations with more stringent entry requirements, with a greater sense of personal accomplishment as well as with a greater sense of prestige and personal status.

Organisational innovation and entrepreneurship

The participants appeared to value innovative and entrepreneurial organisations – organisations that appeared to be „pushing the boundaries“ in terms of creativity and ingenuity. The participants seemed to value the organisation's capacity to encourage creative thinking, but the organisation's ability to deliver on or implement this innovative

thinking seemed equally important. These findings appear to be consistent with the conclusions of Terjesen et al. (2007) in respect of the emphasis in Generation Y employees on innovation and creativity.

Participants appeared to associate greater innovation and entrepreneurial thinking with smaller, more dynamic organisations, while larger organisations seemed to be associated with greater bureaucracy and slower decision-making. This theme appeared to be linked to novelty seeking behaviour and the need for change, with the perception being that more innovative organisations would encourage more creative thinking amongst employees and would, thus, facilitate greater and more rapid growth and development. The impression given was that participants not only want to be worthy competitors in an increasingly competitive business world, but that they want to be considered the best. The need to supercede the achievements of others, as articulated by the participants, appeared to be in their own interests rather than for the mutual benefit of both the participants and the organisations.

Recognition and rewards

Participants discussed recognition and rewards as being an important factor affecting their choice of an organisation for which to work. Participants appeared to seek visibility and recognition for their performance at work. Participants were relatively outspoken about the notion of rapid career progression as well as recognition for the quantity and quality of their output rather than the length of time spent within the organisation. Participants appeared to value the idea of incentives or rewards in return for exceeding the expectations of their employer or their customers. This finding appears to be consistent with the assertions of Martin (2005) and Glass (2007) in which managers are urged to design incentives and

rewards around the performance of Generation Y employees as well to develop fast-track leadership programmes for them in order to keep them interested and motivated.

Importantly, especially within the South African context, participants reinforced the need for organisations to recognise job seekers on the basis of their merit rather than on the basis of their ethnicity or the connections that they might have to individuals within the organisation. As such, participants seemed to place considerable emphasis on proving their worth to themselves as well as to prospective employers, rather than being selected by organisations, irrespective of their skill and competence.

Employee-centricity

Participants referred positively to organisations that take a holistic view of the employee and understand that employees have responsibilities beyond the workplace. Participants emphasised such aspects as employee wellness programmes and work/life balance. Interestingly, participants made little specific reference to leisure activities or to their social lives. This finding appears to contradict descriptions of Generation Y as almost completely „lifestyle“ focused (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010). Instead, participants seemed to be more concerned with the value placed on them by organisations as well as the desire to be treated in a manner consistent with the value they appear to place on themselves.

Remuneration and benefits

The participants appeared to value the idea of a supportive organisation that assists them by providing desirable benefits, such as reduced medical aid rates or discounts on motor vehicles. This finding appears to be consistent with the perception of Generation Y as incentivised (McCrindle, 2006). Paradoxically, participants appeared to value the support and assistance offered by organisations as this enabled them to develop or to maintain their

own independence. As such, it seems that the participants, whilst appearing to value the opportunity to assert their own autonomy and independence, are only able to acquire this independence through the support of organisations.

The participants appeared to seek increased responsibility and accountability, ostensibly owing to the increased visibility and, ultimately, recognition that this might afford them. These findings appear to be consistent with the work of Martin (2005) in which she asserts that Generation Y employees not only seek but also demand increased responsibility and view this as an opportunity to prove their skill and competence within the organisation. Interestingly, participants did not appear to place as much emphasis on the remuneration offered by organisations as initially anticipated at the outset of the study. Thus, it would seem that Generation Y job seekers expect more from an organisation than merely competitive remuneration and attractive benefits.

Social awareness



Some participants appeared to place emphasis on organisations that play an active role in terms of social transformation. Social awareness appeared to include responding to individuals in a culturally aware and sensitive manner, adapting organisational functioning to the specific cultural, political, economic and social realities in the environments within which they operate, as well as ensuring the adequate representation of previously disadvantaged individuals across all levels in the organisation.

Although participants appeared to place value on the idea of making a real, tangible and important contribution to the future of the country, little – almost no – emphasis was placed on global environmental sustainability. These findings appear to be in line with the assertions of Glass (2007) that Generation Y job seekers and employees need to feel that, through their work, they are able to make a meaningful and valuable contribution to society.

That said, contrary to the assertions of McCrindle (2006) that Generation Y individuals are typically socially and environmentally active and aware, participants did not appear to place much emphasis on global social causes and issues of environmental sustainability. Instead, greater emphasis was placed on social and economic redress within the confines of South Africa.

Ethics and reputation

Most importantly, in terms of the objectives of this study, references made by participants to ethics as well as to the ethical reputation of the organisation were superficial. The vast majority of participants did not refer to ethics or any aspect of the ethical reputation of organisations without being prompted to do so. When asked what they believed to be the definition of ethics, participants provided insubstantial definitions and generally did not seem to have a clear or comprehensive understanding of ethics.

When asked if they would consider eliminating an organisation from their range of choices, owing to unethical conduct or blemishes on its ethical reputation, participants generally articulated an understanding or forgiving attitude towards organisations. They appeared to excuse, or even condone, unethical behaviour on the part of organisations, owing to the fierce competition in the business world. Three participants stated that they would not want to be associated with an ethically disreputable organisation but noted that much would depend on the nature of the unethical conduct engaged in by the organisation, whether they had a “valid reason” (P6) for engaging in such conduct, as well as whether organisations were repeat offenders with regard to unethical activity.

Participant 6 implied that organisations might be forced into unethical conduct in order to retain their competitive advantage, whilst participants 7 and 8 condoned unethical conduct as being a necessary part of the contemporary business world. Participant 7 described the

business environment as being “cut-throat” whilst participant 8 asserted that “the business model makes it hard to be 100% ethical”. These views closely approximate an amoral⁶ attitude to (business) ethics as described by Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2010). Similar attitudes to business ethics were displayed through the following comments: “I don’t necessarily believe that ethics in business exists” (P3) and “it’s like tuning a blind eye kind of thing” (*sic*) (P2). One participant asserted that the acceptability of the unethical conduct of the organisation would be a matter of personal choice and personal ethical boundaries which, at best, constitutes ethical relativism (cf. Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010).

Only three participants (5, 9, 10) stated unequivocally that they would not consider working for an organisation that had engaged in unethical conduct. That said though, participants only expressed this view in response to being asked a direct question to this effect. As such, a central concern within this study seems not to be the areas that were discussed but rather the topics that were absent from the participants’ discussion of the factors influencing their organisational choice. The findings of this study, thus, appear to be inconsistent with the literature on the importance of ethics and ethical dimensions of organisational reputation in the attraction of prospective employees (cf. Coldwell et al., 2008; Strobel et al., 2010).

⁶ Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2010) describe an amoral attitude, in the business context, as emerging from the view of business as amoral or, in other words, business and morality as mutually exclusive. As such, they assert that individuals who hold this view tend to be hesitant to discuss ethical issues and, often, simply do not think ethically. Carroll and Buchholtz (2011) distinguish between intentional and unintentional amoral ethics management. They describe intentional amoral management as the lack of concern for ethics in business management, stemming from the view of ethics as inapplicable or irrelevant in the business environment. They describe individuals who hold an unintentional amoral management perspective as casual or inattentive to the ethical dimensions of business activity, not maliciously or even purposefully, but rather from the perspective of thoughtlessness. In other words, the ethical implications of decisions simply do not occur to them. It should be noted that the description of some of the participants’ views on ethics as amoral by no means implies the description of the participants themselves as amoral. It should further be noted that the word „amoral“ is not synonymous with the word „immoral“.

The distinct lack of concern for ethical conduct and for the ethical reputation of the organisation might be owing, at least in part, to the varying extent to which business ethics is incorporated within the tertiary curriculum. Rossouw (1997) found that the incorporation of business ethics into the curricula of South African institutions saw business ethics modules being compulsory, elective or non-existent. Rossouw (1997) found that, most commonly, tertiary institutions followed an informal approach to business ethics in which the subject was not formally included in the curriculum and in which a grasp of business ethics was supposed to occur spontaneously.

It seems reasonable to surmise that ethics is still an area of the tertiary curriculum that is neglected – especially given the findings of this study. Smurthwaite (2011), in a follow-up study to that conducted by Rossouw (1997) found, at the post-graduate level in South African institutions, that there appeared to be little emphasis on business ethics and micro-level considerations, with the focus shifting to meso- and macro- concerns as well as to ethics as pertinent to specific areas of study and application. The apparent lack of breadth and depth of exposure to general and business ethics at tertiary level, as well as the absence of exposure to ethical instruction and education at primary and secondary educational levels might explain the amoral or indifferent perspective on ethics displayed by most of the participants. Alternatively, it is possible that young individuals are insufficiently exposed directly to organisations or even to the news media in which the (ethical) reputations of organisations are discussed. As such, it might be that young job seekers are generally uninformed with regard to the business world and may, perhaps, lack the ethics vocabulary to express a more definitive stance on the matter.

On a more systemic level, the often overtly amoral views on business ethics expressed by the participants could, perhaps, be explained in part by the example set by the present leadership of South Africa. Justice Malala (2011), a political journalist and commentator,

discusses the present „organisational culture“ of the country and laments the idea that the youth of today are constantly bombarded with the national government“s blatant disregard for the ethical conduct that must, of necessity, make up the moral fibre of society. He expresses his concern regarding the effect that observing the government“s flagrant flouting of ethical principles must have on the contemporary youth of South Africa. His concerns appear to be validated in the results of this research study – that the future leaders of the South African organisations that are and will be central to the future success and financial integrity of the country do not perceive ethics to be a particularly important part of business.

Although the vast majority of the participants emphasised the importance of the reputation of organisations in terms of their organisational choice, much of their focus appeared to be on how personal association with the organisation would make them look to others – in general, as well as to prospective employers. Thus, the reputation of the organisation appeared to be viewed as a career stepping stone for some participants or, in cases of association with disreputable organisations, potential „career suicide“. One participant noted that the financial scandals at Enron would forever “taint” former Enron employees in the eyes of prospective employers, owing to potential speculation with regard to what was known by whom about the financial scandals at Enron. As such, organisational reputation did not appear to be considered important for its own sake, but rather for its potential utility to the participants. These findings appear to be in line with those of Thornbury and Brooks (2010), who found that job seekers tend to consider the extent to which association with an organisation may improve their social standing.

The participants seemed to display a similar kind of egocentricity in terms of the other themes that emerged from the study. Participants appeared to focus almost exclusively on what they could acquire from the organisation, rather than on what they could offer the organisation. The egocentricity demonstrated by participants could possibly be explained as

being a characteristic of Generation Y, often termed „Generation Me“ (Twenge et al., 2010). Alternatively, the egocentricity noted could also be a function of the particular career stages within which the participants are currently operating, these being the organisational entry and early career stages (Greenhaus et al., 2007). The objective for individuals negotiating these career stages is to select an appropriate occupation and to establish themselves in organisations as well as in their own careers. As such, the „self-absorption“ displayed in proving their worth, striving for personal status and recognition, and focusing on their own growth and development with little or no regard for their responsibility towards their employing organisations may be just as much a function of their current career challenges as it is a characteristic of their generation.

4.4. Integration

In Chapter four, the data obtained from the repertory grid interviews conducted with the ten research participants were reported and the 48 first-order themes (cumulative total across all ten participants) that emerged from this data were condensed into ten second-order themes. In this chapter, these ten second-order themes were discussed and linked to appropriate literature. Importantly, participants' lack of concern for the ethical conduct of the organisation as well as their amoral or indifferent attitude towards the relationship between business and ethics were discussed. Possible explanations for the absence of ethics in the organisational choice of participants were explored. In the following chapter, conclusions are drawn with regard to the main findings of the study, the practical implications of the study are noted and recommendations for future research are suggested.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

In Chapters four and five, the results of the study were reported and interpreted. In this chapter, an overview of the research study conducted is provided. Following this, the main findings of the study are summarised and the practical implications associated with these findings are explored. Recommendations for possible future research regarding the topic of ethics and Generation Y job seekers' organisational choice are made and the limitations of this study are addressed. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary, from my perspective, on the *quo vadis* of ethics and ethical instruction in the South African context, given the findings of this research study.

6.2. Overview

The objective of this research study was to illuminate, firstly, the specific factors considered by job seekers when choosing an organisation for which to work and, secondly, the extent to which the ethical reputation of the organisation is considered by the South African Generation Y job-seeker in their organisational choice. Interviews were conducted with ten honours and masters students studying business management in Johannesburg, Gauteng. Interviews were conducted using the repertory grid technique which allowed for the emergence of constructs as elicited in response to combinations of organisations as selected by the research participants.

Data analysis was conducted in a number of stages, beginning with the labelling of constructs during the repertory grid interview and ending with the interpretation of the ten



second-order themes as condensed from the 48 initial first-order themes that emerged. The second-order themes were then interpreted in order to provide a comprehensive „image“ of the factors that South African Generation Y job seekers consider when choosing an organisation for which to work, as created from the ten individual mental models of organisational choice constructed during the interviews.

6.3. Main findings

The second-order themes that emerged in the study were as follows: exposure to opportunity, personal and career growth and development, reputation, organisational characteristics, recruitment and selection, organisational innovation and entrepreneurship, recognition and rewards, employee-centricity, remuneration and benefits and, finally, social awareness. Participants highlighted the importance of the locations of organisations, whether they operate internationally/globally or only in South Africa. They emphasised the importance of travel opportunities and associated breadth and depth of exposure and experience with increased personal and professional development. Participants' emphasis on exposure to new people, places and ideas appeared to be linked to a desire to seek out novelty and change. The findings appear to indicate that Generation Y job seekers place considerable emphasis on rapid career progression as well as on their resultant sense of personal accomplishment. Rapid growth and development were also linked to the degree to which organisations value and encourage innovation and creative thinking amongst employees, as well as to smaller, more dynamic organisational environments.

Particularly pertinent within the South African context, participants seemed to associate organisations in the public sector with inefficiency, corruption, unwanted political influence and limited growth and development opportunities. Although corruption was mentioned briefly by some participants, it did not appear to be important from the perspective of

organisational ethical reputation for its own sake, but rather for the sake of their own personal gain. Some participants „name-dropped“ corruption but seemed to associate it with inefficiency and the potential impact on their own personal reputations rather than viewing it as marring the ethical reputation of the organisation. Participants also appeared to associate entry into and progression through these organisations with possessing the „right contact“ rather than with a superior level of skill and competence. Conversely, organisations with more stringent entry requirements and a greater emphasis on competence were associated with a greater sense of personal status and accomplishment.

The findings of this study suggest that Generation Y job seekers appreciate organisations that take an interest in them and value them enough as resources such that they invest considerable emphasis into attracting and recruiting these job seekers. Generation Y job seekers appear to want to be recognised and valued by their employing organisations, with considerable emphasis placed on incentives, rewards and benefits – particularly when linked to performance. The findings suggest that Generation Y job seekers appear not merely to seek increased responsibility and accountability but also to demand it. That said, autonomy and responsibility seem to be sought within the relative security of a stable, well-established and supportive organisation.

Findings suggest that while Generation Y job seekers appear to value flexibility and work/life balance, their emphasis on the freedom to engage in leisure and social activities is not as pronounced as might be assumed. On the contrary, job seekers displayed the need for personal challenge as well as the desire to make a contribution extending beyond the confines of a standard, 40-hour working week. Thus, findings suggest that job seekers display the desire to work „smarter“ rather than harder.

Particularly important within the South African context, findings suggest that job seekers value organisations that actively facilitate social and economic redress within the country by ensuring the equal representation of previously disadvantaged individuals across all levels of the organisation. It would seem that while contemporary South African job seekers express the intent and desire to contribute tangibly and meaningfully to the future of the country, they appear to display little interest in, and concern for global environmental sustainability.

Most importantly, findings suggest that ethics and the ethical reputation of the organisation are of little consequence to contemporary South African job seekers. On the contrary, the findings of this study appear to indicate that job seekers possess an amoral or indifferent attitude to ethics and organisational ethical conduct, such that as long as they are not personally involved in the unethical conduct (and, thus, liable to be „tarred with the same brush“, thereby tainting their personal reputations), job seekers are more than willing to „turn a blind eye“ to unethical conduct on the part of the organisation. Arguably of more concern, findings suggest that job seekers appear to view business and ethics as mutually exclusive owing to the increasingly competitive nature of the contemporary business world.

The findings of this research study appear to suggest that Generation Y job seekers tend to be quite egocentric in their personal and career priorities and aspirations. Whilst this finding could potentially be explained as a characteristic of the Generation Y cohort, their egocentricity may perhaps be a function of the needs and priorities inherent in the career stages within which these individuals currently find themselves.

6.4.1. Implications

The findings of this research study have a number of practical implications. Firstly, the findings of this study serve to enrich the body of literature regarding the factors considered by Generation Y job seekers in their choice of an organisation for which to work, especially

within the unique South African context. Secondly, the themes emerging from this study could assist organisations and, more specifically, human resource functions within organisations to tailor the employee value propositions of organisations such that they appeal to the demands and priorities of Generation Y job seekers.

Given the findings of the study, it is recommended that organisations actively recruit and motivate young job seekers to join them and attempt to retain these individuals by offering incentives, rewards and benefits on the basis of performance. It is recommended that organisations offer job seekers the opportunity to progress rapidly through the organisation on the basis of the calibre of their output rather than the length of their employment with the organisation, and to satisfy their need for change by providing them with the opportunity to travel, to gain broad exposure and to maximise their personal and career development.

There appears to be a sound business case for ethics – that organisations that foster a positive ethical reputation are likely to attract likeminded stakeholders and repel stakeholders with disparate or dubious values and intentions. It seems that given the findings of this study, and in the interests of changing the *status quo*, organisational leadership may wish to consider branding or marketing organisations on the basis of their positive ethical reputation in order to attract and retain young talent – as this may provide organisations with the „edge“ in a highly competitive business environment.

Thirdly, it is anticipated that the findings of this study might serve to create awareness amongst Generation Y job seekers in terms of the care and thought they invest in their choice of an organisation for which to work. It is expected that the results of this study in respect of contemporary job seekers“ lack of concern for ethical conduct and the ethical reputation of the organisation might prove to be thought-provoking for job seekers. Additionally, with greater knowledge of the factors that influence the organisational choice of their peers,

current and prospective job seekers might be able to re-evaluate their demands and priorities and approach their organisational choice with greater maturity and perspective.

Fourthly, the glaring absence of concern for ethics and for the ethical reputation of organisations has implications for South African tertiary institutions. It would seem that (business) ethics courses may need to be more widely incorporated into the curriculum at tertiary level or, alternatively, the way in which (business) ethics is taught at tertiary level may need to be altered in order to impress upon current and prospective job seekers the relevance and, most especially, the importance of ethics, ethical conduct and organisational ethical reputation in the contemporary business environment.

It may, perhaps, be that young job seekers lack the ethics vocabulary and awareness of ethics in business in order to allow them to be sufficiently discerning in their organisational choice. It could, perhaps, be argued that organisations that market themselves on the basis of ethical reputation might cultivate within young employees and job seekers an awareness of ethics and – more than this – the means through which to express their views on organisational ethical reputation by improving their ethics vocabulary. The combination of a greater awareness of ethics and an improved ethics vocabulary could result in greater discernment amongst job seekers in terms of their organisational choice. This may, in turn, further encourage organisations to improve and promote their ethical reputations actively in response to the more discerning „eye“ of their prospective talent. Finally, the findings of this study create a platform for further research in terms of ethics and organisational choice, especially in terms of Generation Y job seekers in South Africa.

6.4.2. Recommendations for future research

Given the findings of this research study, a number of recommendations can be made in respect of future research with regard to the topic of ethics and the organisational choice of

Generation Y job seekers. Firstly, it is recommended that a similar research study be conducted, except utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of the factors affecting the organisational choice of Generation Y job seekers. It is suggested that prospective research studies on this topic utilise a combination of structured interviews and a questionnaire designed on the basis of the findings of this study. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques might allow for a more thorough investigation into the influence of the uniquely South African context on the organisational choice of Generation Y job seekers. Alternatively, utilising a mixed method approach might enable the translation of the study to a variety of contexts in order to allow researchers to note the similarities and differences in the emerging themes.

Owing to the breadth of the themes that emerged from the current study, prospective researchers may choose to narrow the scope of their research topics in order to focus specifically on ethics and the ethical conduct of organisations as they influence (or fail to influence) Generation Y job seekers' organisational choice. It is recommended that future research should also address the possible reasons as to why Generation Y job seekers do not appear to consider ethics in their choice of an organisation for which to work – especially if research subsequent to this research study obtains similar results in this regard.

6.5. Limitations

A number of limitations in the execution of this research study were noted. The repertory grid interviews conducted with the ten participants could have been followed by an in-depth, structured interview in order to obtain even richer data with regard to the themes that emerged from the study. The incorporation of a structured interview would have been a valuable addition to the study as it was noted that the combination or comparison format of

the repertory grid interview meant that participants seemed to truncate that which they wished to discuss in order to be seen to remain within the confines of the instructions of the repertory grid technique.

It was noted that attempting to address each of the possible combinations of the elements in the repertory grid appeared to become tedious for the participants, causing them to lose interest and concentration, and even on occasion demonstrate resistance, towards the end of the interviews. Additionally, participants tended to lose focus on identifying the similarities and differences between organisations on the basis of *the factors that they would consider in their choice of an organisation for which to work*. As such, participants needed to be reminded of the focus of the study in order to avoid answering my questions in terms of the general similarities and differences between organisations rather than discussing these in respect of the manner in which they might influence their organisational choice.

Additionally, the socio-economic peculiarities of the South African employment context, such as affirmative action or the high unemployment rate, might have affected the findings obtained in this study. Given that none of the participants made specific reference to the unique South African employment context, however, it is difficult to estimate the influence of factors such as the high unemployment rate on young job-seekers' organisational choice. This was especially as the inference to be drawn from all the participants' „stories“ was that they regarded themselves as assets, or potential assets, which should actively be recruited by organisations. Were this study to have been conducted using a less academically elevated sample, it is possible that very different results may have been obtained, results that may have been more reflective of the peculiarities of the unique South African context.

6.6. Final thoughts

In this chapter, an overview of the research study was provided. The main findings of the study were summarised and the practical implications of these findings in terms of the South African and global business environment were discussed. The limitations in the design and practical execution of the study were detailed and recommendations for future research were made.

The findings of this study, particularly in respect of the amoral or indifferent attitude of contemporary job seekers to business ethics appear to be particularly important within the South African context. Given the example set by the current political leadership of the country, it is reasonably unsurprising, albeit still disconcerting, that contemporary job seekers appear, at best, to display apathy and, at worst, amorality with regard to the role of ethics in an increasingly competitive business world. It would seem that much needs to be done on an individual, organisational, societal and national level in order to ensure that the moral fibre of South African society is adequately developed.

It seems that the lack of concern for ethical conduct may be redressed through interventions aimed at the current political leadership of the country, such that it may become fit to serve as an ethical role-model for the job-seeking youth of South Africa. Additionally, it may be necessary to incorporate ethics instruction at the primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels, provided that this ethics instruction is delivered by ethically sound individuals. Nonetheless, whatever the mode or means of intervention, failure to address the perception of business and ethics as mutually exclusive could contribute to the cultivation of an entire generation of ethically irresponsible business leaders, thereby hindering the social and economic progress of the country and further damaging its status as an emerging global competitor.

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