

**AFRICAN WOMEN IN A  
WESTERN WORKPLACE:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY**

by

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## SUMMARY

### **AFRICAN WOMEN IN A WESTERN WORKPLACE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY**

by

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This study contributes to the limited academic knowledge (particularly anthropological knowledge) available on the working behaviour of black women workers. The study focuses on how black women workers perceive and experience certain western work values within a western workplace. A problem that constantly arises in South African industry is the correlation between work values and working behaviour. Hence, the study focuses on the African-oriented value judgements and life- and world-views of black women workers manifested in a South African factory and the perceptions of these women regarding selected western work values. The working behaviour of the black women workers, as employed at Automotive Mouldings cc (AMM) and their culturally determined value judgements and life- and world-views concerning certain requirements and elements within the western labour system in general, and specifically at AMM, are examined.

The empirical study provides an ethnographic description of the perceptions of black women workers at AMM of western work values and their working behaviour in the workplace. The culturally determined attitudes of these black women towards “work” are discussed. These selected western work values include career awareness, individualism, thoroughness and alertness, time concepts, discipline, communication, motivation to achieve, diligence, responsibility and accountability as well as work status. These western-oriented characteristics (criteria), however, are not necessarily present in the work value systems of black women workers. This creates conflict and reduces productivity within the workplace, as

the working behaviour of the black women workers, in many instances, contrasts with western-oriented organisational values in general. Thus, it is difficult to predict the working behaviour of black women workers or to judge it from within western employers' own cultural frameworks. In order to prevent or reduce conflict in the workplace, and to enhance productivity, it is essential that employers are aware of the perceptions of western work values and working behaviour of traditional Africans in general, but specifically the working behaviour of black women workers.

**KEY WORDS:** Black women workers, working behaviour, culturally determined value judgements and life- and world-view, culture, western work values, western workplace, career awareness, individualism, thoroughness and alertness, African time concept, work-discipline, communication, motivation to achieve, diligence, responsibility and accountability, work status, gender equality.



## SAMEVATTING

### AFRIKA-VROUE BINNE 'N WESTERSE WERKPLEK: 'N ETNOGRAFIESE GEVALLESTUDIE.

deur

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Hierdie studie lewer 'n bydrae tot die beperkte kennis in akademiese kringe (veral antropologiese kennis), betreffende die werksgedrag van swart vroue. Die studie fokus op hoe swart vroue werkers binne 'n westerse werksplek sekere westerse werkswaardes begryp en ervaar. 'n Vraagstuk wat voortdurend in die Suid-Afrikaanse industrie voorkom, is dié van ooreenkomste en verbande tussen werkswaardes en werksgedrag. Die klem van die studie is gevolglik op die Afrika-georiënteerde waarde-oordele en lewens- en wêreldbeskouings van swart vroue werkers soos dit voorkom binne 'n Suid-Afrikaanse fabriek en die persepsies van hierdie vroue aangaande geselekteerde westerse werkswaardes. Die werksgedrag van die swart vroue werksaam by Automotive Mouldings cc (AMM), en hul kultuurbepaalde waarde-oordele en lewens- en wêreldbeskouings aangaande bepaalde vereistes en elemente binne die westerse arbeidsstelsel in die algemeen, en spesifiek binne AMM, word bespreek.

Die feitebeeld wat uit die studie na vore tree, verskaf 'n etnografiese beskrywing van die persepsies van die swart vroue werkers by AMM aangaande westerse werkswaardes en die werksgedrag van die vroue binne die werkplek. Die kultuurbepaalde houdings jeens die konsep "werk" word bespreek. Hierdie geselekteerde westerse werkswaardes sluit die volgende in: roepingsbewustheid, individualisme, deeglikheid en oplettendheid, tydskonsepte, dissipline, kommunikasie, prestasie-motivering, hardwerkendheid, verantwoordelikheid en verantwoordbaarheid, en werkstatus. Hierdie westerse-georiënteerde werkswaardes (kriteria) is egter nie noodwendig teenwoordig in die werkswaarde-sisteme van swart vroue werkers nie.



Dit veroorsaak konflik binne die werkplek en verminderde produktiwiteit, aangesien die werksgedrag van swart vroue werkers oor die algemeen die teenoorgestelde is van westers-geïntereerde organisatoriese waardes. Gevolglik is dit moeilik vir werkgewers om van binne hul eie kulturele raamwerke die werksgedrag van swart vroue werkers te voorspel of oordeel. Dit is dus van uiterste belang dat werkgewers bewus is van die perspies aangaande westerse werkswaardes sowel as die werksgedrag van Afrika-geïntereerde swart werkers in die algemeen, en spesifiek die werksgedrag van swart vroue werkers, om sodoende konflik in die werkplek te voorkom of verminder en produktiwiteit te bevorder.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:** Swart vroue werkers, werksgedrag, kultuurbepaalde waardeoordele en lewens- en wêreldbeskouings, kultuur, westerse werkswaardes, westerse werkplek, roepingsbewustheid, individualisme, deeglikheid en oplettendheid, Afrika tydskonsep, werksdissipline, kommunikasie, prestasie-motivering, hardwerkendheid, verantwoordelikheid en verantwoordbaarheid, werkstatus, geslagsgelykheid.



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