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**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MENTAL MODEL OF MILLENNIALS IN A
SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATION**

by

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MINI-DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree

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Faculty of Management

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Supervisor: Dr Hoole

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Declaration

I certify that the mini thesis submitted by me for the degree of *Master's of Commerce (Industrial Psychology)* at the University of Johannesburg is my independent work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Robert Jardine



Abstract

Generational difference has become a significant topic in popular media and literature. Current research suggests that individuals growing up during different time periods possess different worldviews and thus possess different workplace values and preferences. This has significant implications for various people management strategies and practices implemented by industrial psychologists. By catering for differing worldviews and workplace values, it is possible to increase engagement, performance, and retention of employees in the workplace. However, when investigating this theory with an empirical psychological lens, the need for further research is evident, especially in different contexts, such as South Africa. This study provides a deeper insight into workplace values as a result of mental models within the South African millennial generational cohort. A conceptual mental model that focuses on the drivers of workplace values that emerged in the study is presented.

Keywords: Generational difference, Millennials, South Africa, Workplace values, Mental Models, Repertory grid, Personal construct theory

TABLES OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | I |
| Declaration..... | II |
| Abstract | III |
| Table of Contents | IV |
| List of Addenda | VI |
| List of Figures | VI |
| List of Tables | VI |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Context..... | 2 |
| 1.2 Problem Statement and Research Question | 8 |
| 1.3 Scope..... | 9 |
| 1.4 Structure of the Dissertation | 9 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 11 |
| 2.1 Generational Difference..... | 11 |
| 2.2 Workplace Values | 13 |
| 2.3 Generational Cohort..... | 15 |
| 2.4 Applicability of Generational Differences..... | 18 |
| 2.5 Research Areas in Literature..... | 19 |
| 2.6 Existing Research Regarding Millennials and Workplace Values | 20 |
| 2.7 Mental Models | 22 |
| 2.8 Personal Construct Theory..... | 25 |
| 2.9 The Nature of a Personal Construct | 26 |
| 2.10 Conclusion | 28 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN | 29 |
| 3.1 Philosophical Assumptions | 29 |
| 3.2 Research Paradigm..... | 30 |
| 3.3 Research Process..... | 30 |
| 3.4 Sampling | 30 |
| 3.5 Data-Collection Methods | 32 |
| 3.5 Data Analysis | 36 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 3.6 Quality Assurance | 38 |
| 3.7 Ethical Considerations | 41 |
| 3.8 Conclusion | 41 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 4: RESULTS | 43 |
| 4.1 Organisational Context | 43 |
| 4.2 Process Analysis | 44 |
| 4.3 Eyeball and Bootstrap Analyses | 44 |
| 4.4 Participant Analysis | 45 |
| Participant A | 45 |
| Participant B..... | 47 |
| Participant C..... | 48 |
| Participant D | 50 |
| Participant E..... | 51 |
| Participant F..... | 52 |
| Participant G | 53 |
| Participant H | 55 |
| Participant I..... | 56 |
| Participant J..... | 58 |
| 3.5 Synthesis: from mental models to themes | 59 |
| THEME 1: Intrinsic | 63 |
| THEME 2: Freedom | 64 |
| THEME 3: Status..... | 64 |
| THEME 4: Social..... | 65 |
| THEME 5: Culture..... | 68 |
| THEME 6: Altruistic..... | 70 |
| 4.6 Conceptual Model..... | 70 |
| 4.7 Conclusion | 72 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION | 73 |
| 5.1 Existing Research..... | 73 |
| 5.2 Organisational Context | 74 |
| 5.3 Personal Experience..... | 75 |
| 5.4 Life Stage | 76 |
| 5.5 Global Generation..... | 77 |
| 5.6 Uncertain Economic Outlook | 78 |
| 5.7 Humanitarianism..... | 79 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 5.8 Technology | 79 |
| 5.9 Research Question | 80 |
| 5.10 Conclusion | 80 |
| CHAPTER 6: CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSION | 82 |
| 6.1 Introduction..... | 82 |
| 6.2 Summary | 82 |
| 6.3 Contributions of Research..... | 83 |
| 6.3.1 Theoretical contribution..... | 83 |
| 6.3.2 Practical contribution | 84 |
| 6.3.3 Methodological contribution..... | 84 |
| 6.4 Recommendations for Practice | 84 |
| 6.4.1 Experience of work roles | 85 |
| 6.4.2 Career management | 86 |
| 6.4.3 Relationships at work..... | 86 |
| 6.4.4 Organisational culture..... | 87 |
| 6.5 Study Limitations..... | 87 |
| 6.6 Areas for Further Research | 88 |
| 6.7 Final Thoughts | 88 |
| 6.8 Conclusion | 89 |
| Reference List | 90 |

List of Addenda

| | |
|---|--|
| Addendum A: Informed Consent Form | |
|---|--|

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Workplace Values and its Constituents | 16 |
| Figure 2: Research Process | 37 |
| Figure 3: Conceptual Model of a South African Millennial Based on Workplace Values | 69 |

List of Tables:

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Generational Cohorts..... | 15 |
| Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants | 31 |
| Table 3: Repertory Grid Rating Example | 34 |
| Table 4: List of Themes, Mental Models and Corresponding Participants Constructs | 58 |

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

My father is a construction manager, and has worked for the same company for 35 years. He managed to complete his university education in a time with little, to no access to computers or internet facilities. I find it difficult to conceive how I would have managed to complete my university studies to date without the aid of today's computer and internet technologies. The age difference between my father and me is more than 30 years. As a graduate, I joined the company where my father is employed, however, after only two years, I decided to leave the company. This has placed significant strain on my relationship with my father. Popular media and management suggest that this situation could be explained by generational differences between us and our differing views of what we value in the workplace; these views being a result of us growing up during different historical time periods.

Generational difference is based on the premise that different generations possess different worldviews, values, and behaviours as a result of growing up during different historical periods (Glass, 2007). This is based on the premise that significant historical life and political, economic, and societal events have a definitive influence on the formation of an individual's attitudes and beliefs (Jonck, van der Walt, & Sobayeni, 2017). Research regarding generational differences suggest that my decision to leave a company after only two years is characteristic of two of my generation's attitudes towards work: being more willing to take risks; and a lack of organisational loyalty (Bresman, 2015). This is in stark contrast to my father, and hence an older generation's attitudes towards work: less willing to take risks; and a higher level of organisational loyalty (Bresman, 2015). This generational

difference has bothered me ever since I decided to leave the organisation after two years, since it is the same organisation where my father is considered to be ‘part of the furniture’.

I often feel overwhelmed by information regarding generational differences in popular media, and I often feel unsettled by the common or popular notion that suggests one thing is characteristic of mine or another’s generation, since I don’t always fully agree with such assertions. Working as a Graduate Development Manager I have found both supporting and contrasting colloquial evidence concerning generational differences amongst students with whom I share a common generation. I would contend that workplace values and attitudes are too complex, and that they are influenced by too many variables to simply be explained by just a single broad variable such as generational difference. When conducting further empirical analysis, a meta-analysis of generational difference research established that there is empirical evidence that both supports and disproves the evidence of generational difference (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012). Despite such contradictory evidence disproving generational difference, it continues to feature as a popular topic in people management research and thought in organisations. Generational difference is often considered to be another source of diversity used to inform talent management practices, despite the need to investigate this topic more thoroughly (Cogin, 2012; Costanza et al., 2012). In this research study, I investigated this notion further in order to add a further empirical lens to the topic to better inform management practice in the workplace, and in particular, the South African employment landscape.

1.2 Context

In recent times, generational differences in the workplace has become a popular and prominent topic of research and management thought (Costanza et al., 2012; Deal, Stawiski, Graves, Gentry, & Weber, 2013; Cogin, 2012; Jonck et al., 2017; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008; Martin & Tulgan, 2002). It is posited that different

generations in the workplace possess differing values, beliefs, and work behaviours, and have been treated as another source of diversity within the workplace, similar to gender and race (Martin & Tulgan, 2002). It is proposed that human resource practitioners take cognisance of these differences in a multigenerational workforce, as they may influence the efficacy of people management and development practices within organisations (Parry & Urwin, 2011). In particular, if workplace values and work management practices are aligned, then positive organisational outcomes such as employee productivity and retention may be increased (Jonck et al., 2017).

In 2008, an entire issue of the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* was dedicated to the topic of generational differences in the workplace, and featured various articles investigating and discussing the various implications that generational differences pose for management (Macky et al., 2008). In particular, research has focussed on generational differences and workplace values as a difference in workplace values, and their satisfaction has been linked to positive organisational outcomes (Jonck et al., 2017). Generational difference is seen as another source of diversity in the workplace that may have an effect on workplace values. Workplace values are considered to be beliefs that influence what one considers to be correct or incorrect within a workplace and has an influence on how one perceives and acts as a result (Parry & Urwin, 2011). This has a significant impact on the motivation and engagement of individuals, particularly when there is seen to be a mismatch between individual workplace values and organisational culture (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). If workplace values are better understood in relation to generational difference organisations may be better suited to motivate and engage different generations within the workplace. This will have a direct impact on performance and retention of employees (Julie, 2012).

Surveys have been conducted regarding the measurement of the workplace values of the generation that represents that largest proportion of the workforce, namely, the

millennials (Bresman, 2015). Over 20,000 different participants from 43 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and North America were surveyed in the seventh edition of an annual study published in 2018 (Parmelee, 2018). Emphasis is placed on the millennial generation because they are considered to be the generation that will comprise the majority of the workforce in years to come. In 2016, millennials represented roughly 2.5 billion people, or a third of the world's population (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016), and they are considered to be the largest generation ever, a generation whose members are now entering positions of leadership and influence within organisations (Parmelee, 2018). Deloitte has focused seven years of research on an annual millennial survey because of the impact this generation will have in the workplace (Parmelee, 2018).

Millennials are believed to possess contrasting values to current talent management strategies (Parmelee, 2018) and as a result are expected to leave their employers far quicker than previous generations (Chopra, 2018). Due to a mis-alignment of what they value in the workplace and what is currently offered by the workplace some estimates suggest that almost half of current millennials plan to leave their current employer in two years (Parmelee, 2018, Chopra, 2018). High amounts of staff-over have negative effects on performance, engagement and training and development (Tsai, 2011). Millennials' lack of loyalty has been attributed to their perceived narcissistic tendencies as popularised in the media by the term *generation me* (Twenge, Campbell, Hiffman, & Lance, 2010).

Despite generational difference's prominence and traction in popular media and management literature, academia has contrasting views regarding the empirical significance of generational differences and workplace values and its usefulness in understanding human behaviour and informing people management practices (Costanza et al., 2012; Jonck et al., 2017; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Twenge et al, 2010). Some of these critiques include an inability to distinguish other effects that might influence individual differences outside of generational

difference, such as career stage (Cogin, 2012) and the worldviews of individuals born between or on the cusp of generations (Reeves & Oh, 2008). This is to say that my father at an early stage in his career in the year 1960 would possess similar work place values compared to myself at an early stage in my career in 2006.

One of the primary critiques relevant to this study is the lack of empirical evidence collected regarding generational difference in developing countries (Jonck et al., 2017; Reeves & Oh, 2008; van der Walt, Jonck, & Sobayeni, 2016;). The seminal papers on generational research focussed their studies on individuals and trends from developed economies, and proposed that generations in developing countries experience these life experiences to similar effect in their formative life experiences, without significant research having been carried out in these countries (Reeves & Oh, 2008). The critique often put forward against these research studies has been that they have ignored generational differences in cultures other than those associated with western capitalism. Despite the Vietnam War and the assassination of John F. Kennedy being used as crucial formative events for some generations' worldviews, these events may not have equal formative significance for individuals of different cultures.

This points to the necessity for further research in developing countries such as South Africa. Because of South Africa's Apartheid past, its society is unique in the way that social groups have not experienced specific historical events in the same way, therefore, individuals may not have experienced world events in the same way as individuals in other countries and/or the same way as individuals in their own countries. Therefore, they may not have the same workplace values due to having differing experiences of the world. It is interesting to consider millennials in this light in particular, as they are arguably the first global generation who are likely to be globally connected to events due to their level of connectivity (Bresman, 2015). If millennials in South Africa can be proven to have similar workplace values in

relation to existing research, it may reveal that they have experienced world events in the same way as individuals in other developed countries where the research of workplace values and generational difference originated. It may be argued that this is indicative of nation-building to some extent, and such evidence may be used to affirm existing theory, and importantly, to submit the possibility that South Africa is starting to realise equality in a once divided nation.

The paucity in research in this regard has resulted in at least two studies in the last two years that have explored the relationship of generational differences on work ethics and work values, two interrelated and similar constructs believed to have significant outcomes in the workplace (Jonck et al., 2017; van der Walt et al., 2016). Work ethics are believed to inform work values and what an individual believes is inherently right or wrong within a workplace. These quantitative studies produced statistically significant results indicating a generational difference in workplace values and ethics, but they did not delve deeper into the factors underpinning these workplace values, nor did they provide particular focus on the generation that will soon make up the majority of the workforce: the millennials.

Instead, these studies assumed differing workplace values and motives within an existing framework of a quantitative scale, and failed to explore emergent workplace values that might have emerged as a result of individuals in South Africa experiencing a truly different exposure to the world, and thus a different worldview. Most generational research on workplace values has followed the abovementioned approach (Cogin, 2012). Using a qualitative approach is not always possible in all studies, and it does not always lead to a large degree of generalisability of results, however, it is an important research method to use to progress a field of study, since it allows emergent themes to reveal themselves (Creswell, 2014). Although qualitative research is time-consuming, it provides rich detail into research phenomena and provides the basis for advancing the field of scientific knowledge (Terre

Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This study aimed to apply a qualitative empirical lens to better understand the worldview of the South African millennial, in order to better understand the emergent workplace value themes that might arise due to their generational membership. In order to do so it would have been necessary to investigate the underlying influences behind what individuals value in the workplace.

Mental models represent the underlying values and assumptions that we hold about the world and frame how we interpret and value those elements that we experience (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). It may be argued that it is this mental model that informs what we value in a workplace, as it frames what we value and makes sense of in our experience of the world. It is the broad framework that underpins our values and behaviours and is influenced by our experience of the world. Mental models are considered to be a type of personal algorithm that represent the relationships between thought processes that have an influence over cognition, decision-making, and reasoning (Senge et al., 1994). Additionally, they are shaped by our previous experiences of the world in order to better predict and make sense of future experiences based on an internalised framework of our past experiences. Since generational theory is based on a view of the world based on a shared previous experience of the world during formative years, mental models can be seen to lend themselves well to the research of generational theory and values, particularly because mental models are the construct that underpin values, and by using this lens, we may be able to provide deeper insight into understanding workplace values.

As discussed, there is a need to better disentangle current approaches in generational theory to better understand the constituents of workplace values, such as career stage and maturation (Costanza et al, 2012; Cogin, 2012; Reeves & Oh, 2008). Mental models may provide a richer approach to understanding workplace values in a qualitative manner than the

traditionally quantitative method that has been used in previous research around workplace values (Jonck et al., 2017; van der Walt et al., 2016).

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Question

The millennial generation has garnered the most research interest because of the proportion and influence they will hold in the workforce due to the sheer force of numbers that they represent (Bresman, 2015; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Currently millennials are the biggest generation in history, and they are now in positions of influence within organisations (Parmelee, 2018). They are reportedly dissatisfied with their current organisations and some reports estimates that almost half will leave their employers within the next two years. This places an increased emphasis on this generation, because if a better understanding of their workplace values can be achieved, more effective talent management strategies can be adopted to cater for a cohort that will soon comprise the majority of the workforce in most industries (Costanza et al., 2012; Jora & Kahn, 2014;). This will have far-reaching effects on the engagement, retention, and performance of a generation, future workforce, and the economy as a whole.

Since generational theory is based on the premise that individuals will hold a certain worldview due to the historical period in which they spent their formative years, and the dates that typify these times as generational cohorts are contested and are not significantly validated outside of the context in which they were constructed, there is a need for generational research in South Africa to further validate this theory. This research study chose to focus on workplace values, by investigating the millennial's mental model or worldview to provide a more holistic and in-depth analysis of what millennials value in the workplace. A mental model comprises the deeply held assumptions an individual has about the world that informs their behaviours and values (Senge et al., 1994).

Based on the above discussion, the following research question was developed to frame the research of this study: **What is the mental model of a millennial in a South African organisation?**

This research question sought to respond to two objectives, namely, to:

- provide the necessary qualitative research in a developing country to validate a theory that has been postulated in a different context and has proven to warrant further empirical research; and
- describe what South African millennials may value in the workplace, to better inform management practice.

1.3 Scope

This qualitative study focussed on gaining rich information from a selection of participants that met the criteria of the target group under investigation: the millennial generation. Data collection took place until saturation had been achieved regarding the construction of a mental model based on workplace values.

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

This chapter has presented the context and motivation for the study framed by its research objectives. The key components of the research have been discussed briefly, namely the millennial generation, generational theory, workplace values, and mental models, in order to contextualise the study. The problem statement and research question to focus the study in order to answer the research objectives outlined was provided, and the scope of the study was discussed.

In the following chapters existing literature regarding generational differences and workplace values is reviewed, and the way in which a mental model may be used to

investigate the workplace values of the South African millennial is described. Existing characteristics of the millennial generation are also discussed. The third chapter details the research design chosen for this study, and the research strategy and steps that were used to collect and interpret the data are described. In the fourth chapter the study findings are presented and evidence is provided of the interpretation and synthesis of the data to construct a shared mental model. Chapter 5 discusses the interpretation of the results, and the dissertation concludes in Chapter 6 with a discussion of the implications and practical contributions of the research.



CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the key theories and constructs relevant to the study are discussed. The study is further motivated by supporting evidence and the argument for the need to answer the research question and objectives is provided.

2.1 Generational Difference

Generational difference has its origins in sociology in the 1950's, and more specifically in the work of Karl Mannheim (1952). His seminal work on the matter classified generations into intangible groups that do not possess any knowledge of one another nor did they share a mental or physical proximity, but were instead a 'social location'. Mannheim perceived generations to exist as a vehicle for social change in society, and posited that generations exist as a result of five characteristics of societal change (Parry & Urwin, 2011), namely:

- (1) the emergence of new participants in the cultural process;
- (2) continual disappearance of former participants;
- (3) participation of members of a generation who are temporally limited to a section of the historical process;
- (4) need for cultural heritage to be transmitted; and
- (5) continuous transition from one generation to another.

The foundation of Mannheim's argument is based on the notion that generations share a social proximity to shared events or cultural phenomena (1952). As a result, they are commonly located in the historical dimension of the social changes. Therefore, due to the time period in which an individual is born, they have a limited range of potential social experiences that predispose them to a certain characteristic mode of experience and thought unique to that period in time (Parry & Urwin, 2011). This provides a generation with 'collective memories' that are specific to that generation's time period, and provide a basis

for future behaviours and attitudes (Costanza et al., 2012). This provides a certain way of thinking and action that restricts their range of thinking and self-expression to certain pre-defined possibilities throughout their lives (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). It is proposed that collective memories during an individual's formative years form the basis of a generation's identity and are crystallised as attitudes, values and behaviours moving into early adulthood, 17-25 years old (Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Eyerman & Turner, 1998). A generation must share both a common location in historical time and possess a specific consciousness of that historical position, which is shaped by the events and experiences of the time (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

Thus, it may be said that generations and the values and worldviews that they hold, are a product of the time period in which they grew up and spent their formative years. Even though different individuals may experience the same events, the way in which they respond to those events is based on their life-cycle stage at the time, that is, their formative years (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Therefore, for events to affect the characteristics of a generation, these events must occur during a generation's formative years prior to the onset of early adulthood, which falls between 17-25 years old. This age is often the period during which an individual enters the workforce, a significant life stage for many.

The idea of different generations possessing different values and preferences has been utilised in the marketing environment to demarcate consumer markets and target advertising strategies accordingly (Aresenault, 2005). Music is considered to be a vestige of different social time periods and is deemed to be a contributing factor in the defining a generation's identity (Eyerman & Turner, 1998; Aresenault, 2005). Marketing strategists have used this notion to target advertising towards certain consumer groups. If a particular product or service is targeted at a certain consumer group, music that may have contributed to that consumer group's shared social values and cultural consciousness may be used in the

marketing campaign. Individuals born at different times have different preferences, and thus, marketing should be tailored to align to those preferences, in order to be more effective. This principle has been used to inform management practices with regard to strategies for coping with a multigenerational workforce (Jora & Kahn, 2014). Different generations may have different workplace values and attitudes, and management should tailor the ways in which they manage these different generations in the workplace (Martin & Tulgan, 2002).

2.2 Workplace Values

Workplace values are described as what individuals consider to be correct or incorrect attitudes, behaviours, and acts within a workplace (Parry & Urwin, 2011), are closely linked to motivation drivers (Deal et al., 2013), and possess implications for the person-organisation values fit within a business (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Workplace values have a significant impact on an employee's job satisfaction, commitment and general attitude towards work (Parry & Urwin, 2011). An alignment of individual workplace values with that of an organisation affect the bottom line of an organisation as they have an influence on engagement, performance and employee retention (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). This is an important point of which to take cognisance, as workplace values are considered to be linked to generational differences, and it is widely believed that currently, organisations are experiencing one of the most generationally diverse workplaces in the history of work. (Bresman, 2015). In some instances, workplace values are seen as another form of diversity in the workplace, which managers should be factoring into their workplace design and talent management practices (Parry & Urwin, 2011). This understanding of the difference in generational work values is based on the premise that differing generations were introduced to the workforce at different points in time, and have thus formed differing workplace values.

There are a number of ways to define work values in the workplace. However, to make sense of them in a meaningful way that demonstrates how they drive practical

workplace considerations for management, it is helpful to use Cennamo and Gardner's (2008) six clusters:

- extrinsic values are fuelled as a consequence of work (wealth, job security, and material assets afforded by a position);
- intrinsic values are fuelled during the process of work (to be intellectually challenged and simulated);
- altruistic values are fuelled through the contribution one makes (aligned to wider societal contribution and to making the world a better place);
- status values are fuelled through status and recognition (influence and career advancement);
- freedom values are fuelled through being able to be more autonomous (work-life balance and flexible working hours); and
- social values are fuelled by social aspects in the workplace (relationships with manager and colleagues).

If a generation grows up during a time in the history of the world that is characterised by stability and economic optimism they might be more inclined to value extrinsic values, as they are able to fuel these drivers in the workplace more readily during their initial entry into the workplace (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). This generation might be more inclined to value long service within an organisation and external status symbols associated with work, such as monetary wealth. However, in more recent generations, where the influence of technology in a different age has enabled a more autonomous workforce than previously experienced, they might be driven by more freedom-based workplace values (Parry & Urwin, 2011). This could be interpreted as a result of a less stable workplace and more options being available to earn an income due to technological advances.

This generation might be more motivated by the ability to have flexible working hours and would be more inclined to change jobs because it is easier to do so due to the availability of technology in the workplace. This is an example of how a different generation may possess different workplace values due to having entered the workforce during a different historical period. This has implications for a multigenerational workforce, and by being able to cater for the multiple needs of different generations in the workforce, organisations will be able to redesign work environments to allow for greater engagement, performance, and retention. However, in order to study differences in workplace values across generations, an accurate and empirical means to demarcate the generations in the workforce is required.

2.3 Generational Cohort

To better enable research and understanding in the field of psychology, generational cohorts have been used to bring empirical precision to the broad construct of generation (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Building on Mannheim's (1952) theory of shared events and cultural phenomena, cohort theory defines generations as a group of individuals who are born at the same time and who are presumed to have similar shared experiences (Costanza et al., 2012). Specifying the exact birth dates of generations in order to cluster and define the parameters of each generation has been a difficult exercise because of a lack of consensus as to the exact dates that define generations. Parry and Urwin (2011) published a study of generational differences using a critical review of theory and evidence, and found over 16 different definitions of generational cohorts and different dates used in various studies and articles . Despite the wide range of varying definitions that exist, the most commonly cited definition of generations used in management and psychological research has been the birth dates defined by Strauss and Howie (1991), which is presented in Table 1. The table groups

generations by birth years, and assumes that the individuals within the generations possess proximity to historical, social, cultural, and economic phenomena that define that generation.

Table 1: Generational Cohorts

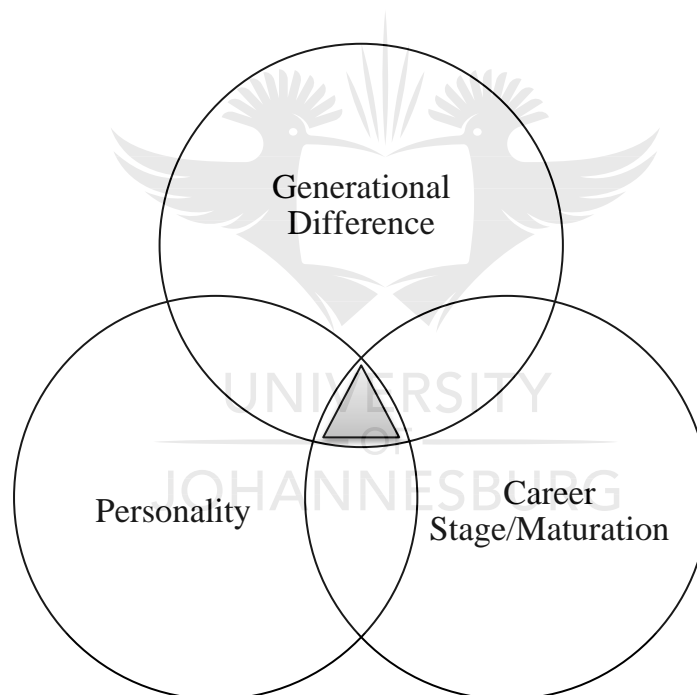
| Generation | Years of Birth | Also known as |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Veterans | 1925-1942 | Silent Generation, Veterans, Matures |
| Baby Boomers | 1943-1960 | Generation Jones |
| Generation X | 1961-1981 | Lost Generation |
| Generation Y | 1982-2000 | Millennials , Nexters, Generation Me |

(Strauss & Howe, 1991)

While defining generations within birth dates enables research into generational differences, as it aids in sampling, it also provides some difficulties. One of the critiques of generational cohorts is that it becomes difficult to place individuals who are born on the cusp of definitive generational birth years into a specific generation (Cogin, 2012). Some of the concerns that have also diminished the credibility of generational differences' applicability in the workplace, have been the way in which generations are defined according to literature (Lyons & Kuron, 2013), the ways in which they are investigated (Costanza et al., 2012), and the influence of characteristics unrelated to generational differences as determining factors of differences between generations, such as personality traits (Parry & Urwin, 2011). The most significant critique has been the difficulty of disentangling the influence of other effects, such as maturation or age, when one considers the effects of generational differences and workplace values (Costanza et al., 2012). In practical experience, despite the fact that my

father and I were aged 25 at different historical times, at the age of 25 my father may have been motivated by the same career drivers that drove me at 25, due to our career stage. Furthermore, an individual's personality traits could also influence the value that one individual, in comparison to another individual, places on certain areas within the workplace. It is believed that in order to investigate whether or not generations truly possess a difference in workplace values would require measuring these values throughout an individual's career (Parry & Urwin, 2011). The interplay of generational differences, personality, and maturation are depicted below in a diagram developed from research findings.

Figure 1. Workplace Values and its Constituents.



△ : Workplace Values

Diagram developed from research findings (Costanza et al., 2012; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

Career and life stages in particular, have been proposed to affect workplace values. Erikson's life stages model (1980) confirms that individuals' values may change during critical life stages. If one considers the social and economic drivers that change

throughout an individual's life stages and career progression, it may be difficult to determine whether a particular value or driver within a work setting is a result of individual differences, or due to a particular life stage (Erikson, 1980; Costanza et al., 2012).

2.4 Applicability of Generational Differences

One of the critiques more relevant to this study, is the questioning of the applicability of generational differences in different contexts and cultures (Bresman, 2015; Cogin, 2012). It may be argued that generations in different contexts possess different worldviews as a result of differing contextual factors that affect the ways in which they interpret and respond to the same historical events during their formative years (Bresman, 2015; Cogin, 2012). This point is integral to the definition of generations. However, this notion is problematic when one takes cognisance of the fact that the most commonly accepted demarcation of generational differences in popular literature are those posited by two Americans who based their demarcation of generations on events in American history, claimed as world history (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Applying this notion of generational difference outside of this context in a developing economy such as South Africa, may be problematic. There is an argument that propounds the existence of global influences on generations as a result of globalisation and technological advancement, however this is also disputed (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). However, it is interesting to note that millennials are considered the world's first global generation because of their connectedness. This connectedness has been enabled by globalisation and the availability and use of modern technology. Therefore, if South African millennials can be proven to have shared values with other millennials outside of South Africa, it may be suggested that generational theory is validated, and that South Africans have now developed a shared experience of the world, one not always afforded to them according to their history, which was characterised by racial divisions and boycotts. Therefore, validated generational difference is not only an important part of diversity in the

workplace that should inform talent management practices, it could, to an extent, also be seen as indicative of nation-building.

2.5 Research Areas in Literature

Research of generational differences has largely focussed on the psychological and behavioural differences of generations (Costanza et al., 2012; Deal et al., 2013; Lyons & Kuron 2013). This research has been undertaken in many areas significant to industrial psychology, including but not limited to personality, work meaning, work attitudes, work-life balance, leadership style, teamwork dynamics, and various values and preferences related to the workplace (Costanza et al., 2012; Lyons & Kuron 2013). For the purpose of this study, workplace values were chosen due to their impact on informing talent management practices and their effects on retention, engagement, and performance (Cogin, 2012; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Jonck et al., 2017; Lyons & Kuron, 2013).

Research has employed quantitative and qualitative research methods, with cross-sectional quantitative methods generating a significant amount of research (Costanza et al., 2011). However, in research, quantitative, and cross-sectional research methods particularly, have been criticised due to their inability to distinguish maturation and other effects from generational difference (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Critiques of research on generational difference have suggested that the preferred method of research should be a longitudinal qualitative method in order to determine the effects of age and career life cycle, so as to present an accurate depiction of generational differences throughout an individual's life (Deal et al., 2013; Lyons & Kuron 2013). However, due to the impractical nature of such research, this has never been achieved on a large scale.

2.6 Existing Research Regarding Millennials and Workplace Values

In order to frame this study, existing research on millennials and workplace values needed to be considered. Despite the lack of congruence on millennial birth dates (Reeves & Oh, 2008), there is some alignment in the notion that millennials possess different worldviews in comparison to other generational cohorts. In particular, millennials are seen to have a high level of trust towards authority, and are considered to value or admire a hero of enterprise as a role model (Reeves & Oh, 2008). Additionally, millennials are considered to have adapted to the changing nature of contract work, and value having parallel careers with multiple roles instead of a single career based on one career at a single institution (Jora & Kahn, 2014). Millennials are believed to be motivated by what they perceive as meaningful work and also value feedback as often as possible (Reeves & Oh, 2008). In consolidated research by van der Walt et al. (2016), it is apparent that millennials are optimistic, confident, and possess strong morals and ethics. Compared to previous generations, millennials possess an enhanced sense of work flexibility and rapid career progression that is believed to be influenced by their generation's upbringing and their connection to technology, which enables greater options in the workplace and higher levels of instant gratification as a result (van der Walt et al., 2016).

Research regarding the millennials' work values also suggests that millennials are significantly influenced by technology, and as such are inquisitive, due to the opportunities provided to them by technology (Jonck et al., 2017). Millennials appear to prefer to work closely in teams and enjoy being challenged. They show a preference for rapid promotion and also exhibit the need to find meaning and fulfilment in the workplace from the work that they do (Jonck et al., 2017).

As an outcome of a quantitative survey conducted in South Africa, van der Walt et al., (2016) compared and ranked the millennial generation's workplace ethics against other

generational cohorts. The Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile was the instrument used to measure work ethics between generational cohorts in this study. Since workplace ethics inform workplace values, it is important to consider these local findings as relevant research findings in the context of this study. The study revealed that South African millennials ranked ‘morality and beliefs’ and ‘leisure’ as important aspects in their working lives. In the study, morality and beliefs pertain to a just and moral existence, and refer to how individuals behave or are expected to behave at work, while leisure refers to the importance of non-work activities and relates to the expectation that millennials will not value ‘hard work’ as much (virtue of hard work). Hard work refers to the belief in the virtue of hard work, and its facility to progress an individual’s career as a result of their dedication to work. This construct of work ethics was the construct valued the least by millennials in the study. It is also worth noting that a ‘delay in gratification’, or a future orientation with a postponement of rewards, was perceived differently by millennials in comparison to how other generations valued this construct. From this study, one might expect a South African millennial to possess a mental model that values a balanced and humanistic workplace regarding ‘doing the right thing’, while still allowing time for family. It might also suggest that millennials value quick career succession above the value of delayed gratification (van der Walt et al, 2016).

Another quantitative study researched a generational perspective on work values in a South African sample (Jonck et al, 2017). This study used the Values Scale instrument to measure work values, and used biographical information collected as generational cohorts to assess the measure across generations. Based on the results of the Values Scale instrument, the study provided a proposed work value profile of a South African millennial. It proposed that millennials consider authority, creativity, cultural identity, risk, social relationships, and economic security to be significant values for their generation. This suggests that a South

African millennial might value close relationships at work, especially with levels of authority, and they might also value a level of independence and autonomy.

Although there have been some cases of significant generational differences existing in previous research, very few studies have focussed on the South African context. Even fewer studies have used qualitative research studies to allow workplace values to emerge as part of the research process. At the time of this study, no researcher had attempted an exploratory qualitative research study with regard to workplace values and generational differences. Rather, previous research has attempted to add to the body of knowledge by using previously defined workplace values in scales and instruments and comparing them across generational cohorts. Quantitative research methodology allows for larger participant samples to be included in the study, which increases the generalisability of the results. However, the methodology may result in limitations in the studies because they do not allow emergent workplace values to emanate from the study, as presupposed values in scales are used instead. Qualitative research on the generational differences shines a different empirical lens on the research field and on workplace values, as it enables an exploratory approach that allows workplace values to emerge from the study. These may include workplace values not previously covered in past research. When considering the correct construct that can be researched qualitatively to study workplace values, mental models were chosen in this study.

2.7 Mental Models

For the purposes of this research study, mental models were used to investigate generational differences due to the influences they may have on workplace attitudes that have previously led research in relation to generational differences in the workplace. Mental models are considered to be deeply-held assumptions or schemata that are constructed from participants' interactions with the social world (Senge et al., 1994). These mental models represent how individuals frame their understanding of the world and its associated systems

and processes. Mental models play a significant role in how an individual interprets and predicts world events and how they reason and make decisions (Nylisay, Canniford, & Kreshel, 2013). Thus, mental models represent an individual's worldview or how they make sense of the world. Thus, it may be assumed that since mental models provide the means through which an individual makes sense of the world, they will play a role in influencing what individuals value in the world. A workplace value is what an individual believes is fundamentally right or wrong with the work setting (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Workplace values have become a prominent topic regarding generational differences in current literature (Cogin, 2012; Costanza et al., 2012; Jonck et al., 2017; Twenge et al., 2010).

Therefore, an individual's mental model, which was so named by Senge in his work *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge et al., 1994), is related to what they value and interpret in the world. How can two people be involved in the same situation yet interpret it differently? The psychological construct of a schema gives the researcher an insight into the broader construct of a mental model. A schema is a structure that contains knowledge and is embedded in an individual's memory (Jones, Ross Lynam, Perez & Leitch, 2011). A mental model uses schemata to inform how one interprets and sees the world.

Senge et al. (1994) made use of schemata to develop the term 'mental models' to be used in the business context, thus the term 'mental model' draws on psychology in its application in the business context. Mental models are the images, assumptions, and stories that form part of an abstraction of how we experience and perceive the world (Meadows, Behrens III, Meadows, Naill, & Zahn, 1974). Meadows et al., (1974) state that these mental models act as a lens that inform how we perceive and make sense of the world, and as a result, influence an individual's behaviour.

Individuals are unaware of the effect that mental models have on their behaviour. This is to say that they are tacit (Senge et al., 2006). However, these authors believe that individuals' mental models may be adjusted if individuals become aware of them by actively seeking them out. The most effective means to alter a mental model is for individuals to become aware of their own mental model and the impact that it has on their interpretation and perception of their surroundings and their subsequent behaviour. As the world continues to develop, a gap is created between an individual's mental model and reality. Senge et al., (2006) believes that this results in counterproductive behaviour. Since a generational mental model is created according to the historical period in which an individual grows up, and the world continues to develop past the period in which an individual was raised, it is proposed that a disconnect between millennials and the current status quo (Bresman, 2015) indicates a gap between mental models and reality. Thus, mental models can be used as a tool to improve understanding of generations in the workplace.

Mental models are made up of two phenomena that affect how an individual uses them to navigate their worlds. These two phenomena are used to explain why individuals do not always behave in accordance with what they say, due to espoused theories and theories in use (Senge et al., 2006). Theories in use are the mental models that actually direct behaviour, while espoused theories are things that people say they will do, such as values, beliefs and behaviour actions. Mental models are further complex in that an individual may have various mental models around themselves and others, which can be simple generalisations or complex theories that influence how they make decisions, solve problems, and form perceptions about decisions taken (Senge, 2006). Furthermore, mental models are influenced by what an individual sees and understands. An individual can only make sense of and react to what they see, and this may be a limiting factor in understanding individual mental models. Considering the global generation of millennials, this may be interesting to consider, because

a shared mental model across a generational cohort might indicate a shared mental model, despite each individual not being able to see exactly everything that another individual has seen. This statement indicates the rise of globalisation and connectedness of the modern generations due to technological advances.

Additionally, a mental model is considered to be an internal representation of an external reality based on an individual's interaction with the world (Pfeffer, 2005). Thus, a mental model may be considered complimentary to research regarding generational difference due to the role the environment has on influencing how individuals view the world (Glass, 2007). Because of the complexity of isolating generational differences as a construct mental models may also provide better insight into this concern as it investigates the psychological constructs that underpin the behaviours and preferences in the workplace.

2.8 Personal Construct Theory

In his Personal Construct Theory, Kelly (1977) states that people attempt to predict and control events by forming hypotheses or theories, and testing them using experimental and experiential evidence. In this way Kelly (1977) describes people as personal scientists. Individuals create expectations based on experiences, and further test them out behaviourally by observing the outcome. On reflection of the outcome, an individual's theory is either reinforced, refuted, or adjusted, and it is the outcomes of these internal personal experiments that inform the way in which one lives (Fransella, Bell, & Bannister, 2004).

From an ontological perspective, Kelly (1977) believes that whatever exists can be reconstructed. Individuals are constantly reevaluating and reconstructing their beliefs of reality according to behavioural feedback from their environment. This is to say that no single person's reality is perfect, nor is it final. Therefore, all individuals possess their own meaning that is acquired from the world by ascribing meaning to their experiences, which becomes

their reality. In a changing world, individuals make sense of their world by developing a personally organised system of interpretation based on their experiences (Tan & Hunter, 2002). Therefore, now more than ever, individuals are using their personal models to make sense of a changing world as they attempt to provide themselves with certainty. Personal constructs are used to make sense of current situations and in an attempt to predict future events.

2.9 The Nature of a Personal Construct

Pope (1982) states that an individual uses constructs to make sense of past events, to anticipate future events, and to reflect on the accuracy of future events once they have occurred. Fransella (2005) states that a personal construct is unique to an individual, meaning that a personal construct is created by the individual due to their unique context and interpretation thereof. Therefore, a generational mental model can be considered to consist of shared personal constructs shared by a generational cohort due to the similar context that all individuals face, and their reaction and subsequent internal hypotheses formed as a result.

One of the paramount aspects of a personal construct is that it is bipolar in nature (Fransella et al., 2004). Fransella (2005) states that individuals use constructs to distinguish between things that are similar to others, and those that are not. Constructs may take the bipolar value attributed to people, events, and things. However, the meaning attributed exists as a dichotomy of similar or dissimilar.

As a result of this dichotomy of polarity, constructs are interpreted in a hierarchy (Fransella, 2005), meaning that an individual ascribes subordinate and superordinate importance to constructs (Kelly, 1977), and therefore, one construct will imply polarity on the other construct. The construct whose polarity is implied by the other construct is the superordinate construct, while the construct that implies polarity on the other is the subordinate

construct. However, the hierarchy of constructs is influenced by an individual's context or personal experience. In certain situations, certain constructs may be more meaningful than others. The range in which an individual finds a construct meaningful or useful gives the researcher an indication of the construct hierarchy, and of an individual's construct system. This construct system is what an individual uses to think and attribute meaning to their world (Kelly, 1977).

The primary function of a construct is an experience to be used as a reference to anticipate change in the world (Fransella et al, 2004). By using a hypothesis, based on past events, one may be able to anticipate future outcomes in similar events. Having these constructs validated in future events strengthen an individual's constructs and worldview. These anticipations of certain events influence an individual's behaviour and feelings, however, when these anticipations are not validated, an individual may re-evaluate these constructs and adjust their behaviour accordingly (Fransella, 2005).

Fransella (2005) refers to a choice corollary in constructs that underpin an individual's need to grow and develop as being fundamental to one's life. He states that we need to continually define and examine our interpretation of the world, and therefore an individual will attempt to select one pole of a construct in an effort to increase their sensemaking in the world. Kelly (1977) describes a construct as a reference axis around which an individual constructs a system of their own personal network action pathways, that both limits action and enables new ways of acting as a result of their understanding of the world .

The arrangement of such constructs in an internal system forms a mental model through which an individual makes sense of, and interprets, their world. This worldview influences what meaning one ascribes to the world and any subsequent decisions and

behaviour that an individual undertakes based on the lens through which they view the world. This includes what an individual values. Generational theory has gained popular traction as a lens through which generational cohorts view the world in an effort to understand what they might value. Furthermore, research in generational theory and workplace values has focussed on what values or drivers generations might have in the workplace in order to inform management practice to influence positive organisational outcomes. These workplace values are a product of the shared mental models that comprise values and personal constructs.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed generational differences and workplace values by using an empirical lens and citing relevant literature. The link between workplace values, generational differences, and talent management strategy was also demonstrated, with its influence on positive organisational outcomes. Critiques of generational theory were mentioned. The need for further empirical research in the field was demonstrated, and the motivation for a qualitative research study was discussed. Finally, the construct of mental models and personal construct theory were discussed as viable constructs to focus on in this qualitative study, considering the nature of both generational difference and workplace values and how they may be explored using mental models.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the strategy and blueprint used to inform the decisions undertaken in order to answer a research question in a study (Creswell, 2014). The strategy will inform the chosen worldview or paradigm used to guide the research process. It will also further inform the choice of research techniques and method used in order to gather and analyse data. The research design chapter of this research will establish and substantiate the use of the methodology used in an effort to answer the research question.

3.1 Philosophical Assumptions

A research paradigm is the larger framework that informs the research process and consists of a belief in a nature of reality, ontology, and how a researcher may make sense of this reality, or epistemology (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This study used constructivist ontology in that reality is assumed to be internally co-constructed by the participants a result of their subjective experiences (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This suits the current study, as it is aligned to an individual's relative and subjective mental models, formed as a result of their experiences in society. A constructivist epistemology was used because it denotes that knowledge, or reality, exists as a process of reconstruction between participants and their social context (Creswell, 2014). This approach further compliments this study because the premise of generational differences is based on the idea of societal influence on an individual's worldview, or reality.

The discussed ontology and epistemology are incorporated under the interpretative research paradigm, which is concerned with the subjective meanings that people attach to phenomena (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This is believed to be the best research paradigm to be adopted in this study due to the necessity to capture subjective internal representations of each individual's reality related to their work experiences and workplace values.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The interpretative research paradigm proposes that a qualitative research design and method is used in an effort to better explain and comprehend the subjective meanings and reasons behind social action (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Qualitative research is exploratory in nature, and aims to gather rich data in an effort to better understand the underlying reasons and meanings, being the constructs under investigation (Creswell, 2014). This research design is best suited to achieving better understanding of the subjective experience of a generation's possible mental model. The chosen research design prescribes certain techniques or research methods for practically gathering data that is rich in subjective meaning. This particular study used the repertory grid interview, a technique that has previously been used as an effective tool to measure generational differences (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007).

3.3 Research Process

The research process involved the collection and analysis of the data during the study. As a full-time masters student, there was limited time available to collect data. This constraint influenced the sampling and the access to a diverse range of participants. This has implications for the generalisability of results, but does not compromise the quality of information gathered.

3.4 Sampling

For the purposes of this study, a purposive sampling strategy was used. Purposive sampling is based on the availability and convenience of participants, and the premise that there are participant characteristics known to the researcher that are relevant to the study (Creswell, 2014). In this study, this participant characteristic was the participants' birth dates,

since birth dates have been used in previous generational cohort research to define and demarcate different generations for sampling purposes.

This study used the popular and commonly accepted definition of generational birth date as posited by Strauss and Howie, and as depicted in Table 1 (1991). To define a sample of millennials, in this study only individuals that were born prior to 1982 were used in the sample. That being said, since this study involves millennials' mental models with regard to the workplace, the sample could not include individuals without work experience. Therefore, the sampling was defined by the parameter of participants born between the dates of 1982-1990 that had at least one year of work experience.

Purposive and snowball sampling within a particular organisation was used to collect participants for the study. This was done because of the access I had to the participants of a particular organisation due to the relationship I had with the organisation at the time of the study. An initial amount of 15 participants was expected, but saturation of data was reached earlier than anticipated during the data collection phase. A total of 10 participants were used to create the mental model defined in this study. Individual in-person interviews were conducted with these participants after they were made aware of and consented to their voluntary participation in the study. Although the limited transferability of the results to a wider population in this study is a limitation, a rich understanding of the subject matter during the time frame allocated was achieved. The implications of collecting data from a single organisation are discussed in the presentation of the findings. Demographic information of the participants is presented in the table hereunder.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Participants

| Participant | Population Group | Gender | Year Born | Age at time of Interview | Work Experience (years) |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Participant A | White | Male | 1989 | 26 | 5 |
| Participant B | Indian | Male | 1990 | 25 | 4 |
| Participant C | White | Female | 1988 | 27 | 5 |
| Participant D | Black | Male | 1990 | 25 | 3 |
| Participant E | White | Male | 1985 | 30 | 10 |
| Participant F | White | Male | 1990 | 25 | 4 |
| Participant G | Black | Male | 1985 | 30 | 6 |
| Participant H | Indian | Male | 1984 | 29 | 9 |
| Participant I | Black | Male | 1984 | 31 | 11 |
| Participant J | White | Male | 1989 | 26 | 5 |

3.5 Data-Collection Methods

Participants were chosen and asked to participate in the study by the means of a semi-structured qualitative interview. The participants were asked to choose a location of their choice and interviews ranging between one hour to one-and-a-half hours were conducted. Care was taken to allow the participants to feel comfortable but also to encourage focus to ensure effective interviews. To this end, all interviews were conducted outside of the working environment to minimise distractions, at a venue that was quiet and comfortable for the

participant. I put the participants at ease by explaining setting the context of the study and the informed consent form that was presented at the outset of each interview. This form included the purpose and confidentiality of results obtained during the interview, and the participants were asked to sign it. Initially participants were asked to provide a brief career history to better contextualise any information that was collected during the interview process and to break the ice in order to build rapport. During the interview process the repertory grid interview technique was used to collect information.

The repertory grid interview is based on Kelly's (1977) personal construct theory (Fransella et al., 2004). Kelly (1977) posits that individuals construct their realities by contrasting their experiences, and in doing so, individuals develop antecedents that are used to better understand and predict future events according to their perception of reality. If these antecedents accurately predict future events, these constructs are maintained, if they do not, new constructs are adopted (Fransella et al., 2004). These constructs are considered to be an individual's personal views of their reality that can be assembled into schemata or mental models. These constructs are believed to remain relatively stable after early adulthood.

The repertory grid technique uses a semi-structured qualitative interview to investigate personal constructs (Fransella et al., 2004). The technique focuses on two concepts: elements and constructs. The elements are objects of the individuals' thinking to which they relate their concepts or values, and in this study, the elements were workplace experiences. The constructs are what individuals use to discriminate between the elements, and are bipolar in nature (Myers, 2013), and they exist on a continuum and are evaluative. It is believed that it is these constructs that inform an individual's workplace values.

These personal constructs are elicited from participants by contrasting the differences and similarities between elements (workplace experiences) that are meaningful to the

participant. This is called triading, and involves presenting elements to participants in sets of three, and asking them to think of constructs that make two of them similar and one dissimilar. Triading is repeated multiple times with varying combinations while continuously asking participants to make similarity-dissimilarity judgments. This allows the researcher to elicit multiple bipolar constructs as an output of the interview process. The dominant constructs that emerge comprise the set of constructs found on the repertory grid.

In this study the participants were all asked the same exploratory question related to what participants valued in the workplace in order to elicit elements of workplace experience:

Can you give some examples of positive and negative experiences in your work experience to date?

Furthermore, follow up questions were used to better define a number of positive and negative experiences and were then compiled on a set of cards during the interview. It is believed that positive and negative workplace experiences can be used to indicate workplace values, since workplace values are an indication of what individuals believe is fundamentally wrong or right in the workplace. These formed the elements of the study that would be triaded to elicit constructs.

In order to better weight the significance of the constructs that were elicited, a rating process was used to better define the significance of each construct by rating the original elements. This process was implemented in the last part of the interview and was only facilitated once constructs had become saturated after multiple triading processes.

Jankowicz's (2004) recommended grid was used to this end in the final part of the interview process, and involved placing constructs either singly or in pairs on either side of a bipolar scale. A pair indicated that there was a similarity between constructs that emerged from the triading phase. The singleton is the polar opposite of the value. The participants were then

asked to rate the original discussed elements according to the bipolar scale provided by the pair and singleton, based on a 1-7 rating scale according to where they felt they sat on the scale. This is better illustrated in the table hereunder.

Table 3: Repertory Grid Rating Example

| Rating | | | | | | Rating |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Scale – 1 | | | | | | Scale – 7 |
| Pairs | Element 1 | Element 2 | Element 3 | Element 4 | Element 5 | Singleton |
| <i>Informal</i> | | | | | | <i>Formal</i> |
| <i>Working</i> | 7 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 3 | <i>Working</i> |
| <i>Culture</i> | | | | | | <i>Culture</i> |

We can see that an informal working culture emerged as a pair during the triading process. When asked to compare and contrast a triad of workplace experiences, it emerged that a participant favoured an informal working culture. The polar opposite of this construct is thus a formal working culture, indicated by the singleton provided. When the elements were placed into the grid and the participant was asked to provide a rating we can see that according to Element 1, this participant felt a distinct inclination towards a formal working culture as they provided a rating indicative of a high singleton score (7). However, when reflecting on Element 2, the participant indicated an inclination towards an informal working culture, and thus a score of 1 was recorded.

Once this rating scale was complete, the participant was asked to examine the scale and constructs were elicited for a final confirmation. Field notes and non-verbal communication were also noted during the interview process to add more context and clarity

to collected information. Based on both positive and negative experiences discussed, I was able to elicit a hierarchy of workplace constructs that denote what each participant valued in the workplace, and that response was recorded in the grid. This would later contribute to the construction of the overall mental model based on workplace values. These constructs indicate how the individual construes the world, makes sense of, and understands their world (Jankowicz, 2004). The arrangement of these personal constructs shaped an individual's mental model and gave a deeper understanding of what they value.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data included analyses of data collected from field notes, general observations, and the output of the repertory grid interview process. In order to create a rich and deep understanding of the research topic being studied, all forms of data collected were used in the interpretation of the results (Schwandt, 2000). As outlined by Kelly (1977), strict adherence to personal construct theory and repertory grid guidelines was ensured during the analysis process to ensure that data was correctly interpreted (Fransella et al., 2004; Myers, 2013). The main source of data analysis was the repertory grid. During the analysis, phase two key techniques were used to elicit the final data in relation to the research question. This involved initial eyeball analysis and bootstrapping, which are techniques used to identify constructs after the interview process.

Eyeballing involves taking a broad overview of the initial data by removing oneself from the finer details (Jankowicz, 2004). Researchers must endeavour to remain objective during this process and formulate initial thinking regarding the data collected. Jankowicz (2004) provides a six-step process that outlines useful questions to inform this process. These include the following questions:

1. What is the participant thinking about?
2. How has the participant represented the topic?
3. How does he/she think? (Noting the constructs and number of constructs).
4. What does he/she think? (Using the rating scale).
5. Analyse supplied elements, constructs, and ratings.
6. Draw conclusions.

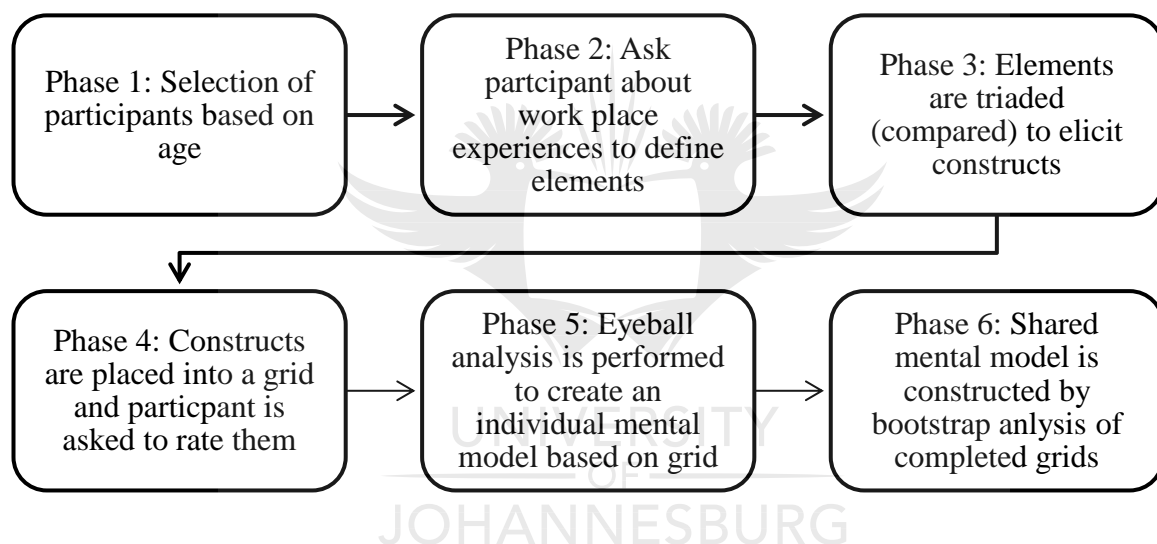
This initial analysis allowed me to construe initial constructs between participants. These constructs formed the basis for individual mental models that emerged as a result of the process. Following the eyeballing process, a method of bootstrapping was used to generate wider themes and inferences in relation to the research question. Bootstrapping is the method in which previous knowledge and experiences are used to generate a secondary level of ideas (Fransella et al., 2004). In this study, this was achieved by moving from individual constructs and mental models to a shared mental model for a generation.

Initially each participant's mental model was created by assembling constructs that emerged during the interview process. After interviewing 10 participants it became apparent that the constructs that had emerged had reached saturation. The common themes that emerged after bootstrapping were reviewed, extracted, and collated to create a thematic map. This final conceptual model forms the basis of the findings of this study. Existing literature was applied to inform and position the conceptual model within the existing knowledge base of the field in order to answer the research question.

Data was transcribed on cards during the interview process and an observation journal was used during the interview process to collect contextual, demographic, and information related to the interview process. The cards proved to be a useful tool during the interview process as they were used to document the experiences that emerged from the participants'

initial responses to the interview focus question. Each experience was recorded on a separate card. I believe that using these experience cards supplemented the repertory grid process, as they allowed for a physical arrangement of cards/experiences when participants were asked to compare and contrast their experiences to develop constructs during the triading process of the interview. Figure 2 hereunder depicts the research process from participant selection to the generation of a shared mental model.

Figure 2: Research Process



3.6 Quality Assurance

In any study it is vital to ensure the reliability and validity of results. Without reliable and valid results, a researcher cannot claim with accuracy that they have truly measured what they have intended to measure, nor can they propose that their findings can be generalised to a wider population or cohort with accuracy (Schurink, 2009). Validity is considered to be the degree to which information collected truly represents the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2014). Reliability refers to the extent to which the research techniques used were consistent and whether or not results can be replicated in a similar context (Creswell, 2014).

This amounts to the quality or trustworthiness of data. The quality, or trustworthiness, of the data was maintained by addressing Guba and Lincoln's (1994) alternative constructs of quality qualitative research. As cited in Schurink (2009), Guba and Lincoln maintain that the credibility, transferability, dependability, replicability and conformability of qualitative research should be addressed to ensure the quality of qualitative research.

Credibility refers to whether or not the results of a study are valid, in this case, establishing whether or not there is a match between the participants' views and the researcher's representation of them. In order to maintain credibility, the participant's own verbatim words were used as much as possible in the documentation and interpretation of the results. Furthermore, the participants were given the opportunity to review the constructs that were derived during the interview process at the end of each interview. This allowed the participant to confirm the extent to which my representation of their worldview matched what they believed it to be. This increased the content validity of the research, as it increased the degree to which the study represented the content that it had intended to document (Creswell, 2014).

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to another specific situation or case. This is more difficult to determine due to the limited number of participants involved in the study. However according to the sampling strategy and saturation levels reached, it can be argued that to some extent, the findings may be generalised with members of the target demographic. In this study, the target demographic was the generational cohort millennials. This can be stated with relative confidence, due to the limited number of novel constructs that emerged after 10 participants were interviewed, due to saturation.

Dependability refers to whether or not the research process followed was logical, well-documented, and audited. In the structure of this study all of the steps in chapters have been demarcated to document the research journey. I have included my interest in the topic, the review of existing literature and methods, and I have documented the steps undertaken to both collect and analyse the data during the study. I have also ensured that I adhered to the best practice of the chosen research technique (Fransella et al., 2004), and engaged my study leaders as advisors and mentors during the research process.

In order to maintain replicability of the findings, or the degree to which the findings could be replicated, the research process and any key decisions taken were carefully presented. Steps taken in the data collection and interpretation were detailed, and strategies to increase the trustworthiness of the data captured were presented. By demarcating these steps in this study, the possibility of replicating these results in a similar context has been ensured.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which a researcher can provide evidence to corroborate findings (Schurink, 2009). This was achieved through the initial review of literature used to frame the study and the application of relevant theory during the data analysis. Cennamo and Gardner's (2008) use of work value themes were particularly useful in consolidating and synthesising the themes that emerged during this process.

In addition to the principles of quality qualitative research, as mentioned by Schurink (2009), I was careful to ensure reflexivity during the research process (Myers, 2013). As I shared a common generation with the subjects, a key demographic in this study, I was careful to address my biases during the research process. I noted down my workplace values before the study, and ensured that I capture participant data without judgement. I also reflected on stages in my career and personal experiences related to my upbringing or personality that may be affecting my interpretation of results. I also used a research diary to continually sense

check my understanding of the data that I was collecting in an effort to remain unbiased and impartial in my documentation and analysis. In qualitative research it is important to remain unbiased and fair during the research process, because by using the researcher as the measure, one is using a tool that already possesses natural biases in a study (Myers, 2013).

Another way that I enabled this process was to ask for opinions from my study leader during the interpretation of my results. As a millennial, researching millennials values, I may have been prone to draw conclusions that played to an expedience bias within my own interpretation i.e draw conclusions that make sense to me. By involving another skilled researcher in the process, that was not a millennial, I was able to mitigate my own influence on the data as this researcher acted as a chief contrarian in the process to interrogate the data interpretation to develop a more robust interpretation, thereby limiting the effect of my own bias.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

During the process of this study the principles relevant to ethical considerations during the research process were documented and kept in mind. I ensured that I acted with benevolent intent at all times, and was sure to ensure that no harm was caused to any of the study participants. This was achieved by stating in the informed consent form that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt they no longer wished to continue. Furthermore, the informed consent form also explained and enshrined the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity regarding the information discussed during the study.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the research design of the study and steps taken to collect and analyse the data have been detailed. I have mentioned my own ontological and epistemological

beliefs that framed the qualitative nature of this study, and have mentioned how I ensured the quality of the data that was captured. Lastly, I have detailed how I ensured that the use of human participants in the study was ethical. In the following chapter I the findings of the study are detailed.



CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter the stages used in the repertory grid analysis to consolidate, interpret and analyse the findings are outlined by detailing each participant, presenting each of their mental models that emerged from eye balling, and then the subsequent themes that emerged from bootstrapping. The chapter concludes with the presentation of an integrated conceptual model framework to better understand a shared mental model in order to address the research objective.

4.1 Organisational Context

As all participants in this study were chosen from the same organisation it is worth mentioning the context of the organisation and facets of the organisation that may be relevant to the interpretation of the data. The subject business was founded by its two co-founders who belonged to generation X (1961-1981). At the time of the study, the business had 56 employees and relied on outsourcing most of its work to sub-contractors. The organisation specialises in fibre and internet infrastructure installations to homes. Despite the two co-founders belonging to Generation X, almost the entire staff complement belonged to the millennial generational cohort. Most of the employees within the business did not have formal tertiary qualifications, and were often hired according to their attitudes and organisational fit, with a focus on mentorship. The founders described themselves as “serial entrepreneurs” and hoped that one day their business would be considered a “school for entrepreneurship”. As such, they valued autonomy and independence in the way that they managed their business and employees. They also emphasised a culture that did not regulate a strict dress code for its employees, and was also considered ad a “work hard, play hard” environment. It can be said that the organisation could be considered a quintessential millennial organisation. At the time of the study the business was performing successfully

and growing at a rapid rate. They had recently received a large investment and planned to expand their premises to accommodate their rapid growth.

4.2 Process Analysis

In order to interpret the findings of a repertory grid technique of inquiry, it is necessary to first capture the meaning of the constructs via a process analysis, and then to use an eyeball and bootstrap analysis in an attempt to address the research question (Jankowicz, 2004). During the process analysis, the researcher initially ignored the results of the grid and reflected on the interview process. This was achieved via the field notes that documented how the interviews took place, and the interviewer's reflections on the process. These notes were used during the process to add a richer depth of interpretation.

4.3 Eyeball and Bootstrap Analyses

Subsequently an eyeball analysis was used to focus on the constructs that emerged from the process, and which were captured in the grid. During the sensemaking component of the interview, these constructs were used to draw wider inferences about what workplace values that the participants held. Categories of constructs are the output of this process of eyeball analysis (Jankowicz, 2004), and during this analysis, constructs were categorised according to the meanings that were derived during the interview process. These broad categories were then used to assimilate the broader themes that emerged during the analysis. This is referred to as bootstrapping in the process of repertory grid analysis (Jankowicz, 2004).

During this process, each construct was used as a unit of analysis. Each unit was compared to others during the interview process, and grouped together in the moment of the interview, if the unit possesses similarities. If a construct is dissimilar, it was placed into a different category. This involved a continuous redefining of categories during the interview

process until all constructs could be placed into categories. This core categorisation process used a number of core constructs such as ‘autonomy’ and ‘relationship with colleagues during the study’.

4.4 Participant Analysis

In this section the construct categories per participant are presented, and are the core constructs for each of the 10 participants. They can be interpreted as the themes that represent the constructs of their mental models. They were derived from the interview process and in particular through comparing and contrasting workplace experiences to extract salient core constructs per participant. The participants own words were used where appropriate to better substantiate the analysis and improve clarity in interpretation. The documentation of participant findings was initiated by detailing some details to provide relevant contextual data, initially from the process analysis and then from the list of constructs that emerged.

Participant A

Born: 1989. Years working: Five. White male.

This participant had held his current position in the business for a few months, and had changed jobs three times during the period that he had been working. During our discussion he revealed both positive and negative experiences at different employers, that gave rise to definitive constructs through the interview process. He saw this recent change in employment as a bold career shift that was deemed successful due to a majority of previous negative workplace experiences at other employers, and recent positives experience with his current employer. This current work position was a major shift, from a competency perspective, and from the jobs he had held previously throughout his career until this point.

(i) Growth in a business: He detailed that he was motivated by the potential for growth in this business, which was something that he had not experienced at the previous companies for

which he had worked. He stated that in his current role he experienced “a shorter amount of time than expected for career growth”. This was one of the drivers for him to join the company. He had not experienced this in previous positions, and he believed that this aspect of his current role would motivate him to stay at the business for a longer period.

(ii) Communication with manager: Another reason for his satisfaction in the role was the prevalence of more “open communication” between himself and his manager. As a result, he believed that he experienced a level of relatedness between himself and his superiors that he had not experienced before. He valued the feeling that he worked with people that “understood his world”.

(iii) Empathy in the workplace: This was contrasted against his previous negative experience in the workplace of a “lack of empathy” from managers. He believed that some of his previous managers did not have an “understanding of (his) personal problems” and this led them to make decisions that he didn’t deem fair. He believed that this contributed to managers creating a “disconnect with the younger generation”, and that they could not manage them effectively because they did not understand them.

(iv) Non-corporate workplace: The participant was able to identify aspects of the work environment from previous work experiences that he valued, such as a “strictly non-corporate work environment”, of which “flexible working hours” was an attribute thereof. When comparing more experiences, he was able to provide further details such as a relaxed dress code, “fun environment”, colourful and informal work areas, and various team-building events such as off-site social events.

(v) Working with friends When probed further on this point it emerged that he and his fellow colleagues and managers experienced a greater sense of relatedness, and were allowed

to wear informal workwear. He felt this contributed to him feeling as if he was “working with his friends”.

(vi) Training and development: The participant was also encouraged by the prospect of further training and development in his current workplace. Throughout his career he had experienced a “lack of assistance and (training) knowledge”.

Participant B

Born: 1990. Years working: Four. Indian male.

This participant had “married relatively early in (his) life” and saw the interview process as an opportunity to reflect on his career changes between different careers in an effort to look forward towards how he might plan his life moving forward with his young family. His past work experiences included positions such as photographer, music producer, call centre agent, and master of ceremonies.

(i) Client satisfaction: The participant enjoyed previous roles that allowed him to interact with people in various capacities. He was particularly motivated by the “instant satisfaction” he gained from seeing the effect that his work had in his various roles as a “master of ceremonies” and as a “client services administrator”.

(ii) Peer acknowledgment: One of his proudest moments was when he was “acknowledged by his peers”, which he often interpreted as an indication of his competency in a particular skill, e.g. “problem solving”.

(iii) Trusting management (autonomy): He felt he excelled best in roles that had “empowering management” that allowed him to assert his “authority” and “influence” when needed. This was further emphasised by some of his negative workplace experiences that

included management that did a “directors walk-through” to maintain tight control in an office environment.

(iv) Management understanding: It is unsurprising that he also noted a “lack of compassion” from management and a “lack of understanding” in the workplace as contributing factors to some of his negative workplace experiences. He believed that a manager can disappoint employees if they are regarded as “an acquaintance and not a friend”.

(v) Friends as co-workers: His experience of close relationships with those that he “worked the closest with” provided a sense of “kinship” that he found particularly rewarding. This is to say that he felt solving a challenge with people he saw as friends to be a positive experience, and one “that did not feel like work”.

Participant C

Born: 1988. Years working: Five. White female.

This participant was one of the few females within the business under study, and the only female in a leadership position. Her work background was also in contrast to the majority of employees at the time as she was a registered chartered accountant and had previously worked at a top international accounting firm. Most employees have previously only worked at smaller businesses, and roughly only 50% of employees had a formal tertiary education. However, this could be considered to be in line with the requirements of her role as the head of finance.

(i) Team/community: the participant gained a significant sense of satisfaction in her work from the sense of family and community that she felt in the workplace. She felt that when everyone shared a “sense of passion and dedication that bound them in the workplace” they were happier and more engaged. Despite feeling isolated at times in her position and gender, she felt a “sense of family” in her current role.

(ii) Individual responsibility: when given “responsibility and the authority” to take on projects where she had the autonomy to make decisions, she felt highly engaged. In previous roles only “side projects” gave her this feeling. She felt that in her current role she was able to feel the same in her day to day-to-day work as she had previously only felt in her side projects at a previous employer.

(iii) Office relationships: She had experiences at her previous employers that led her to value the “relationships within an office”. When they went wrong, incorrect “labelling could occur” or employee misbehaviour could occur, which often resulted in misunderstandings and an “unpleasant work environment”.

(iv) Trusting relationship with manager: the participant believed that a trusting and authentic relationship with one’s manager was key to anyone’s success in a workplace. She felt that when she achieved such a relationship that she was able to perform, and felt a greater sense of happiness in her work.

(v) Diverse and challenging work: this participant enjoyed work that challenged her. This resulted out of work that was “diverse in the skillsets that it required”, as it motivated her to learn continuously rather than growing bored or complacent.

(vi) Humane business processes: she particularly valued company processes and “procedures that were human and fair”. She believed that traditional corporate businesses had processes such as performance management that did not take into account “aspects of an employee’s life and role” that influenced their behaviour. In other words, she valued businesses that were not as heavily regulated, that took important human aspects about individuals’ lives into consideration, such as a loss of a loved one, and businesses that don’t get lost in the administration of their businesses.

Participant D

Born: 1990. Years working: Three. Black male.

This participant had joined the business after a few “non-career positions” such as a gym manager and catering services server. He did not view these positions as roles that he wanted to maintain on a long-term basis as a career. Against the background of his former work experience, he viewed his current role as his first “real position” in a business, a “real position” that he wanted to use to plan for his future career. From this perspective of his career, he was able to draw on both positive and negative experiences from his other roles that aided in him developing constructs during the interview.

(i) Feel respected: he possessed a strong need to be respected by his manager and colleagues in his role, which stemmed from him wanting to be “taken seriously”. He felt that this need was fulfilled in his current role, and he felt empowered and confident that he could be “trusted to get things done” in that role. He felt that he was respected by his manager and everyone else that he worked with.

(ii) Independent work: he believed this sense of respect and empowerment and the confidence held in him to perform in his role was linked to trust. He believed his manager trusted him, as he was given “enough responsibility and autonomy” to perform in his role. His manager allowed him to work independently, which the participant valued.

(iii) Colleagues: he was motivated by the feelings of relatedness he felt within his current team. He felt that they “shared a common age” and that he “could be more open” with them. He believed it was their shared understanding and similar interests that lead them to feel as if they “were more than a team at times”.

(iv) Inconsistent managers: he stated that the trust one feels in a manager is important in “developing a relationship that would be productive in the workplace”. He believed one of

the most important success factors in this relationship was a manager that was “authentic, consistent, and could be relied upon to make consistent and fair decisions”.

(v) Participatory decision-making: the participant valued being able to “be part of the decision-making process”. When he was “kept-in-the-loop” about decisions and wider long-term strategy he felt more motivated, and was better able to adjust to changes within the business. He felt that his manager played a significant role in including him in decisions and that it was an indication of his manager’s faith in him.

Participant E

Born: 1985. Years working. 10. White male.

This participant had been working for 10 years and had changed employment multiple times before joining his current employer. He was a self-confessed “start-up addict” and enjoyed the thrill and excitement of the start-up environment. However, he found that once a start-up business started to form the scalable processes and procedures needed to transition into a bigger business, he often moved to a “new challenge” as he found a larger business less exciting. He headed up one of the divisions of the business in his role at the time. At times he experienced difficulty in balancing the time commitments expected by his family and growing children with his work commitments.

(i) Challenging work: the participant enjoyed challenging work that left him feeling as if he was a “pioneer” where his achievements were measurable, and he was able to feel as if he had “accomplished something in (his) work”. He enjoyed the continuous problem solving involved in “blazing a new trail” within a new business and/or industry. He found that by surpassing challenges in his work, he developed a greater sense of confidence and self-efficacy, and therefore he sought out positions that would provide such challenges in his role or work environment.

(ii) Independent work: he further valued “respect and trust in the workplace” that enabled him to work independently and with his own sense of creativity. He believed that this allowed him to reach and surpass his milestones and accomplishments.

(iii) Togetherness: the participant felt that he often experienced an “overwhelming togetherness” at work that “meant a lot” in his life. He felt as if he had a family at work and that “he was more than a number”. He valued this aspect of the workplace, and believed that it is workplace relationships that epitomised this value for him.

(iv) Respect of manager: he felt that respect from a manager was a “two-way street”, and that it “took time to cultivate”. He believed that this required patience and both employees and managers that reflected on their relationships.

(v) Mentorship and training: in previous work roles this participant responded well to mentorship, and he stated that he was “lucky to have excellent mentors” throughout his career. He believed that his best mentors “were accepting of their flaws” and were able “not [to] let their egos get in the way of their jobs”. He relied on them from a training perspective.

Participant F

Born: 1990. Years working: Four. White male.

This participant believed that there was a significant difference between generations in the global work environment. He had previously worked in environments such as media, advertising, digital media, and public relations. He firmly believed that one’s employment should not be focussed on remuneration, but rather on job satisfaction. He also highlighted the role of technology in the collaboration of generations and in terms of changing the traditional work context.

(i) Stimulating and challenging work: previously the participant had enjoyed work that allowed him to be stimulated and to learn. He valued being creative and “becoming a technical expert through problem-solving and challenges”.

(ii) Humanness of business: he stated the importance of the “personalisation of business”. He believed that one’s employment is “less about objectives and more about who you are dealing with”. He believed that one should be able to connect with the stakeholders (clients, colleagues, service providers) within one’s role on a “human level”.

(iii) Untraditional working environment: he valued working in environments that were untraditional and “against the current status quo”. He believed that such environments possessed flexible working hours, were not fear-driven environments, and, despite having an appreciation for the human side of business, favoured environments that were still accountability-driven work spaces.

(iv) Career progression: the participant valued career progression and clarity towards this end, something he felt had not experienced in previously held positions. He was concerned about a “glass ceiling” in his career, and believed this might be due to his own misaligned reality and expectations.

(v) Leadership values: he felt that he most valued managers that displayed the “correct leadership values”. These were values typical of “leaders, not a boss”. He believed these to be expressed in how a leader treated his team and wider business. He valued leaders that had close relationships with employees and generally cared for an employee’s wellbeing, and he emphasised collaboration and valued a sincere work ethic.

Participant G

Born: 1985. Years working: Six. Indian male.

The participant's career began in the information technology sector after completing a technical university diploma. He had only worked for two different employers at the time of the interview, and he had been in the role for four years at the business. He believed he was considered to be one of the "old guard", as he had been with the business since its inception and had seen the business triple in size since he joined it.

(i) Personal growth: he valued an environment that focussed on "shared personal growth", that emphasised development, and had a mentorship system that ensured that "everyone was always growing and developing". He believed that he would excel in an environment that emphasised reflection and growth.

(ii) Self-management: the participant valued the ability to be the "master of (his) day and his life" in his daily work. He was engaged in work in which he was independent, autonomous, and in which he was sufficiently trusted to develop his own work structure. He enjoyed roles that allowed him to structure his own work, as this meant he could balance his family commitments. He also believed that when work fell outside of traditional working hours he was able to "sacrifice his personal life" during these times, because he knew that he was able to adjust his work when he needed to balance his personal life commitments; it would therefore "balance out".

(iii) People environment: he believed that the culture or type of the "people environment" in which he worked was a driver of what he valued in the workplace. This is to say that all the people he worked with had a shared purpose and a drive that was similar to his own. If you "spend the majority of your working day with these people" you should be able to have some sort of relationship.

(iv) Making a difference: this participant valued the ability to make a difference in his work. He valued the "ability to see and measure the impact" of his work and to witness his

accomplishments. He gained personal satisfaction from being able to measure his progress and base his impact on making a difference through human interaction and satisfaction (clients, stakeholders).

(v) Human touch in business: He valued the ability to remain “human or personal in business”. This was something that he had not experienced positively at some of his previous employers, but it was something that he felt was important. He defined this as being able to be aware of “employees as more than a number” and to be empathetic to their personal needs outside of their employment relationship with the business.

(vi) Recognition: He valued recognition in his role within a business, and felt that this aspect could be improved upon for him to remain engaged. He felt that when he was undervalued he “did not work as hard”, and he found it “difficult to remain committed”. He defined this recognition to include social recognition within the business and not simply remuneration. He valued being seen as part of other “top achievers”.

Participant H

Born: 1984. Years working: Nine. Indian male.

This participant had work experience of almost a decade at the time of the interview. He had been engaged in his current role for three years. He was a middle manager with a specialised function at the time, and had previously held roles in industries and functions such as call-centres, sales and marketing, finance, and project management.

(i) Social recognition: this participant valued being socially recognised in his work. He valued having “not only a traditional targets and performance system”, but also having forms of social recognition, such a public leader board, and non-monetary incentives such as extra holidays. The extra holidays in particular appealed to him because he knew that he could take them while his colleagues worked, therefore emphasising his differing social status.

(ii) Challenging development: he valued “continuous learning and development” that challenged him. When he felt that he was not being challenged or stretched to learn or develop he would leave a business.

(iii) Self-management: this participant felt that he excelled in a business where he was his “own manager”. This is to say that he valued freedom, autonomy, and independence in his daily work. He felt that he could perform better at times in this environment, as this allowed him to make his own decisions more quickly.

(iv) Unempathetic management culture: he felt that he valued the ways in which management treated employees in the workplace. He had previously had negative workplace experiences previously where he felt “management just didn’t care”. For him, this environment was characterised by strict control and a clear separation of personal life and business.

(v) Personal life support: the participant had experiences where employers had provided support for employees’ personal lives. This included provisions such as access to spare company vehicles when his own car had technical difficulties and personal support during major family and life events, such as a burglary and child birth.

Participant I

Born: 1984. Years working: 11. Back male.

This participant possessed no formal qualification, but believed that his varied experience provided him with a better education and outlook on life than most university graduates. He had been at the business for three years when the interview took place and had worked in roles and industries similar to those in which he was currently involved. He had come from an impoverished background and felt conflicted at times because he still supported his parents who held more conservative values than he did.

(i) Promotion: he listed one of his most positive experiences in the workplace as a promotion he once received early in his career. He believed that this was a clear “validation of his hard work” and also proved his value to the business amongst his peers.

(ii) Learning opportunities: the participant believed that he excelled in the “start-up” environment where there was an emphasis on learning, and there were often challenges in his daily work. He enjoyed the constant changes and learning needed to overcome new challenges that appeared regularly in his daily work.

(iii) Fun at work: he valued the ability to have “fun at work” and to get to know his fellow colleagues on a personal level. He believed that by having a more informal work environment he was able to “understand the other side” of his colleagues and managers, and he was able to handle criticism better and focus more on collaboration because they shared a closer relationship.

(iv) Management of managers’ behaviour: he believed that despite the benefits of a closer relationship formed at work, this placed an emphasis on managers being able to “swop between professional and personal (management styles) with skill”. He valued some managers’ ability to handle the “awkwardness of discipline” when they were faced with disciplining employees with whom they had formed close relationships. He valued this as a core competency that managers needed to be effective in environments in which he preferred to work.

(v) Management’s abuse of power: the participant valued a flat organisational structure and was critical of overly hierarchical and authority-driven work environments. He did not value an “abuse of position by managers” and felt that managers should be careful to set an example and to be authentic in the way that they commit to both the organisation and their employees.

Participant J

Born: 1989. Years working: Five. White male.

The participant qualified with a tertiary education in the general field of marketing. He was recently married at the time of the interview and was looking forward to “settling down into a long-term career”. He had previously worked in a completely unrelated industry, optometry, but now looked to hone his skills, as he believed he was “playing to his strengths”. He had been with the business for almost three years at the time of the interview.

(i) Personal mastery and challenges: he felt that he thrived in an environment that continuously challenged him and made him “overcome fears and focus on problem-solving”. He valued the ability to be presented with a challenge without a current skillset or competence needed to master it. This forced him to improve himself, which he valued.

(ii) Individual recognition: he valued the opportunities that had allowed him to express himself so that he could be “recognised as an individual by (his) colleagues”. He valued the ability to become an expert in a particular skill and be acknowledged for it. He believed this would help him feel that he was not “just a number”.

(iii) Early leadership opportunity: the participant valued the opportunity to “lead by example” and fulfil leadership roles as soon as he could in his career progression. He respected leadership as a profession, and believed that all individuals within a business should be given some form of “leadership opportunity to both test them and ensure success in a business”.

(iv) Mistrust in leadership: despite holding leadership in high esteem, the participant was also critical of managers that did “not operate with authenticity and trust”. He believed that if managers did not place an emphasis on building relationships based on trust, managers, the team, and wider business would likely fail.

(v) Unempathetic management style: he believed at times that management did not appreciate how much “effort was put in by the employees reporting up to them”. He believed that managers lacked empathy in this regard and that they should show more understanding and empathy for their direct reports.

4.5 Synthesis: from mental models to themes

In this section a synthesis of the mental models of all 10 participants into a shared conceptual model of workplace values for a South African millennial is presented. The results were analysed using the boot-strapping and eyeballing process to develop shared mental models common amongst different participants. These shared mental models were then used to construct themes that emerged as a result. Themes are presented using participants’ direct quotes to enhance the understanding of each theme, where applicable. Letters in brackets are used to reference participants who exhibited relevant themes that match the participant codes used earlier. The conceptualisation of the participant themes with wider themes is provided in Table 3 below.

Individual constructs were first grouped from individual participants in the column on the far right. These groupings provided aspects of shared mental models in the next column which made up the six eventual themes that emerged that are listed on the column on the far left. Following the table a discussion of each theme is provided in line with the shared mental models that formed it. At times examples from grouped constructs are used from participants in the discussion to provide detail to enrich understanding.

Table 3: List of Themes, Mental Models and Individual Participant Constructs

| Themes | Theme Description | Shared Mental Models | Grouped Constructs from Participants |
|-----------|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Intrinsic | Values that are driven or met by the process of work. This includes how stimulating or challenging an individual experiences the process of working and the opportunity to learn and develop in the process. | Challenging Work Development | (C) Diverse and challenging work (E) Challenging work (F) Stimulating & challenging (H) Challenging development (J) Personal mastery and challenges (A) Training & development (E) Mentorship and training (G) Personal growth (I) Learning opportunities |
| Freedom | The degree to which someone is autonomous in their work, and they have the ability to set their own work schedule and manage their time. | Autonomy | (B) Trusting management (autonomy) (C) Individual responsibility (D and E) Independent work (G and H) Self-management |

Social

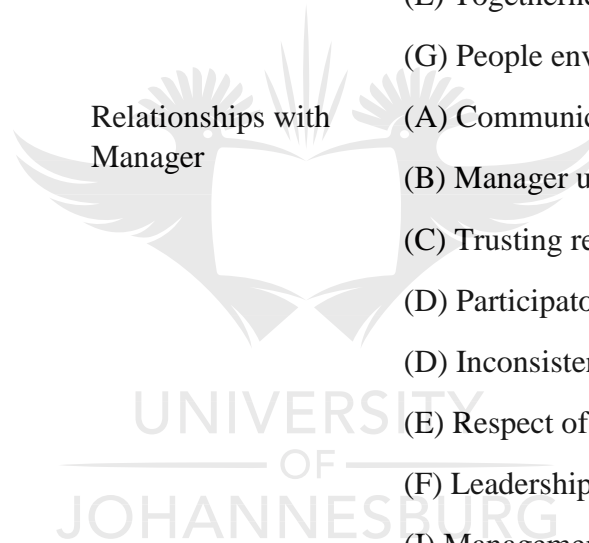
Values that are driven by the social aspect of work. This includes the types of relationships an employee has with their colleagues and managers. Relationships that were close and characterised by genuine care and respect were valued.

Relationships with
Colleagues

- (A) Working with friends
- (B) Friends as co workers
- (C) Team/community
- (C) Office relationships
- (D) Colleagues
- (E) Togetherness

Relationships with
Manager

- (G) People environment
- (A) Communication with manager
- (B) Manager understanding
- (C) Trusting relationship with manager
- (D) Participatory decision making
- (D) Inconsistent managers
- (E) Respect of manager
- (F) Leadership values
- (I) Management of behaviour by managers
- (I) Management abuse of power
- (J) Mistrust in leadership
- (J) Unempathetic management style



| | | | |
|--------------|---|---------------------|---|
| Work Culture | The work environment that one finds themselves in. This is a shared set of assumptions and values held by a wider organisation. Values that created an empathetic, caring, informal, and fun environment were valued. | Empathetic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (C) Human business processes (F) Humanness of Business (G) Human touch in business (H) Empathy in the workplace (H) Unempathetic management culture (H) Personal life support (A) Non-Corporate Workplace (F) Untraditional Working environment (I) Fun at work |
| | | Informal | |
| Status | Values that are fuelled by the status outcomes of work, such as a difference in social status due to career growth, and recognition from peers. | Peer Recognition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (B) Peer acknowledgement (H) Social recognition (D) Feel respected (G) Recognition (J) individual recognition |
| | | Career Growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (A) Growth within a business (F) Career progression (I) Promotion (J) Early leadership opportunity |
| Altruistic | Values that are based on a selflessness and giving back to a society or greater cause outside of work. | Client Satisfaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (B) Client satisfaction (G) Working with purpose |

THEME 1: Intrinsic

As stated by Cennamo and Gardner (2008), intrinsic values are values that are driven by the process of work. These are values that are fulfilled not necessarily in the output of their work, but by the stimulation and personal engagement individuals feel during the work process (Elizur, 1984). During the interview process, participants referenced the exciting and dynamic nature that their work provided and how they would leave a business if they did not feel as if they were challenged in their roles. Two of the ways in which participants were intrinsically fulfilled was through the challenge of the work that stimulated them and the need to continuously train and develop themselves to remain competent to meet these challenges that they achieved through the process of work.

Challenging Work

Participants found themselves most engaged when the work challenged their current level of competence. Participant J enjoyed being challenged so that he would “become an expert” in a particular area that led him to feel a “degree of pride and satisfaction” in his job. The challenging nature of work is also related to the variety and complexity involved. Participants believed that it was not only the challenge of single tasks that enabled them to further develop a core competency, but a variety of tasks that made them aware of other competencies that they should develop within a role. This emphasises management’s role in structuring work that stretches an employee’s skillset to keep them engaged. Participant H felt strongly enough about being challenged, to the extent that he had left previous employers when he felt that he was not being challenged enough after a period of time in a role. This has implications for engagement and retention of staff within a business.

Development

Participants valued the opportunity to learn and develop new skills to overcome challenges in the process. Participant I commented on the easy access to learning opportunities because of the internet access. With such affordable and easy-to-access means to learn and develop, the participants felt that they could learn freely and at their own speed to enhance both their performance and their long-term career growth. However, this could never be substituted for on-the-job training.

THEME 2: Freedom

Cennamo and Gardner (2008) refer to freedom values as values that are driven by the opportunity to be more autonomous in one's work. If an employee is more autonomous in their work, they are able to set their own work schedule, plan their work to accommodate events in their personal life, and can be a "manager of their own day" (G). To gain a sense of freedom in their work, an individual must have a sense of autonomy.

Autonomy

Participant B ascribed his autonomy at work to management's influence. When his manager trusted him to set his own deadlines and manage his own time, he felt that he was more engaged and felt less threatened. The opposite of management style is characterised by strict and tight control. Being able to be more independent in one's work and gain a sense of autonomy can be influenced by a manager's approach to managing employees. By working in an environment with more flexible working hours, participants also felt that they had more autonomy and more independence in their work.

THEME 3: Status

Values that were driven by status and career progression emerged as a theme. This value is often fuelled by status recognition with regard to peers either in hierarchy, praise, or

other symbols of recognition (Elizur, 1984). This construct emerged as a theme of social recognition and career growth.

Social Recognition

When individuals felt that they were recognised for their contribution in the workplace they felt that they were respected and valued—(D), (G), and (J). This included being praised by a manager in front of colleagues or a change in permanent status, such as a promotion. When they felt respected and valued they felt more committed to their work and were engaged at a higher level (G). Being recognised was also an indication to the rest of their colleagues that these individuals possessed a unique contribution and that they could be trusted. When individuals were acknowledged socially they felt “more confident” and felt a great sense of pride in their work (B). In some cases participants believed that being socially recognised created a positive competitive culture that motivated performance (H), it made one feel as if they “were more than a number” (J).

Career Growth

Participants were motivated by the possibility of career progression, particularly rapid growth (A) or early opportunities for career and leadership development (J). Participant I felt that one of his earliest promotions was still one of his fondest memories because it “validated his hard work” and was an indication of the extent to which the company valued him. Career growth can be linked to social recognition because a positive change in position within a company can be considered a positive social change in an individual’s peer group.

THEME 4: Social

Two of the most prominent construct groupings that emerged during the study focused on the relationship between colleagues, and the relationship with one’s manager. This theme is indicative of a social grouping of work values, as it is characterised by the

social aspects of the workplace (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). With regard to a relationship with colleagues, a sense of togetherness and relatedness emerged as important in the forging of bonds in the workplace. In this study, this was not a surprising theme, since the majority of the employees share the same generational cohort.

Relationship with Colleagues

Participants cited that the “people environment can make or break a business”. They considered this to refer to how well employees get along with each other and to what extent they have trusting and authentic relationships. If relationships were not harmonious it could lead to frustration, disengagement, and eventually individuals leaving a business (Participant D).

Participants cited some of their most fulfilling experiences as those that involved working with colleagues who they considered to be more than formal and traditional colleagues in the workplace. They relished the opportunity to get to know their colleagues on a more informal basis and to appreciate them as “more than a number” (B). This allowed individuals to enjoy more harmonious and productive working relationships. This was often reinforced in an informal and relaxed working environment where employees felt that they could establish these informal relationships. Certain work events, such as off-site team-building also encouraged and nurtured these relationships.

Unsurprisingly among members of the same generational cohort there was also a sense of togetherness and identity derived from sharing similar experiences (Parry & Urwin, 2011). However, this sense of “togetherness” can arise out of more than just sharing a similar life and career stage in a workplace. By experiencing a sense of “teamness” in the shared sense of “we are all in this together” (Participant C), individuals who all share a common goal orientation or organisational purpose may also feel a bond.

Manager Relationship

The most saturated construct grouping that emerged during this study was that regarding the relationship between manager and employee. Considering the influence that a manager's actions may have on an employee's well-being, engagement, performance, and willingness to remain at a business, this was not surprising. Trust, communication, and respect emerged as some of the more prominent themes that influence other areas of the conceptual model, including autonomy and recognition.

When participants believed that they had a relationship with a manager that was built on trust, respect, and clear communication, they believed that they could perform at their best (A, C, E). These relationships were characterised by mutual respect and a lower power distance evident in flatter organisational structure. When managers trusted their employees more, they felt more empowered and more engaged in their work. Trust between managers and employees was evident in situations where managers allowed or encouraged employees more autonomy in their work. Another sign of trust was managers including employees in the decision-making process (D). Furthermore, when individuals felt that their managers were empathetic and "human", this led them to increased respect of managers. When Participant B believed that his manager saw him as "more than a number" and displayed genuine care about what was happening in his life outside of their working relationship, he felt more inclined to "do more for (his) manager".

In as much as individuals cited positive manager behaviour as one of the more significant reasons for them to remain with an employer, participants were also critical of manager behaviour that did not meet their values. They cited inconsistent and unfair treatment of employees in the workplace, and an unethical use of power as reasons for distrusting their managers. Additionally, if managers were unsympathetic to the needs of an

employee, they would consider leaving the business. Studies have shown that leadership behaviour is positively correlated with organisational culture and job satisfaction (Tsai, 2011).

THEME 5: Work Culture

The work environment in which South African millennials work emerged as the fourth theme in the study. Millennials in particular valued a work environment that was informal and empathetic. When attempting to position the work environment within existing psychological theory, it is useful to use the construct of organisational culture, since it can be argued that the way in which an employee experiences the workplace environment is indicative of the organisational culture, and thus, the two terms can be used interchangeably. Organisational culture is the shared set of values, assumptions, and beliefs about an organisation that govern behaviour; it is considered to be the personality of a company and defines how employees experience the environment (Odendaal & Roodt, 2009; Schein, 2010). The two constructs that emerged during this study indicate those aspects of organisational culture that are valued by the South African millennial.

Informal

Participants valued a work environment that was “informal and non-corporate”. This was considered to be an environment that had a relaxed atmosphere and which was characterised by less regulation in terms of dress code and a which had a flatter organisational structure (A). Participant A particularly valued the ability to form relationships with colleagues in a relaxed atmosphere where he felt he could have informal discussions without feeling “too serious”. This is characterised by a cultural norm that allows the gratification of basic drives related to enjoying life and having fun, as opposed to a strict control of social norms.

This is an environment where happiness is seen as good, fun is encouraged, and off-site events such as team-building events and informal gatherings are encouraged (Participant I). These events are considered to be rituals and artefacts of an organisational culture and collectively are indicative of the type of culture thereof (Odendaal & Roodt, 2009). Providing a different work setting in the way that furniture was arranged and the colours that were used were aspects of the physical working environment that Participant F valued as it represented an informal and fun work environment.

Empathetic

The participants valued a work environment where they felt the business respected the intersection of their work and personal lives. The participants valued a culture that was empathic towards its employees' needs, and this was evident in the company's management style and in the ways that processes and procedures catered for the "human needs" in the business. The empathetic construct can be aligned to the feminine side of the dimension that values quality of life, care, and rather than living to work than, working to live.

The participants valued businesses that included processes that "[saw] past black and white" and could adjust for exceptions based on unexpected personal circumstances (C, F, G). Participant C particularly highlighted performance management as an aspect of a process in the workplace that could drive an unempathetic culture of behaviour management. The ability to have flexibility in one's work schedule to accommodate personal life commitments was also seen as "humane" and an indication that a company's culture was geared more towards the genuine care of its employees. Other examples of how an empathetic culture was visible included flowers on an individual's desk for a special event G) and the loan of company assets, such as a vehicle, if an employee had a need (H).

THEME 6: Altruistic

The final theme that emerged regarding the contribution an employee makes is altruism and is aligned to a wider contribution to society; this has been categorised as an altruistic work value (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

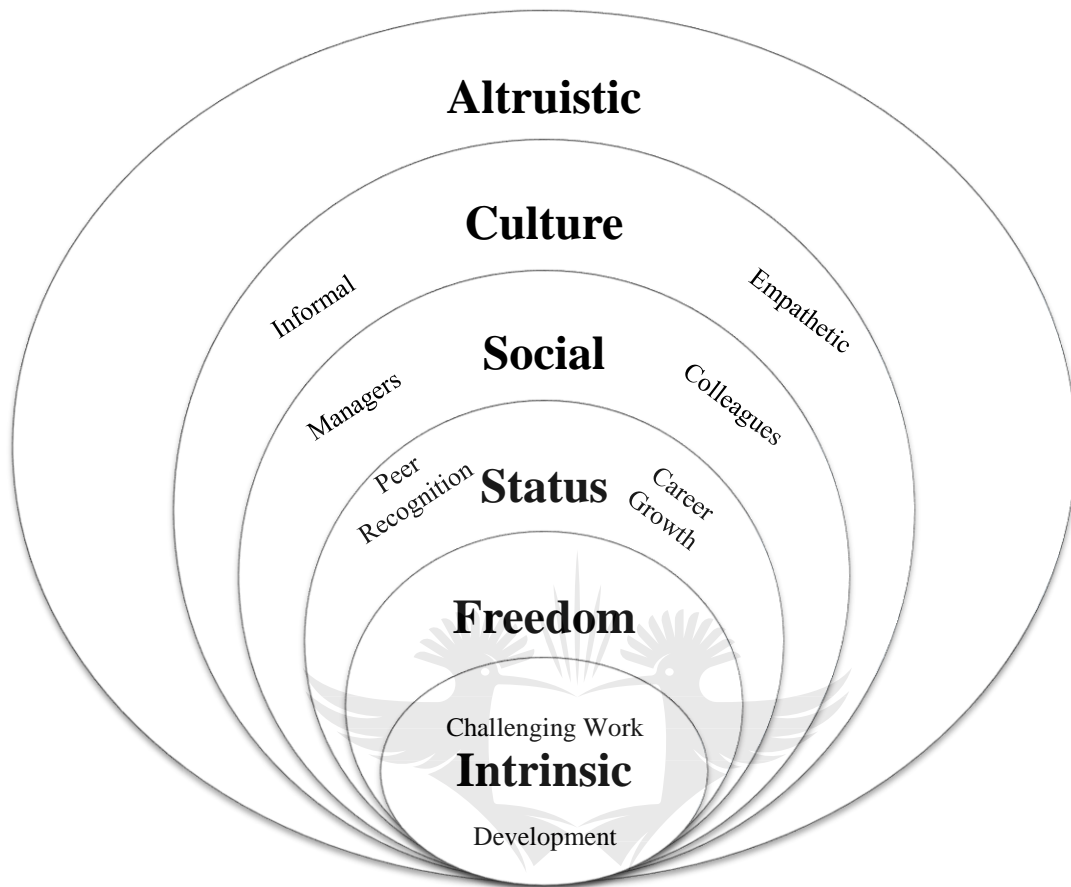
The participants were motivated by the impact that their work had on their final stakeholder/customer. They gained a sense of “instant gratification” when they were able to resolve an issue for a client and when they could observe the value of their work (B). It gave them a deep sense of satisfaction to witness the value that they added to the final customer and to the wider difference that they were making in their society and community.

4.6 Conceptual Model

In order to better make sense of the six themes that emerged from the synthesis of the constructs of each individual’s mental models a conceptual model is presented. The model represents a possible mental model of a South African millennial based on workplace values.



Figure 3: Conceptual Model of a South African Millennial Based on Workplace Values



The model refers to six distinct domains of experience for the South African millennial. The feeling of being driven by challenging work and being motivated by opportunities for development and learning is experienced internally on the first domain labelled 'Intrinsic'. Also experienced internally is the sense of autonomy or 'Freedom' that an individual may experience in their work experienced in the second domain. Millennials further value 'Status' in that they value both peer recognition and career growth. The next level indicates aspects of the 'Social' environment that a millennial values. Millennials value close relationships with their managers and colleagues within the workplace. 'Culture' emerged as the fourth element of the workplace that a millennial valued, that is an organisational culture that is both empathetic and informal. The last domain of the model

alludes to the notion that millennials may also be motivated by their wider contribution to society in their work role on an ‘Altruistic’ level.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the individual results of all 10 participants in the study and the context of the organisation was presented. The content discussed in each repertory grid interview was summarised in a presentation of the constructs that emerged during the analysis. A synthesis of these constructs to construct a shared mental model of a South African millennial’s work values was presented. To better understand the value-add of this model, further discussion is required regarding the practical implications of the findings.



CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

When interpreting the findings, it has been useful to use existing theory to better corroborate and contextualise a conceptual model for a South African millennial, based on workplace values. However, in addition to existing research, and to better make sense of the findings, it is important to discuss the influence of organisational context, personal experience, and life stage on the results of this study. An attempt to better interpret the reasoning behind certain themes is also presented.

5.1 Existing Research

It is worth mentioning that the majority of research findings were in line with existing research findings. Millennials are expected to be individuals that are motivated by the challenge of work and value the social aspects of work (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). In particular, they value career succession and the social relationships possible in a working environment (Jonck et al., 2017). Although an employee's relationship with their manager was the most significant construct and theme that emerged from this study, it has not been the most highly significant construct related to millennials in previous research (Jonck et al., 2017). However, it is possible that this theme might be more significantly attributed to the culture of the particular organisation involved in the study, rather than a generational difference.

Previous research has highlighted that a millennial is expected to be motivated by challenging work and an environment in which they can receive feedback for development (Jora & Kahn, 2014). It is therefore unsurprising that an intrinsic value emerged in this study, highlighting the motivation of work itself. This theme posits that the millennials in the study valued the challenge nature of overcoming challenges in their workplace, and were motivated by the goal of continually learning and developing themselves. One of the more significant differences in generational theory has focussed on the desire for more autonomy and freedom regarding balancing the demands between work and non-work related activities (van der Walt

et al., 2016). This theme also emerged in this study as the freedom theme in the conceptual model.

One of the traits definitive of the millennial generation has been their perceived narcissistic tendencies and desire for quick career progression (Reeves & Oh, 2008). This theme also emerged in this study, as the participants all admitted to valuing status in the work environment, realised through peer recognition and career growth. A desire for social relationships at work and a close working relationship with authority (Jonck et al., 2017) was also validated in this study and is evident in the significant theme of social relationships. This theme was mentioned the most amongst the majority of the participants, and focussed on relationships with managers and others in the workplace as a motivating factor in the work environment. Although it is not a clear theme in existing research, millennials in this study valued a working culture that prioritised empathy and an informal working culture. This theme emerged around a workplace being observed as empathetic to the participants' non-work-related commitments that might interfere with their work commitments, and is therefore in line with existing expectations of millennials valuing a balance between the two. The altruistic theme that emerged is further unsurprising because millennials are expected to be motivated by work that they find meaningful in giving back to wider society (Cogin, 2012)).

5.2 Organisational Context

As mentioned previously, all study participants were drawn from the same organisation. The organisation possessed a number of defining characteristics that contributed to the organisation's unique culture. The organisation possessed a uniquely informal culture that emphasised mentorship and a "work hard, play hard" attitude at work. Furthermore, the majority of the organisation's working population shared the same generational cohort: the millennial generation. When employees experience a high fit between organisational values and personal work values they experience high levels of engagement, and the organisation

experiences a higher rate of retention of its employees (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Thus, it can be said that this organisation possesses characteristics that may appeal to a millennial generation.

Additionally, when one compares the eventual themes that emerged from the study, it is unsurprising that they are closely aligned to the organisation's characteristics. This may be considered at first a limitation of the study, as it may be argued that this conceptual model could be considered a model of an organisational mental model and not of a generational cohort. However, this can be considered a factor that bolsters the argument of the study, since all individuals who participated in the study shared a common generation and made up the majority of the organisation. In some instances the business can be considered a millennial business because of its high millennial employee count and characteristics that are valued by its employees, who are mostly millennials.

The interplay of organisational context was also mitigated by asking all participants to draw on work experiences throughout their entire working career. This proved to be a helpful aid in the interview process, as participants often referred to negative past experiences with past employers, and were easily able to contrast these experiences with experiences within their current organisation during their repertory grid interview. This is indicative of existing research that has highlighted that employees are likely to leave an organisation if their work values are not fulfilled (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Jonck et al., 2017; Twenge et al., 2010).

5.3 Personal Experience

During the interview process it was apparent that a significant amount of constructs that emerged may have been formed as a result of past personal experience. This indicates that participants developed certain values as a result of personal experiences rather than a shared generational cohort. Considering the participants' sometimes limited working

experience base, it is difficult to ascertain whether the reason the participants valued certain constructs was due to a difference in age or a difference in personal experience. An individual who only had work experience with one employer might value different workplace values compared to someone of a similar age with a more varied work experience out of which their views were construed. Age is often assumed to be associated with life experience, but empirically there is insufficient research that has distinguished the effects of maturation and generational difference (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

It is difficult to determine whether the need for freedom or autonomy in one's work is a result of a generational difference or due to personal experience. From a generational perspective, it can be argued that individuals are able to work remotely and become more flexible in their work due to rapid technological advances, and therefore they value the ability to be flexible in their working hours (Jonck et al., 2017). This is a possibility that was not afforded to older generations due to the scant technology that enables remote work during their formative years in the workplace. However, previous personal experience of negative workplace experiences regarding strict management control could also motivate the desire for more freedom and autonomy in the workplace (Participant B).

5.4 Life Stage

Since personal constructs are continuously being redefined based on comparisons of past experience to expected future outcomes (Kelly, 1977), it is worth noting that constructs might well exist on a continuum, and that they are likely to fluctuate throughout an individual's lifetime. There is evidence to suggest that during major career stages, certain values may change over time (Costanza et al., 2012). In other words, what these individuals value now may change over time as they mature, as their careers develop, and as they enter different life stages with different drivers and responsibilities. A participant might value early leadership opportunities when starting their career, but they may value more time at home

with their families as their family commitments increase during later life stages. This is indicative of a change in values due to a change in life stage, as represented by Erikson's Life Stages Model (1980). Erikson (1980) states that in early life stages an individual is more likely to be centred on personal internal experiences that may be self-serving. Later in an individual's life they may be more centred around relationships and nurturing, as these later life stages are centred around parenthood. Near the end of an individual's working career they may value mentoring and training in the workplace as means of making a contribution, as later life stages are characterised by a sense of fulfilment and wisdom (Erikson, 1980).

Furthermore, in this sample, the need for status recognition could be based on the need to feel secure and validated early on in a career when the employee has little experience or exposure and may feel less secure. This need may diminish later in life, once the employee has amassed more experience and knowledge in the working environment, and they may feel more secure as a result. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the need for status, as characterised by rapid career growth, is valued because of a generational difference, or because of what is valued during the early stages of a career. It would be useful to measure what an older generation values at a similar career stage in order to determine these effects, or to measure this workplace value throughout an individual's lifetime.

5.5 Global Generation

It is difficult to determine to what extent the values that emerged are based on a shared experience of the world (generational cohort), personal work experiences, or life stage. Despite these shortcomings, from this study, there is still evidence to suggest that a shared mental model exists. Furthermore, this mental model is in line with existing research from other countries regarding the millennial generation. This answers one of the research objectives to the extent that if existing research was validated by this study, there is evidence

to suggest that a global generation does indeed exist, or at least that millennials in this study have had a shared experience of world events with other millennials in other countries.

One of the central arguments to support this assertion centres around the use of technology and the premise that millennials are the first global generation (Bresman, 2015). Generational theory rests on the premise that a group of people possess a shared experience of significant world events that shape their worldview or mental model (Senge, et al., 1994; Strauss & Howe, 1991). It is argued that millennials are the most connected generation in the workplace due to globalisation and the influence of technology. This is to say that millennials possess a larger degree of shared experiences of world events due to the wider degree of access to information through channels such as mobile communication, the media, and the internet, which were not available to previous generations (Bresman, 2015). From this perspective, it is useful to attempt to unpack some of the key experiences that may have shaped the themes that emerged as part of the mental model. This might provide a better insight into determining the other effects of individuals' differences regarding workplace values.

5.6 Uncertain Economic Outlook

Since the generation that preceded millennials (Generation X), the economic outlook regarding career stability has decreased over the years, impacting millennials more so than older generations (Jonck et al., 2017). This means that it is necessary for millennials to remain employable and retain skills that can be used at various organisations. As a result, millennials have been known to change organisations often in an attempt to find economic stability in uncertain times, a characteristic that older generations reject in favour of long service as a result of the value that was formed when they started their careers in relatively economically stable times in world history (Glass, 2007). Thus, it is unsurprising that millennials are motivated by the ability to be challenged and learn new skills in the

workplace through the process of work. When millennials feel that they are no longer growing and that they are not developing new skills or being stretched they are likely to leave that place of employment. By being able to develop and challenge themselves, individuals are able to learn new skills and competencies that make them more marketable in the workplace. This uncertainty could also influence the quest for status that emerged out of the study. The quest for status was often closely linked to self-esteem and self-confidence, and this could be attributed to establishing a sense of stability during uncertain times.

5.7 Humanitarianism

There is a distinct overall theme of humanitarianism or a promotion of human welfare throughout some of the themes in the model. On a social level, millennials value being able to have informal and authentic relationships with both their managers and fellow colleagues. They value these relationships as part of the human side of the business. Furthermore, they value a culture within a business that promotes human welfare and feels more authentic and informal. They are critical of organisations that do not take into account the general welfare of their employees. This drive for humanitarianism also translates into the necessity of being driven by altruistic values and of being driven to make a contribution at work that actually fosters change in the wider society and ultimately benefits all stakeholders.

5.8 Technology

Technology has been advantageous and disadvantageous to the millennial in the modern workforce. As previously mentioned, technology has enabled millennials to be more connected and integrated into wider society. It has also allowed a more boundless integration of work and life in the modern workplace due to the possibility of working from any location and at any time. However, it can be argued that because there is less of a clear distinction

between personal life and work life, that there is a drive for more freedom or autonomy within the workplace, as technology has enabled this possibility.

5.9 Research Question

In answering the research question, it is clear that a conceptual model exists for the mental model of South African millennials based on workplace values. This model is based on six themes or domains that are determined by how a millennial experiences work. If millennials fulfil these domains in their experience of work, they will experience higher degrees of engagement and performance, and they are more likely to seek retention by the organisation. This can be consolidated into the domains of how a South African millennial:

- is motivated by the challenge of work (intrinsic);
- feels that they are autonomous in their work (freedom);
- possesses opportunities for acknowledged early career growth (status);
- are able to have genuine relationships with both their managers and colleagues (social);
- works in an environment that is informal and promotes human welfare (culture); and
- can witness how their work contributions make a difference to wider stakeholders and society (altruistic).

In answering the the research objectives, existing research was validated in the South African context by the output of this study. Furthermore, a model has been created to better inform talent management practices.

5.10 Conclusion

In this chapter a link between existing research and the outcomes of this study has been provided. A discussion regarding the influence of organisational culture, personal experience, and life stage on values that emerged during the study was presented. Possible

reasons that have contributed to the emergence of themes due to generational differences were stated. Finally the research question of the study was answered via a summary of the conceptual model that has been the central output of this study in relation to the two research objectives.



CHAPTER 6: Contributions and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the study is concluded by means of a summary of the research undertaken and findings. The practical contributions of the findings of this research are elaborated upon and reference is made to key stakeholder groups for whom the findings are most relevant. The chapter concludes with the limitations relevant to this study, areas for future research, and final thoughts.

6.2 Summary

In Chapter 1 my personal interest in the research area was described and set the contextual background to the problem statement. Reference was made to the growing impetus of research focus regarding the imminent majority general cohort of the workplace, i.e. millennials, and the need for further empirical research regarding the existence of generational differences within a South African context was highlighted. The research question, objectives, and the key motivation for the study were stated. The study aimed to create a mental model of a South African millennial in order to both validate existing research and to inform talent management practices. The scope of the study was set out and the structure describing how the remainder of research would be undertaken was presented.

In **Chapter 2** the key psychological phenomena relevant to the study were defined and detailed and included generational difference (Mannhiem, 1952), generatioanl cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1991), workplace values (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), personal construct theory (Kelly, 1977), and mental models (Twenge et al., 2010). Previous research findings were identified as was the paucity of qualitative research findings that motivated this study.

In **Chapter 3** the research design of the study was presented. I presented my philosophical assumptions that framed my role as the researcher in the study and the process

undertaken to gather and analyse the data used in the study. The study was framed as a qualitative study and exploratory in nature. Sampling and best practice methods of the chosen research technique and the repertory grid interview (Fransella et al., 2004) were mentioned and the reliability and validity of the data was discussed. The criteria for quality of the data were also described and the steps taken to ensure that the study maintained ethical considerations were mentioned.

In **Chapter 4** the findings of each participant were presented, and a consolidated discussion of shared themes was posited. This included a coded integration of shared constructs via a thematic analysis, as presented in Addendum A, the output of which was a conceptual model of a South African millennial based on workplace values.

In **Chapter 5** points that were relevant to the interpretation of the findings were discussed and included the role of organisational context, personal experience, and life stage. A mental model that validated existing research was created and provided input for future talent management practices. Possible influences that underpinned the central themes that emerged were discussed, and a consolidated answer to the research question was presented. **Chapter 6** covers the final contributions and the study's conclusion.

6.3 Contributions of Research

6.3.1 Theoretical contribution

As far as it was possible to determine at the time of the study no exploratory study in the South African context had been completed to explore generational differences and workplace values of the millennial generation. For the most part, generational differences and workplace values have been assumed, despite empirical evidence to suggest that this relationship could be argued as questionable in respect of other possible effects, such as career stage and maturation. Furthermore, if generational workplace values were assumed to

exist, they were assumed to be shared with generational cohorts outside of the South African context, without empirical evidence to support this assumption. To this end, this research study makes a humble theoretical contribution by presenting workplace values from a millennial perspective that have been empirically researched and presented from within a South African context.

6.3.2 Practical contribution

The study revealed practical considerations that may be applied in the workplace related to both the understanding of workplace values and what these specific findings may mean for industry in the South African context. The study promotes the need for a more rigorous understanding of workplace values and argues that to link workplace values to a generational understanding of behaviour may be ineffective in some instances. The study also provides practical considerations for how interested stakeholders could structure the workplace environment and manage the workforce to cater for millennials' workplace values. This could have an effect on the engagement, productivity, and retention of the largest segment of the South African workforce, i.e. the millennials.

6.3.3 Methodological contribution

Considering a contribution to the field of methodology, this study reinforces the robustness of the repertory grid interview technique to explore personal constructs. It proved to be the best technique for the chosen research question because it facilitated accurate extraction and comparison of workplace experiences as a means to delineate personal constructs and values regarding workplace values.

6.4 Recommendations for Practice

There are a number of recommendations for practice for stakeholders that stand to benefit from understanding a millennial mental model. As mentioned, when workplace values

are fulfilled in a work setting, an individual is expected to possess higher levels of engagement, perform at a higher level, and remain within the business for longer periods of time. For leaders in an organisation, it is important to fulfil these values for that portion of the workforce that is soon to be the majority of the workforce population. This study provides recommendations for how leaders within organisations can shape their workplace environment and apply talent management strategies. For members of the millennial generation, the findings of the study could provide insight into their own value drivers, and could assist them to seek out organisations that provide the values that they seek to provide fulfilment in the workplace.

6.4.1 Experience of work roles

How millennials experience their work is a major contribution to practical application within industry. If leaders intend to engage and retain millennials they should ensure that within their organisations they structure roles that are challenging and motivate individuals to focus on learning and self-development. This may be a challenge at times when individuals increase their competence, but this could encourage leaders to continuously redevelop roles or provide side-projects that stretch and engage the mind of the millennial in the workplace.

There is evidence to suggest that millennials perform best when they experience a high degree of autonomy in a role. To experience autonomy in a role may be related to a business's wider organisational culture and may be influenced by the direct line manager's management style. However, leaders are recommended to create roles and chains of command that rely on less control and more autonomy in the millennial's quest to enjoy flexible working hours and to have the freedom to have control their work output o where possible.

As evidenced in the findings of this study, millennials will also respond well if they are able to feel that their work role contributions have an impact on the wider society and associated stakeholders. Leaders may be able to emphasise this through various organisational initiatives such as communication strategies that emphasise this altruistic contribution, and events that bring together millennials and wider stakeholders.

6.4.2 Career management

To engage a millennial, it is recommended that implemented career management strategies cater for rapid career growth and associated status symbols linked to peer recognition. This may be difficult at times due to the difference in generational values within the workplace and existing career management practices related to the status quo. However, rapid career growth can also be acknowledged by peer recognition, benefits such as monetary allowances, and company benefits such as vacations days. In this way, leaders are able to continually motivate millennials without upsetting the status quo regarding traditional career management related to job titles and career advancement. Millennials also consider additional responsibilities within a role as a form of career advancement.

6.4.3 Relationships at work

The findings revealed that how millennials experienced their social relationships within the workplace was a major driver in how they valued their workplace experiences. They valued relationships that were informal, genuine, and sincere. Leaders play an instrumental role in creating an environment where these kinds of relationships can be fostered. Having regular “check-in” meetings with subordinates and focussing on an employee’s entire wellbeing and not only focussing on employee output could better enhance workplace relationships. Furthermore, organisational initiatives such as team-building and off-site meetings should be encouraged to allow opportunities for both managers and

colleagues to get to know each other better outside of their work environment. Employee wellness programmes focussing on fostering relationships should also be encouraged, such as sporting events and charity days.

6.4.4 Organisational culture

How an employee experiences their role, their career, and relationships at work are often influenced by, and are indicative of, organisational culture. Thus, an organisational culture that is aligned to the values displayed in the conceptual model will likely motivate and retain millennials to a significant extent. This includes a culture that respects the balance between work and non-work related activities, possesses a flat organisational structure, and allows employees to have autonomy and control regarding their work day. This could include developing company events that are inclusive and allow family members to attend.

6.5 Study Limitations

Although this study provides useful qualitative information, the generalisability of results will always be comprised by the small sample size. Thus, it is difficult to generalise these results to a wider population group. The fact that the sample was drawn from employees at a single company might be a further limitation. Therefore, it is difficult to state whether a shared mental model was created due to generational membership, or from organisational membership.

One of the possible criticisms of this study could be the biases and prejudices I may have brought to the study as a researcher. This is inherent in any qualitative study where the researcher is used as the tool to gain a more interpretative and subjective understanding of the meanings behind phenomena (Creswell, 2014). As the researcher, I fall into the millennial generation currently under investigation in this study. During the process of data collection and analysis, I made an exerted effort to reserve any preconceived assumptions and

judgements I may have regarding the study, and I endeavoured to do this by using various qualitative research techniques, such as a field notes, observations, and keeping a research diary (Creswell, 2014).

6.6 Areas for Further Research

As mentioned throughout the study, it is difficult to determine the other effects that may be behind differences in workplace values. To investigate this aspect, it would be necessary to investigate workplace values throughout an individual's career and life stages in a longitudinal study. Further research should also consider personality as a source of individual difference.

It would also be worthwhile investigating the reasoning behind the formation of individual difference in values, based on world events. It is by the dates of these events that generational cohorts have been defined, but it is possible that according to an individual's country of origin, certain events may be more important to some individuals than others. For example, the end of Apartheid may be more influential to a South African's development of values in comparison to historical events that would be influential for an individual raised in China. Although the influence of technology and uncertain economic outcomes are considered to be important influencers in the formation of millennial workplace values, it might be interesting to investigate these influences on other generational behaviours and determine whether or not culture affects them.

6.7 Final Thoughts

It is relatively expected for generations to criticise previous generations by virtue of the belief that previous generations "had it easier" because of advances in technology, the economy, and society. This is often an unhelpful notion used to further define an in-group and an out-group. Although useful for dinner conversation and as a tool for reflection for

groups of varying ages, to base entire talent management practices on this concept without further empirical research is ill advised. For any source of individual difference to be used to determine key decisions in talent management, their empirical significance should be determined and validated. There is also a need to possibly develop a separate set of generational cohort dates for a South African population, based on the country's unique history.

6.8 Conclusion

This study was motivated by a career decision that changed the relationship I had with my father. I sought to provide an empirical lens to a popular area of talent management that seemed to provide insight into the different worldviews that were not shared by either myself or him. In reviewing literature, I provided a more discerning eye whereby generational differences could be tested and verified, and this motivated the need for more rigorous research to be undertaken in general in terms of talent management practices. Although it seems that South African millennials do indeed possess similar worldviews to other millennials, it is still not certain how much of this is a result of generational membership. Although my father and I are truly different people and we hold different worldviews, it is our shared value system that supersedes these differences and enables our close relationship.

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Addendum A – Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Masters Industrial Psychology Programme

Mental Model of the Millennial Generation: A South African Sample

I hereby confirm that my participation in the above mentioned study is voluntary and I confirm that:

- I have been informed of and understand the purpose of the study
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- I understand that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice
- The information when used will be anonymous and confidential
- I understand that the information collected will be used in partial fulfilment of a master's degree, including an article and future publications
- My identity and participation in this study will be kept confidential at all times

Signature of Participant: **Date:**

I confirm that I have explained to the participant the purpose and procedures of the study to which he/she has agreed to participate and that he/she has answered all the above questions – thereby providing informed consent to participate in this research project/ study.

Researcher **Date**