

## CHAPTER 1

### 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

#### 1.1 TITLE

The use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees

#### 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Stress is a reality that every person lives with. It has an effect on almost every aspect of a person's life. Hardworking, dedicated executives and corporate employees must keep up with the pace that is expected of them. This causes a great amount of stress and stress in the workplace is one of the greatest issues with which organisations need to cope.

There is a growing need for corporate employees to be able to manage their stress levels and use stress to their own and to the organisation's advantage:

***It has been estimated that the damage to the workplace and to the worker costs approximately 16.3 billion dollars annually (Cherbosque, 1999:67).***

Organisations are losing money because of employees who are not able to manage their stress levels. Employees often experience stress because of an excessive workload, an expected work pace, difficult work schedules, role conflict, uncertainty regarding career

security, poor interpersonal relationships and unpleasant working conditions – to name but a few. This stress manifests in conflict, depression, absenteeism, headaches, hypertension, alcoholism, drug abuse and other conditions. The organisation does not only lose money by paying the medical bills, but there is also a loss of productivity. No organisation can afford to ignore the issue of stress in the workplace without suffering the consequences.

The purpose of this stress management programme is to create greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their lives and to indicate to them how to go about managing stress to their advantage. The play therapy mediums will be used to aid the de-stressing of the corporate employees and to facilitate greater awareness regarding the effects of stress on their lives. Corporate employees need to be made aware of the fact that stress can be positive. This awareness starts from within each person. Corporate employees must become aware of what causes stress in their lives, what the effect of stress is on their bodies and health, the role stress plays in their job performance and how stress affects their relationships with significant others. As soon as the corporate employees become aware of the effect that stress has on their lives, they can consciously start making changes to ensure more effective stress management in the future. These individuals will then be able to accept responsibility for the fact that they are the programmers of their own lives and they cannot blame external factors for where they are and how they are reacting to whatever is happening in their lives.

### 1.3 MOTIVATION

It has become apparent to the researcher that stress within the workplace is creating a challenge for the employees as well as the organisation. Ray & Miller (1991:506) explain it as follows:

***Stress in the work place is unavoidable but its effects are often deleterious both to the stressed individual and the organisation. At the individual level the effects may include physical and psychological problems, drug and alcohol abuse and low morale. At organisational level, low productivity and absenteeism are among the costly results.***

Employee Assistance Programmes (hereafter EAP) address the general wellness of employees, which include stress management. In South Africa much emphasis is placed on HIV/Aids education and training, which is definitely a concern, but it leaves very few resources for other areas of employee well-being. A further concern regarding the EAP is that many companies consider the EAP as a “nice to have” and not as a necessity in working towards a healthy working environment. Harper (1999:22) explains it as follows:

***The position of the EAP's as primarily a part of social responsibility means that in times of cutbacks, EAP's have short-sightedly often been seen as a convenience rather than an integral part of business.***

In South Africa there are not enough EAP's or human resources within organisations to address the issue of stress and the probable effects on employees and, therefore, on the

organisation. This could have a negative impact on the productivity of the employees in the organisations.

The stress management training will be conducted within a company where there is an EAP in place, but the company does not have the resources to undertake the training of employees in a stress management programme. This research study will enable the organisation to become aware of the stress that employees are experiencing. The organisation will take action with regard to stress management by allowing employees to partake in this research study.

Stress can be to the advantage of the employees and the organisation for which they work. If people do not experience stress they are passive and bored. People need a sense of purpose and that often coincides with stressful events. Stress has a unique effect on different people. Some researchers argue that stress is very negative for the employee. Grobler & Hiemstra (1998:19) describe it as follows:

***An attitude of: if the job is too stressful find another, indicates a short-sightedness and an inability on the part of the doctor to comprehend fully the extent of the problem, ....***

On the other hand some feel stress is necessary for the employee to perform optimally. Loehr (1997:415) feels that stress could be a driving force in the lives of employees:

***Stress of all kinds - physical, mental and emotional - is good for you. Stress could be the energy that drives the person to better performance.***

It is important for corporate employees to become aware of the stress triggers in their lives and whether the stress is to their advantage or to their detriment.

Stress is a part of life and will not disappear, so it is to the benefit of employees to manage stress in their lives rather than to try and get away from it. Employees within a corporate environment are exposed to stress every day. Organisations expect performance to ensure rewards. For this reason employees need to become aware of what causes stress in their lives and what their response is to stress.

***Success was always linked to the same two things – stress exposure and stress response (Loehr 1997:4).***

The greater the awareness, the more employees can start working towards being in control of their own lives. Corporate employees can use stress to their advantage. In the researcher's experience the more demands that are made on individuals, the less they feel in control and they therefore experience negative stress which is to their detriment. With this stress management programme each individual will have the opportunity to become aware of the stress triggers in his/her life and by living according to their own stress management programme they will be able to regain control of their lives.

During this research the corporate employee's awareness will be facilitated by means of the Gestalt Theory as a frame of reference. According to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:113) the Gestalt Theory promotes individual awareness:

***The central goal in Gestalt therapy is the deepening of awareness, which promotes a sense of living fully in the here and now.***

The researcher will make use of play therapy mediums (such as clay, drawings, sensory activities and relaxation techniques) to ensure an active learning environment which will enhance awareness. The stress management programmes that are available on the market tend to be traditional and very little or no participation is expected from the respondents. These stress management programmes consist of a variety of educational and therapy groups or one-on-one counselling sessions (Kendall, <http://www.work4food.com.playforlife/problem.html>). The researcher is of the opinion that adults can enjoy the learning experience and make it worthwhile by including creative mediums in the programme. Adults can experience learning positively when it is combined with creative experiences.

Stress management can be a fun experience. In communicating with corporate employees it has become obvious that there are few enjoyable activities in their daily lives because work and its demands take up too much time. If corporate employees can incorporate more enjoyable and relaxing activities in their daily lives, more effective stress management will most probably be the result. This stress management programme will aim at enabling corporate employees to become aware of the effects of stress on their lives and facilitate the realisation that stress management begins with taking control and finding ways to relax and make life enjoyable.

In the past, the researcher has enjoyed working in the corporate environment and has found the reactions of the adults towards the play therapy mediums of great interest. This research grants the opportunity to investigate the effects of the play therapy mediums on adults who undergo a stress management programme.

## 1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Stress in the workplace is a reality. If it is left unattended, the impact could be to the detriment of the employee as well as the company. Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (2001:191) state the following regarding stress in the work place:

***One traditional school of thought is summed up by the notion that companies should basically ignore stress. Another school of thought suggests that companies should avoid offering stress management programmes to employees, for fear of law suits***

In reality the organisations who do not offer stress management programmes usually realise their mistake at a later stage when productivity is lost in employees who cannot cope with the stress in their lives. Hellriegel, *et al.* (2001:191), explain it as follows:

***Work-related stress is not a trivial concern and organisations that ignore the impact of stress on employees and productivity run far greater risks than companies that attempt to manage the impact of stress on employees effectively.***

It will be to the advantage of an organisation to involve the employees in a stress management programme. A stress management programme can address the stress that employees are experiencing and it can enable them to use stress to their advantage and, therefore, to the advantage of the organisation.

The question of how “stress” should be defined has been asked many times. There are many different definitions for stress. Girdano, Everly and Dusek (1993:7) describe stress

as being ***the body reacting to pressure***. The effect that stress has on the human being, physically, emotionally and psychologically can exhaust the body to the extent of illness or malfunction. Stress is negative when the person feels he/she cannot cope anymore, when illness within the body occurs as a result of stress or when behavioural problems materialise (Girdano, Everly and Dusek, 1993:7). Corporate employees who experience the above mentioned symptoms will most probably cost the company in productivity and/or medical accounts.

Every person reacts to stress in a unique way. In South Africa the stress that corporate employees experience is also exacerbated by the transformation process that the country is still experiencing. Affirmative action and retrenchments occur frequently and few people are assured of job safety. According to Grobler and Hiemstra (1998:19-20), about half of the working population in South Africa are unhappy in their jobs. Approximately 75% of the people who consult psychiatrists are experiencing problems that originate from a lack of job satisfaction and an inability to relax.

Stress is a reality within the workplace that affects companies to the extent that they lose large amounts of money because their employees develop stress-related problems. According to Van den Bergh (2000:5) a survey that was done by Employee Assistance Professionals in South Africa, which indicated that the most prevalent problems in the work place are:

- Family issues (25%)
- Stress (23%)
- Depression (21%)
- Alcoholism (14%)
- Job conflict (9%)
- Drug abuse (2%)

Therefore, stress is a major factor in the work place and many stress-related problems such as depression, alcoholism and job-conflict also rate very high among the referrals to the EAPs.

This research is aimed at addressing the stress-related corporate environment in South Africa. Greater awareness amongst corporate employees will motivate and enable the employees to be more in control of their lives and to create stress management programmes that will suit their needs. The Gestalt Theory will be utilised as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory supports the notion of awareness as a tool that can be used by a person to be in control of his/her life. Passons (1975:21) states the following regarding the Gestalt Theory:

***Gestalt therapy uses as a tool, awareness. Now, awareness is the capacity to focus, to attend. If I am unaware of what I am doing, I am not responsible for what I am doing***

## **1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.5.1 Aim**

To use play therapy mediums in a stress management programme to enable corporate employees to become aware of and to manage their stress levels.

## 1.5.2 Objectives

- To conduct a literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees.
- To design a stress management programme using play therapy mediums to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.
- To implement a stress management programme that will enable employees to manage their stress levels more effectively.
- To evaluate a stress management programme for corporate employees.
- To formulate conclusions and recommendations which will be based on the empirical findings obtained from the study.

## 1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is the question that needs to be answered by the proposed research study. According to Grinnell (1988:436-437), there are a few aspects that need to be considered when writing a research question:

- ***A general question may not always precisely identify the variables which are the subject of the study.***
- ***The general research question or specific hypotheses flow from prior components of the proposal.***
- ***Our questions and components must also follow logically from the perspective and definitions provided by the literature review and conceptual framework.***

By taking these aspects into consideration the research question can be formulated as follows:

*Will the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees have a positive effect on their stress levels?*

## **1.7 HYPOTHESIS**

The stating of an hypothesis and the testing thereof is an important part of the research process. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:37), state the following regarding the hypothesis:

***Problems are questions about relations among variables and hypothesis are tentative concrete testable answers to such problems.***

The hypothesis is, therefore, the suggested answer to the problem (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:37).

Babbie (1992:55) states that the hypotheses inform the participants of what is to be expected of the study:

***...hypotheses are specified expectations about empirical reality, derived from propositions.***

The following hypotheses are made, guided by the expectations regarding the proposed research study.

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Will be aware of what stress is.
- Will become aware of the effect of stress on their lives.
- Will become aware of what causes stress in their lives.
- Will be able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release.
- Will be able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives.
- Will be able to take responsibility for their lifestyle.
- Will be able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives.
- Will be able to compile a personal stress management programme for themselves.
- Will be more productive and motivated to the benefit of the organisation.

## 1.8 RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two main research approaches that the researcher can adapt during the research study. This distinction lies between the qualitative and quantitative research methods:

***We can use quantitative methods to count and correlate social and psychological phenomena. Likewise, we can use qualitative research methods to seek the essential character of these social and psychological phenomena. Both methods attempt to describe and explain social reality (Epstein, 1988:185).***

The researcher is of the opinion that both research methods can make a positive

contribution to the research process. It is difficult to differentiate which research approach would be more appropriate for the research study that is to be undertaken. Schurinck (1998:241-243) mentions that the qualitative as well as the quantitative approaches have aspects that the researcher can make use of for the successful implementation of a study:

***The main aim of the quantitative approach is to measure the social world objectively, to test hypothesis and to predict and control human behaviour. The qualitative approach is more interpretive and holistic in nature with its main aim to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life situations.***

The researcher is of the opinion that this research will be completed more successfully if some aspects of the qualitative research approach and some aspects of quantitative research approach are incorporated. The researcher agrees with Mouton and Marais (in De Vos, 2002:364) who state that a combination of the two mentioned approaches gives the researcher a fuller picture of the subject being researched:

***That the phenomena that are being investigated in the social sciences are so enmeshed that a single approach most certainly cannot succeed in encompassing human beings in their full complexity. It would, therefore, be futile to behave as though one approach should be fully accepted and another entirely rejected.***

Quantitative research will be used during this study but for the sake of a more comprehensive study, some aspects of qualitative research will be incorporated.

With regard to the quantitative approach, the respondents will complete questionnaires

before and after they have undergone the stress management programme. The questionnaires will give an indication of the stress levels that the respondents were experiencing before the stress management programme and what the effect of the stress management programme was on the respondents' stress levels. These results will be analysed statistically to ascertain the impact of the stress management programme on each individual. The respondents will also be asked to complete a checklist at the commencement of the stress management programme which they will make use of during the compilation of their own stress management programmes. The checklist will not be submitted to the researcher for analysis, but will remain the property of the respondents. In this regard a quantitative approach will be followed.

Qualitative data will also be gathered throughout the research. The researcher will make use of a semi-structured interview schedule to conduct individual interviews with each of the respondents who will take part in the study. This will enable the researcher to become aware of the participants' current knowledge concerning stress and expectations regarding the stress management programme and to draw some conclusions with regard to the effect of the training on the respondents.

## **1.9 TYPE OF RESEARCH**

### **1.9.1 Applied Research**

The type of research that is done in a study can be classified broadly as basic (also called pure) research or applied research (Bailey, 1994:24). Applied research is when social work research sets out to solve problems in social welfare and basic or pure research attempts *to advance knowledge just for knowledge sake* (Rubin & Babbie, 1993:99). Basic research is if the only interest that the researcher has is to

add to the knowledge base of social work – therefore to gather information that will be added to existing information (De Vos, 1998:69). Applied research can be defined as knowledge development, knowledge utilisation and/or intervention design and development (De Vos, 1998:69 & 70).

Bailey (1994:24) draws the reader's attention to the fact that applied research and basic research are not always mutually exclusive and at times basic research would, for instance, include some practical aspects. In essence, applied research will be utilised during this study. Applied research is directed towards providing possible solutions to problems that exist. This is part of knowledge development (De Vos, 1998:69). For the purpose of this study a stress management programme will be developed that will be utilised by corporate employees with the purpose of relieving and managing their stress levels, to the advantage of the individual as well as the company.

### **1.9.2 Intervention Research**

This study will also include an aspect of intervention research which is described by Schilling (in De Vos, 2002:396) as follows:

***An intervention is an action undertaken by a social worker or other helping agent, usually in concert with a client or other affected party, to enhance or maintain the functioning and well-being of an individual, family, group, community or population.***

A stress management programme will be developed to be introduced to a group of employees from a corporate environment. After the completion of the programme, a

post-test will be done and the pre-and post-test scores will be compared to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. The proposed research will follow the process of intervention research (see paragraph 1.10).

## 1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is the guideline according to which the research will take place. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:67) state that the research design is carefully tailored to the exact needs of the researcher and that the research design is part of the planning of any scientific research project from beginning to end.

***A research design is any specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to test specific hypothesis under given conditions (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:65).***

The researcher is of the opinion that the research design guides the researcher throughout the course of the research. Grinnell and Stothers (1988:219) explain it as follows:

***A research design is a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study, from the conceptualisation of the problem right to the dissemination of the findings.***

The research design that will be used for this study is the quasi-experimental design and more specifically the one-group pre-test/post-test design. According to Bailey (1994:224), this design includes the following steps:

- Select subjects

- Select experimental environment
- Pre-test
- Administer experimental stimulus
- Post-test

With the quasi-experimental design, the pre-test results will be compared to the post-test results (Fouche & De Vos, 2002:144). During this study, a group of corporate employees will be selected, they will be asked to complete a pre-test regarding their stress levels and their stress management skills, whereafter they will undergo stress management training. Thereafter, they will complete the same test as the pre-test. This will be to ascertain the effect of the stress management programme on their stress levels and stress management skills.

## **1.11 RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND STRATEGY**

The research procedure suggested by Rothman and Thomas (1994:386) is the Design and Development Model. The procedure is as follows:

- **Problem analysis**
  - Identify and involve clients
  - Gaining entry and co-operation from all involved
  - Identify concerns of the population
  - Analyse concerns
  - Setting goals and objectives
- **Information gathering and synthesis**
  - Use existing information sources

- Study natural examples
- Identify functional elements of successful models
  
- **Research design**
  - Designing a system
  - Specifying procedural elements of the intervention
  
- **Early development and pilot testing**
  - Developing a preliminary intervention
  - Conducting a pilot test
  - Applying design criteria to the intervention concept
  
- **Evaluation and advanced development**
  - Selecting an experimental design
  - Collecting and analysing data
  - Replicating the intervention under field conditions
  - Refining the intervention.

In this study the Design and Development Model will be incorporated into the combination of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. It will be used as a guideline for the research procedure specifically in terms of the development of the stress management programme, the pilot study, the implementation and the evaluation of the programme.

#### **1.11.1 Data Collection**

Data collection methods are described by various authors in great detail (compare De Vos, 2002; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995; Grinnell, 1988 & Babbie, 1992). Data

collection in qualitative research basically consists of the following methods:

- Interviews.
- Documentation.
- Visual imagery.
- Observation.

The quantitative approach mainly makes use of:

- Questionnaires.
- Checklists.
- Indexes.
- Scales.

(De Vos, 1998:89).

The qualitative data collection methods that will be used in this study are mainly:

- **Individual interviewing**

In qualitative research interviewing is probably the most prominent method of data collection (Greeff, 2002:292). According to Bergum in Greeff (2002:292), an interview refers to a discussion and it includes the attitude of interaction. Schurinck (1998:298) defines the interview as ***a social interaction between equals in order to obtain research relevant information.***

This means that the researcher has the responsibility to involve the interviewee in the conversation and whilst doing so, gather information that is relevant to the study.

By using a semi structured interview schedule, an individual interview will be conducted with each of the respondents in this study. The purpose of these interviews will be to enlighten the respondents regarding the research study and to explore the attitudes, needs and expectations of all the respondents regarding stress in the workplace. This will be used as background information for the stress management programme.

The following themes will be addressed during the interviews:

- **Defining stress**

- What is stress?
- Is stress positive or negative?

- **Causes of stress in the life of an employee**

- What causes stress in your life?
- Do you experience stress within your working environment? Explain.
- What causes stress in your home life?

- **The effects of stress physically, emotionally and psychologically**

- How do you experience stress physically, emotionally and psychologically?
- If you do, how does it affect your life?

- **The use of stress management techniques.**

- What do you do to manage your stress levels?
- Do you think you can improve on your stress management techniques?

In terms of the quantitative research the focus will be on the following data collection methods:

- **Questionnaires**

The questionnaire is an essential part of this study as it makes up the pre and post-test that will be completed by the respondents before and after exposure to the stress management programme. A questionnaire can be defined as follows:

***A questionnaire is a set of questions on a form that is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project (New Dictionary of Social Work, 1995:51).***

There are different types of questionnaires that can be applied in various ways:

- Mailed questionnaires.
- Telephonic questionnaires.
- Personal questionnaires.
- Questionnaires delivered by hand.
- Group administered questionnaires (Delpont, 2002:172-174).

Group administered questionnaires will be used for the purpose of this study. All the respondents will be together throughout the duration of the stress management programme and a suitable venue will not be a problem. The researcher will be available to give instructions and clarify uncertainties that may occur.

It must be noted that the construction of a questionnaire must be done systematically and the appropriate questions must be included. According to Bailey

(1994:108), the relevance of the questions is important for the successful use of the questionnaire:

***...the key word in questionnaire construction is relevance. The questions that are to be asked must be relevant to the goals of the study and to the individual respondent that will be taking part in the study.***

According to Mouton (2001:103 & 104) some common errors may occur in the construction of questionnaires such:

- No piloting or pre-testing is done.
- Words are undefined, vague, or assume too much about the respondents.
- Double-barrelled questions.
- The order or the sequence of the question may affect the response.
- Leading questions.
- Negatively phrased questions.
- Poor and confusing layout of questionnaire.
- Instruments that are too long.
- Sensitive and threatening questionnaires.
- Avoid yes/no questionnaires.

The questionnaire that will be used for this research study has been selected from published literature. The student did not develop a questionnaire because there are many questionnaires regarding stress on the market. The questionnaire is appropriate because it is short (which is helpful because the employees working in the corporate environment do not have a lot of time to spare to complete long questionnaires) and yet it addresses the important aspects of stress management.

The questionnaire will be completed in a pilot study before the commencement of the research.

- **Checklist**

Delpont (2002:184) describes a checklist as a type of questionnaire as follows:

***A checklist is a certain type of questionnaire consisting of a series of items. The researcher can develop a checklist for the research study or he/she can make use of an existing checklist. The respondent will then be requested to indicate on the checklist, which items are most applicable to him.***

During this study each of the respondents will be asked to complete a checklist during the first session of the programme. The researcher is of the opinion that the checklist is ideal at this stage of the programme because it is short and uncomplicated, therefore not time-consuming. The checklist will serve the purpose of giving an indication of the causes of stress in the lives of the corporate employees.

## **1.12 PILOT STUDY**

It is essential that the researcher gather background knowledge regarding the research problem before the research is initiated. Strydom (1998:178) explains it as follows:

***The pilot study is one way in which the prospective researcher can orientate himself to the project he has in mind.***

The pilot study forms an important part of the research that will follow and is described by Strydom (2002:211) as follows:

***The pilot study can be viewed as the dress rehearsal of the main investigation.***

The pilot study can include the following: literature study, consultation with experts, feasibility of the study, testing of questionnaires and measuring instruments.

### **1.12.1 Literature Study**

A literature study enables the researcher to be informed regarding research that has been done in the past and where the need for research lies in the future. According to Babbie (1992:110), the researcher needs to ask: "What have others said about this topic? What theories address it and what do they say? What research has been done previously?" Strydom (1998:179) agrees that the researcher can only reach the goals that he has set out to reach if he is up to date with current knowledge regarding the research subject.

The researcher must take responsibility to continue reviewing literature throughout the research process. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:23), state the following regarding the literature study:

***...in the course of research, new aspects and problems arise requiring new information***

A literature study is an ongoing process that enables the researcher to understand and question issues relating to the area of study.

The literature review will focus on the following aspects:

- Stress: Defining stress, where it originates from, what the effect of stress is and relevant stress management programmes.
- Corporate environment: How is the corporate environment structured? Who forms part of the corporate environment? What is the effect of the work place on the corporate employee? How (if at all) do management levels affect the corporate employees?
- Play therapy mediums: Defining play therapy mediums. How will play therapy mediums be used in a stress management programme? The use of play therapy mediums in working with adults.
- The Gestalt Theory: The theoretical framework that will form the basis of the study.

Relevant literature will be studied regarding the above mentioned focus areas. South African as well as international literature will be included in the literature review. The researcher will make use of the Academic Information Centre of the University of Pretoria, the World Wide Web, information gained from relevant courses and information gained from consultations with experts.

#### **1.12.2 Consultation with Experts:**

Gathering background information from literature is important but it is not the only means of gathering information. It is necessary for the researcher to consult with experts who have experience in this field of study. According to Bless & Higson-

Smith (1995:25), consultation with experts is necessary for the following reason:

***Useful background information can be obtained in direct discussion with people involved in a similar subject issue.***

The following experts have been identified and will be contacted regarding this study:

- Ms Annie Bodenstein: HR manager with Origin Insurance – she will be consulted regarding her expertise within the corporate environment and her first hand experience of the stress that corporate employees experience.
- Ms Linda Botha: EAP professional with Pikitup (Waste Removal Company) – she will be consulted regarding specific stressors within the research environment.
- Dr Chris Heunis: Adventure experience professional – he will be consulted regarding stress management through physical experience and how these activities can be included in a stress management programme.
- Dr Elaine Lee: Educationist – she will be consulted regarding the effects of stress on concentration and work performance.
- Dr Violet Oaklander: Gestalt social worker (Contacted via e-mail) – she will be consulted regarding the use of play therapy mediums as metaphors for stress relief.
- Dr Peter Mortola: Gestalt social worker (Contacted via e-mail) – he will be consulted regarding the use of play therapy mediums with adults.
- Dr Susan Steinman: President of the Workplace Dignity Association in South Africa will be consulted regarding her expertise in trauma caused in the workplace because of bullying.

- Dr David Gold: Mental Health professional of the United Nations will be consulted regarding the setting up of a stress management programme and the time frames for that programme.
- Mr Stephen Tiley: Project Manger for the SAB internal auditors will be consulted regarding background information of the competitive corporate environment of which he is part.

The researcher is of the opinion that the above mentioned experts can contribute to this research study from their different fields of expertise.

### **1.12.3 Feasibility of the Study**

More and more organisations are realising that the effect of stress on the employees in their companies is far reaching. The employees, who do not have the ability to manage stress, do not contribute to the work place in a positive way. This is seen in absenteeism, stress related illness and general loss of productivity within the workforce. Organisations are losing time and money because their employees are not able to manage their stress levels.

The researcher has identified an organisation where the need for stress management has been communicated. The human resources division has given the researcher permission to undertake a stress management programme with employees from this organisation. The respondents will undergo a pre-test and a post-test, before and after the programme has been completed. The company has set aside the time, personnel and the venue for the research and the training to be done.

Stress management forms part of the general wellness of the corporate employee. General wellness is a function that is fulfilled by the EAP within the company, but because of a lack of resources they are not able to address stress management by using their own personnel.

#### **1.12.4 Testing of Questionnaires and Measuring Instruments:**

**Semi structured interviews** will be conducted by following a combination of the informal conversational interview and the general interview guide (Greeff, 2002:297). Use will be made of a checklist to ensure that the interview is guided to the extent that issues of concern are included, but time will be allowed for questions that flow from the immediate context.

The **questionnaire** and the **checklist** will be pre-tested with a group of individuals who have similar characteristics as the target group before being utilized in the ongoing research study. These individuals will not be included in the research study. This will ensure streamlining of the questionnaire and the checklist before presenting them to the targeted group of respondents.

### **1.13 DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIVERSE, POPULATION, SAMPLING AND SAMPLING METHODS**

#### **1.13.1 Universe**

The universe is described by Arkava and Lane in Strydom & Venter (2002:198) as follows:

***Universe, they write, refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested.***

For the purpose of this study the universe will be one of the departments within ABSA, the organisation in which the research will be done. This will be explained in more detail at a later stage.

### **1.13.2 Population**

Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:85) define population as follows:

***...the entire set of objects and events or group of people which is the object of research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics.***

Seaberg (1988:240) describes a population as inclusive of all who are involved:

***...the totality of persons, events, organizational units, case records, or other sampling units with which our research problem is concerned.***

Furthermore, a population can be described as the sum total of all the units of analysis (Bailey, 1994:83). The unit of analysis refers to “what” it is that the researcher is interested in investigating (Mouton, 2001:51).

Within a corporate organisation the sum of the employees would make up the population of the research study. There are many different corporate organisations

within the South African economy and the infrastructures within these organisations differ. The research for this study will be done within one of the departments of ABSA, a banking organisation in South Africa.

For the purpose of this study probability sampling and more specifically, simple random sampling will be used. Strydom & Venter (2002:204) explain simple random sampling as follows:

***In this situation each individual case in the population theoretically has an equal chance to be selected for the sample.***

A meeting will be conducted with the Human Resources department of the organisation to explain the extent of the research and what resources (such as a venue, tea and coffee) will be needed to conduct the research. The Human Resource Department will identify a department in which they feel stress management training is necessary. This department will form the universe (approximately six hundred people). The universe consists of different teams and the personnel from the human resources department and will identify three teams who will form the population. The employees who form part of the population will then be invited to partake in the research study on a voluntary basis and, therefore, form the sample for the study.

### **1.13.3 Sample and Sampling Method**

It would be ideal to study the whole population to gather the information required but it is seldom possible where the population is large. Babbie (1992:192) agrees with this view by saying:

*... sampling will allow a researcher to make relatively few observations and generalise from those observations to a much wider population.*

The sample is, therefore, the elements of the population that are included in the study (Arkava and Lane in Strydom & Venter, 2002:199). The sample will be studied in an effort to gain understanding of the population from which it is drawn.

A probability sampling technique and as mentioned before, more specifically the simple random sampling technique will be used to select respondents for the study.

The following criteria will be taken into consideration:

- All the respondents are required to have an understanding and verbal ability of the English language.
- All respondents' work schedules should be between eight o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon.
- The population from which the sample is taken should be multi-cultural, consist of males and females and include personnel from different levels.

## **1.14 DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS**

### **1.14.1 Play Therapy Mediums**

Play therapy is traditionally used with children but relevant literature and the researcher's own experience has shown remarkable results in the use of play therapy mediums with adults. Schaefer (1993:p.xi) states that "play itself has a number of therapeutic elements that produce behaviour change". Furthermore, play

also offers opportunities to re-live past stressful events and the emotions associated with them in a safe and therapeutic environment (Kendall, <http://www.work4food.com/playforlife/literature.html>).

The play mediums can be categorized according to different forms of play. The following forms of play will be used during this study:

- Relaxation play: music and games.
- Creative play: clay, water, paint and drawings.
- Metaphors: Metaphors will be used to communicate symbolically with the respondents – at times using the abovementioned mediums and at times using story telling as medium (Schoeman, 1996:12-13 & 86).

The researcher is of the opinion that play therapy mediums give adults the opportunity to let out creative energy and in doing so, they have the opportunity to become aware of themselves and make contact with unfulfilled needs in their lives.

#### **1.14.2 Stress**

Stress could be described using feeling words such as tension, anxiety or panic and the implications of these feelings in our lives. Warren & Toll (1994:9) define stress as follows:

***Stress is the response to the perceived relationship between the demands on us and our ability to cope.***

Stress is, therefore, a person's reaction to changes that take place around him/her, all the time (Brewer, 1995:3).

Stress is pressure that all people have to face every day of their lives. People experience demands from family, friends, jobs and personal ambitions in different ways and at different times in their lives. People react to stress in a unique way and they could use the pressures in life to their advantage.

### 1.14.3 Stress Management

Girdano *et al.* (1993:7) define stress management as follows:

***...the ability to reduce stress arousal or to cope in a competent manner with stressors.***

Stress management is living with the stress in a positive way. Stress is a part of daily life but a person can manage the effect that it has. According to Newman (1992:27), stress is in the eye of the beholder and not in the event. He describes stress as ***the gap between what you have and what you want.***

### 1.14.4 Organisation

An organisation can be defined as a coordinated unit consisting of at least two people who function to achieve a common goal or set of goals. Furthermore, organisations are entities that enable society to pursue accomplishment that cannot be achieved by individuals who are acting alone (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 2000:17).

#### 1.14.5 Corporate Employees

To understand the meaning of “corporate employee” it is necessary to consider both parts of the concept:

***A business corporation is a legal entity permitted by law in every state to exist for the purpose of engaging in lawful activities of a business nature. It is an artificial person created by law, with many of the same rights and responsibilities possessed by humans (Skaliski (ed); 2001:195).***

An employee is described as a staff member or wage-earner of an organisation (Chambers Thesaurus; 1997). Therefore, a corporate employee can be described as a person within an organisation where he/she has to fulfil a function with many other corporate employees. All of these individuals work towards a common business goal within the organisation.

#### 1.14.6 Gestalt Theory

A Gestalt can be defined as follows:

***... a configuration or a totality that has, as a unified whole, properties which cannot be derived by summation from the parts and their relationships.... It may refer to physical structures, to physiological and psychological functions or to symbolic units by English and English in 1958 (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:109).***

The Gestalt Theory underlines the following:

- A person tends to seek closure – if the Gestalt is incomplete it demands attention until balance acquired.
- A person will complete Gestalts in accordance with current needs.
- A person's behaviour is a whole which is greater than the sum of its specific parts.
- A person's behaviour can only be meaningfully understood in context.
- A person experiences the world in accordance to the principles of figure and ground (Passons, 1975:12 &13).

Therefore, the Gestalt Theory takes the whole person into consideration. The person has to take responsibility for every part of his/her being and work towards gaining a balance in his/her Gestalt.

#### **1.14.7 Employee Assistance Programme**

Employee assistance is a generic term depicting more or less structured programmes that utilise technical, administrative and professional human services and personnel people, on either a contractual or employment basis, to meet the need of troubled employees (Myers, 1984:4).

An employee assistance programme can also be described as a work-based intervention programme aimed at the early identification and/or resolution of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect performance (Burgess, 1996:25).

Therefore, an employee assistance programme is a structure within an organisation that works towards the health and well-being of the employees. Action can be taken regarding work related issues in a pro-active or a reactive manner.

## **1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations are not as simple as “what is right” and “what is wrong”. Different cultures and communities will differ vastly in terms of the criteria for what the right thing is to do and what the wrong thing is to do. In social research it becomes even more complicated because research is not done within a sterile laboratory but the research is focused on human beings.

During the course of the research the researcher can come face to face with ethical issues. Ethics define the proper way to conduct research but these ethics begin and end with the researcher. The researcher’s personal morals and beliefs are the best prevention against unethical conduct (Neuman 1997:443).

Bailey (1994:454) defines ethical conduct, according to Websters’ Dictionary, as conforming to accepted professional practices. According to Babbie (1992:464-469), the following ethical agreements should be considered in social research:

- **Informed consent**

The research will be conducted with voluntary respondents. All the respondents will have the option of taking part in the stress management programme and, therefore, the research. The respondents will be permitted to withdraw from the research at any given time. Strydom (2002:65) explains this aspect as follows:

***Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures that will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed, as well as the credibility of the researcher be rendered to potential subjects or their legal representatives.***

The respondents will be informed regarding the goal of the research as well as the advantages and possible disadvantages of the study. They will also sign a consent form before the commencement of the research.

- **No harm to respondents**

The research will be conducted in a respectful manner. All respondents will be exposed to the same questionnaires and stress management programme. Strydom (2002:64) states the following:

***Subjects can be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner. One may accept that harm to respondents in the social sciences will mainly be of an emotional nature, although physical injury can not be ruled out completely.***

Everything possible will be done to ensure that the respondents do not suffer physical or emotional harm.

- **Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality**

The information received from the respondents will be treated confidentially.

Singleton in Strydom (2002:67) states the following:

***The right to privacy is the individual's right to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent his/her beliefs and behaviour will be revealed.***

Before the commencement of the stress management programme a contract will be set up with the respondents requesting confidentiality regarding conversations that take place during the course of the stress management programme.

- **Deception of respondents**

The researcher will inform the respondents of the role that she will play in the research process, before the start of the stress management programme. Attention will be given to the elimination of misconceptions regarding the research. Neuman in Strydom (2002:66) describes deception as follows:

***Deception occurs when the researcher intentionally misleads subject by way of written or verbal instructions, the actions of other people, are certain aspects of the setting.***

- **Release or publication of the findings**

A report will be compiled after the results of the research study have been analysed.

The report will be made available to the respondents as well as the management of

the organisation. Strydom (2002:71) states the following:

***The findings of the study must be introduced to the reading public in written form otherwise even a highly scientific investigation will mean very little and will not be viewed as research.***

## **1.16 FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH REPORT**

This research study will consist of 7 chapters and will be divided as follows:

CHAPTER 1: General introduction and framework of the study

CHAPTER 2: The use of the Gestalt Theory in a stress management programme

CHAPTER 3: The effect of stress on the corporate employee

CHAPTER 4: The use of play therapy mediums with corporate employees

CHAPTER 5: Organisational behaviour

CHAPTER 6: Empirical procedure and findings

CHAPTER 7: Conclusions and recommendations.