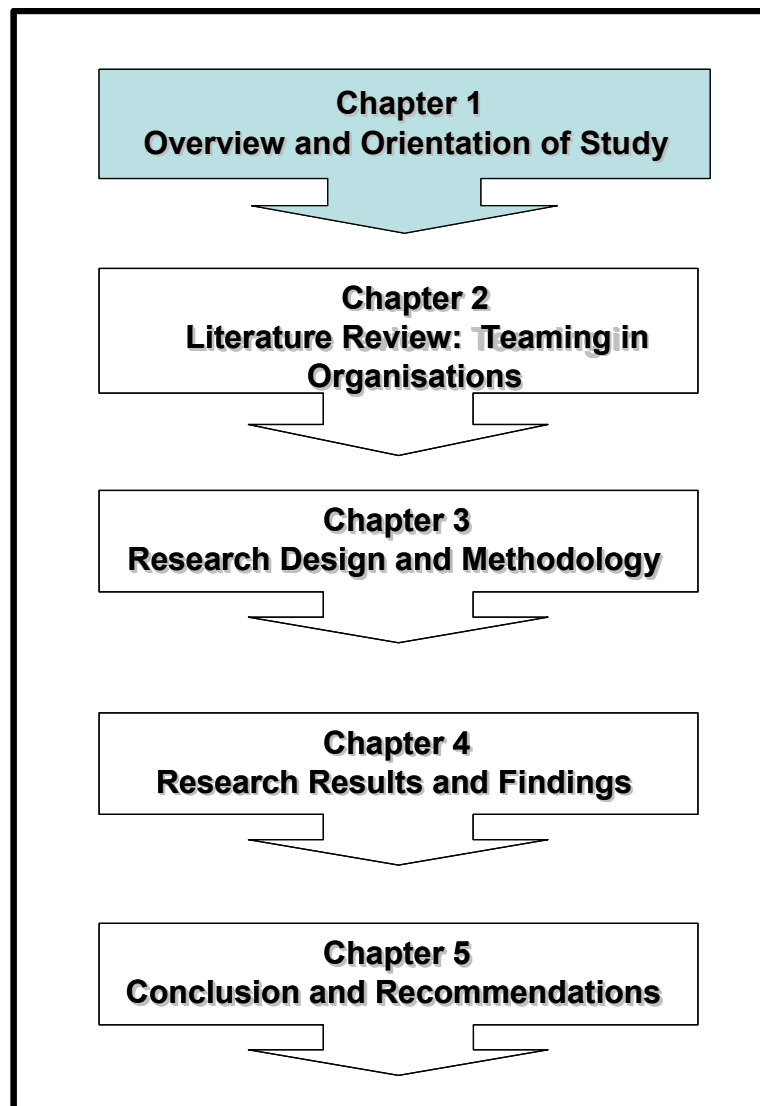




## CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW AND ORIENTATION OF STUDY

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The following chapter layout is used throughout the study and is referred to in each chapter.





## 1.1 BACKGROUND, RATIONALE FOR AND VALUE OF THE STUDY

Teams and teamwork have become and remain popular amongst leaders in organisations. Because of the popularity of teams, there are a large number of practitioners and team building “experts” entering the market. Many offer packaged solutions, following a shotgun approach and hoping that one of these approaches will actually work. It is therefore no wonder that some authors are sceptical about the true value of teamwork. In this regard, Allan and Hecht (2004:437) refer to what they call “the romance of teams”, suggesting that teams are not necessarily the answer to all managerial problems. They remark that empirical data on team effectiveness are often not as impressive as the theories on teams would suggest. Naquin and Tynan (2003:2) express a similar view in an earlier article, where they comment on a “Team Halo effect”. They argue that team complexities are frequently not fully understood when teams are implemented.

My interest<sup>1</sup> in teams and teamwork, which resulted in this study, developed as a result of my role as a so-called “team building expert” and trainer. Often, corporate leaders told me what to do and what they wanted the ultimate “team edge”<sup>2</sup> to be. None of them ever consulted with their teams before announcing another “team building event”. As the one who had to make these team events work, I began to ask myself whether this kind of approach was correct. I sensed that this was not the most appropriate way to develop teams, but I could only speculate as to what teams really expected from the phenomenon called “teamwork”.

Exposure to organisational behaviour as a field of study changed my understanding of team complexities. This study was therefore conducted taking into account the multiple levels of organisational behaviour:

- the individual level;

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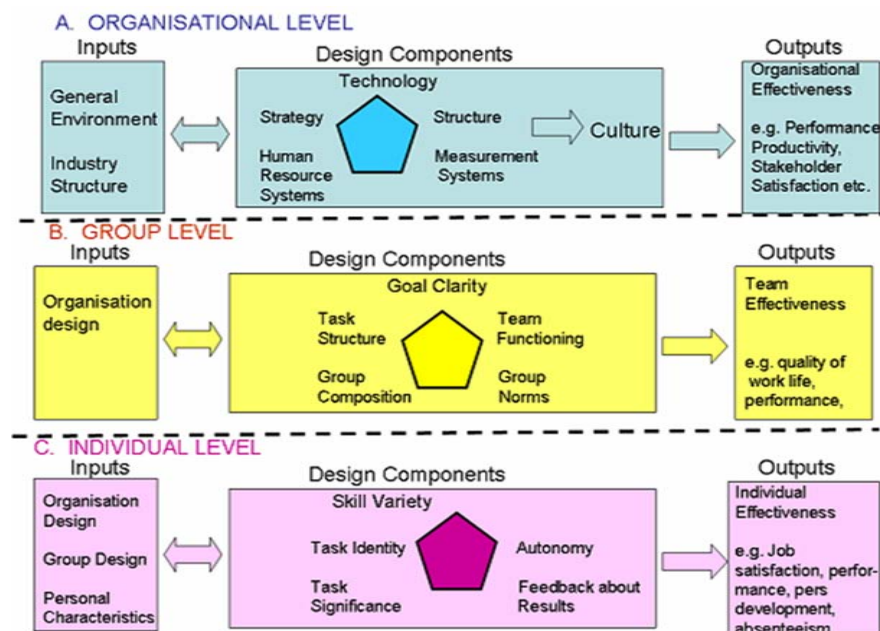
<sup>1</sup> The first person pronoun is used throughout this thesis to refer to the researcher, because, in line with a postmodernist approach, it was decided to reflect the presence of the researcher in the research process explicitly throughout the text.

<sup>2</sup> A word used by the researcher to describe extreme team effectiveness.

- the group level; and
- the organisational level.

The field of study of Organisational Behaviour has changed the way in which organisations and the people who work in them are perceived. There have been significant changes that have had a vast impact on all spheres of work and on those who engage in it. Organisational Behaviour, as defined by Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt (2004:668), is “a field of study that investigates the impact that individuals, groups and structures have on the behaviour within organisations, for the purpose of applying such knowledge toward improving the organisation’s effectiveness”. This study falls within the field of Organisational Behaviour.

The research findings and recommendations will therefore add value to this body of knowledge. A model suggested by Cummings and Worley (2005) is a useful graphic depiction of where teamwork could fit into the total Organisational Behaviour picture (see Figure 1.1, below). However, it is important to note that teams and teamwork cannot be neatly categorised, since they are affected by many factors and only a truly integrated approach would make strategic sense.



**Figure 1.1: Three levels of organisational behaviour**  
(Cummings & Worley, 2005:89)

## **1.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Qualitative and quantitative research can be seen as representing two different paradigms, each historically assuming a different ontology and epistemology. Merriman (1998:3) argues that it is helpful to link research and philosophical traditions in order to illustrate different research orientations.

### **1.2.1 The qualitative versus quantitative debate**

A qualitative research method was chosen for this study. To explain why this choice was made, it is important to note the different focuses of qualitative and the quantitative research approaches.

Trochim (2006:4) notes: "There has probably been more energy expended on debating the difference between and relative advantages of qualitative and quantitative methods than almost any other methodological topic in social research." He prefers to see similarities rather than differences between the two approaches, and he summarises the central issues as follows:

- all qualitative data can be coded quantitatively; and
- all quantitative data is based on qualitative judgment,

Some authors in this field suggest that the research question should guide the researcher when selecting a relevant approach (Thomas, 2003). There seems to be no clear-cut prescription when deciding which paradigm to use – qualitative or quantitative, or a combination of both.

With regard to this debate and controversy, it is perhaps apt to conclude, as Trochim (2006:5) does, that it "seems as if social research is richer for the wider variety of views and methods that this debate generates".

### **1.2.2 The history of qualitative research**

According to Adler (1987), qualitative research methods began to gain wider recognition in the 1970s. Until then, the phrase "qualitative research" was marginalised as belonging to the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Phrases such as "fieldwork", "observations", "ethnography" and "sociology"

were used instead of qualitative research. However, in the next decade, qualitative research began to be used in other disciplines as well, and it soon became significant in the fields of disability studies, women's studies, education, human studies and others.

This led to the development of new methods of qualitative research in the late 1980s and 1990s, especially after much criticism was levelled at this approach by proponents of a purely quantitative approach. Giddens (1990) argues that qualitative research has gained popularity mainly because of the subjective or linguistic bent that has gained a foothold across the globe. Qualitative researchers believe that their type of research is particularly well suited to getting insight into the subjective qualities of the lived world.

### **1.2.3 The essence of qualitative research**

Qualitative research is a research methodology that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the behaviour of humans and the motivations that govern human behaviour. Strictly speaking, this research method investigates **how** and **why** individuals and groups understand or view the world around them. Quantitative research, on the other hand, focus on the **what, where** and **when** of decision-making amongst individuals or groups. Since qualitative research seeks a deeper understanding of social behaviour and phenomena, there is a need for focused and usually smaller samples, as opposed to random, large samples (Giddens, 1990).

### **1.2.4 The approach used in this study**

In this study, a qualitative **interpretivist approach** was adopted, and the study was positioned in a post-positivist paradigm. As with any study, this study was inevitably guided by the chosen research paradigm and my view of the world as a researcher conducting this research. Some key terms are therefore explained briefly below.

According to Burrell and Morgan (1997:24), "to be located in a particular paradigm is to view the world in a particular way". Kuhn (1996:113) suggests

that a paradigm “stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques and so on, shared by members of a community”.

Table 1.1 (below) compares the paradigm of interpretivism (which ultimately influenced the choice of research approach) to a positivist paradigm (which is not espoused in this study).

**Table 1.1: Theoretical assumptions about interpretivism**

<b>Theoretical Assumptions about:</b>	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>
Ontology	The researcher and reality are separate.	The researcher and reality are inseparable.
Epistemology	Objective reality exists beyond the human mind.	Knowledge of the world is intentionally constituted through a person’s lived experience.
The research object	The research object has inherent qualities that exist independently of the researcher.	The research object is interpreted in the light of the meaning structure of the researcher’s lived experience.
The research method	Statistics, content analysis.	Hermeneutics, phenomenology etc.
Validity	Certainty: data truly measures reality.	Defensible knowledge claims can be made.
Reliability	Replicability: research results can be reproduced.	Interpretative awareness: researchers recognise and address the implications of their subjectivity.

### 1.2.5 Philosophical assumptions

Researchers involved in post-positivist research share a particular paradigm. Based on their beliefs, they might make many assumptions when conducting and interpreting their research. Based on an analysis done by Reyes (2002:3-9), in this study, various philosophical assumptions were made when embarking on the research project.

The research was physically done in the field and an in-depth understanding was reached. I was thus willing to sacrifice breadth for depth (purposeful sampling). As the researcher, I was the primary data gathering instrument;

and my understanding and generalisations were grounded in the data that was collected and analysed. Data took the form of words and pictures rather than numbers. The data also included interview notes and transcripts, and I was interested in “meaning-making”, in other words, the ways in which people make sense of their worlds.

Although the process was informed by theoretical constructs, the data was generated **inductively** and tested deductively in an ongoing or “**dialectical**” **process**. The interviewees were invited to participate in the data analysis. Lastly, in reporting the findings, I, as the researcher, included my own voice to represent the diverse voices of multi-positioned interviewees through stories, narratives and quotations.

### 1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the interviewees in the study (Interviewee 2, 2007:pers.comm.), an Executive at GijimaAst noted “Teamwork seems to be the strategic way to increase effectiveness and organisational growth. Yet, when it comes to practice, a fairly ‘simple’ concept becomes very complicated since we do not seem to know what makes teams tick.”

Since the beginning of time, human beings have attempted to understand the world in which they live. In this journey towards understanding their world, they have made assumptions and have tried to communicate their experiences and their observations. In this study, an attempt was made to explore, understand and explain the complexities of teamwork as experienced by individuals, teams and management of selected organisations in South Africa. In-depth interviews and focus group interviews were used to gain more information.

Exploratory research is usually done when a researcher wants to investigate phenomena that are not well or fully understood and to generate hypotheses for further research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). **Explaining why something occurs** is an approach where the researcher sets out to identify plausible relationships shaping a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this study,

an attempt was made to try to explain patterns related to the phenomenon in question. Fouché and Delport (2002:12) stress that the purpose of explanatory research is to “gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual”. Stebbins (1998:2) claims that exploratory research is a mission to discover as much as possible about a specific topic. Morgan and Kreuger (1993:12) conclude that qualitative research methods are ideally suited and useful for exploration, as well as for discovery purposes in research.

Many consultants and in-house trainers offer a variety of generic team solutions, but are these solutions well researched? There are many interesting theories and team development ideas, making a choice of one specific idea difficult. The diversity of the South African work force makes the team challenge even greater. Moreover, quite often the interventions suggested by consultants are expensive and do not seem to make a lasting difference. Team building "events" companies often market themselves as team experts, charging clients huge amounts of money without offering sustainable team solutions. Therefore, for example, ten short telephone interviews revealed that nine out of the ten team-building companies approached offer mainly packaged solutions and events and fail to ask clients what they need for what purpose and in which format.

I have been involved with teams and team interventions for 15 years, *inter alia*, as a trainer, training manager, business consultant and organisational development (OD) practitioner. In my years as a practitioner, I have conducted more than 200 team interventions and have advised many clients on the most suitable team approach for their organisation. However, team interventions do not always seem to work. In many cases, complexities and dynamics hinder optimal team development.

***In this study, I set out to discover what the expectations of employees are of teamwork on multiple levels in a contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century South African organisation.***



## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on a preliminary literature review and my experience with teams, the following key research question was formulated:

**What are the expectations of employees of teamwork on multiple levels in selected 21<sup>st</sup> century South African organisations?**

I also investigated the following sub-questions:

- How do South African **employees** experience teams and teamwork?
- What do **teams** regard as critical success factors in terms of teamwork in the team development processes?

At first glance, these questions may not seem complicated (as a researcher I believe in simplicity and clarity). However, as the research journey continued and the interviewees and I began to “unpack” the questions, we were frequently astonished by the integrated nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

## 1.5 CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted within the context of organisational behaviour as a field of study. As a qualitative research approach was followed, the scope of the research largely evolved as this journey unfolded. This journey and its milestones are described in detail in later chapters.

The study does not cover all aspects of teams and teamwork. The study’s objective was to conceptualise, understand and explain the expectations of teamwork at various organisational levels. I do not claim either to investigate or to understand all the complexities of team dynamics and how these complexities may influence team effectiveness. The focus is on team expectations in a contemporary, 21<sup>st</sup> century organisation, based on selected South African organisations. The research outcomes were analysed and evaluated as they emerged, taking into account the paradigms that guided the study, as well as my personal values, beliefs and attitudes.

The last part of the research project required conclusions to be reached and recommendations to be made. Once again, my aim was to understand teamwork from the unique perspective of individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole. These aspects are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

## **1.6 PURPOSE AND UNIQUENESS OF THE RESEARCH**

In more than one instance, I had to ask myself: will this study be unique?

I found no evidence that similar studies in a South African context have been conducted. The uniqueness of this study is further strongly embedded in the combination of the theme and the research method. Lembke and Wilson (1998:928) investigated various alternative theoretical contributions regarding teamwork for contemporary organisations, and concluded the following: “team research has often focused on how teams can be managed effectively without describing what teamwork really is”. They remark that, in current research, member’s interactions with other members in the team are described, but the emotional and cognitive processes involved with teamwork are often neglected. They further argue that many authors, for example Hackman (1990) and Bourgeois & Eisenhardt (1988) highlight management processes that may lead to member motivation, but do not sufficiently understand what the team members want.

By some chance, a researcher may generate a set of recommendations, only to find that someone else has also come up with the same theory using methods that are more traditional. However, the researcher may still make a contribution to knowledge, and a valuable one, since the recommendations may be made using different and unique methodology

The strengths of this type of emergent inquiry are that it leads to in-depth insights and establishes rapport with research subjects. Some weaknesses are that results cannot be generalised and that the procedure is very time-consuming (Mouton 2001:148).

However, I am convinced that my study will make an original contribution to the body of knowledge, and that the context and qualitative approach applied will add an additional element of uniqueness to this research project.

## 1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

Mouton (2001:55) describes a research design as a plan or blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research. The design best aligned to the research question in this study is that of **an explanatory design** – which can be interpreted in many ways. Myers (1997) argues that the rationale for doing qualitative research comes from the fact that there is one thing that distinguishes humans from the rest of the natural world: their ability to talk!

“An exploratory research design is particularly suited to the study of behavior” (Golding, 1999:18). It seeks inductively to distil issues that are important to specific groupings of people. The aim is to create meaning about these issues through analysis and the modelling of theory (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006:8).

In this study an **inductive** theory discovery design is used that allowed theory to be developed while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical data. Data collection, analysis and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other.

## 1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was followed when conducting the research. The research design guided the selection of this research methodology. Most sciences have their own specific research methods, which are supported by methodologies (in other words, a rationale that supports the method's validity). The social sciences are methodologically diverse, using both **qualitative** methods and **quantitative** methods, including case studies, survey research, statistical analysis, and model building. A combination of the two methods is also possible.

Many authors use many definitions when describing the two major approaches in organisational research, namely a quantitative versus a qualitative approach. The **quantitative** approach is often seen as objective, relying heavily on statistics, whereas the **qualitative** approach is seen as subjective, and preferring language and description.

**Quantitative** research is often referred to as functionalist, objectivist or positivist research, whereas **qualitative research** is also referred to as interpretative or subjectivist. Both approaches are underpinned by differing paradigms and these paradigms ultimately affect the research process.

### **1.8.1 Research population and sampling strategy**

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) define the **research population** as the entire set of individuals or teams who will be the focus of the research and of whom the researcher would like to determine some characteristics.

In this research project, the population was the employees of two South African-based companies: the Auditor General (AG) and an Information Communication Technology (ICT) company called GijimaAst. The Auditor General has 1700 employees and GijimaAst approximately 3000 workers. Both companies can be described as modern, contemporary or 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations. They have lean structures; they are diverse and are global in orientation. Both companies use teamwork in implementing their strategies. In both companies, employees have had previous exposure to team processes.

#### **1.8.1.1 *GijimaAst's vision, mission and values***

The vision, mission and value statements of GijimaAst illustrate the company's contemporary nature. There is a strong focus on client orientation, a desire to be world-class and an innovative drive.

The vision, mission and values of the company are described as follows on GijimaAst's (2007) website and in its strategic documents:

“**Our vision** is to be the most respected company in the ICT industry in our target markets by driving unparalleled value for our clients, staff, shareholders and our communities.

**Our mission** is to continually improve our client centricity by focusing on improving their efficiency and competitiveness through our

- world-class, innovative and affordable services;
- premier client care;
- commercial acumen; and
- proven technological leadership.

We will achieve this through the development of staff, intellectual property, our communities and the investment in our technology and service based partnerships and resources.

**Our values:**

- **The client is key**

GijimaAst aims to create a service experience that is unparalleled in the industry through its unique client-centric model.

- **Esteem through growth**

Growth is essential in order to maintain and sustain a healthy business that is profitable and effective.

- **We love what we do**

We will make every effort to ensure that the work environment is pleasant, challenging and conducive to growth, health and happiness. We want the workplace to be fun and a place where our employees enjoy being every day.

- **Dedication to delivery**

We aim to demonstrate our loyalty by sticking to our promises and encouraging an honest and open dialogue between GijimaAst and our employees.”



### **1.8.1.2      *The Auditor General's vision, mission and values***

The Auditor General's vision, mission and values are described as follows on the Auditor-General's (2007) website and in strategic documents. Once again, the overall strategy indicates the organisation's drive to be regarded as world-class and to provide value-added services:

#### **Vision**

We are the independent world-class provider of public sector audit and related value-added services.

#### **Mission**

Providing independent and objective quality audit and related value-added services in the management of public resources, thereby enhancing good governance in the public sector.

#### **Values**

- Integrity
- Independence
- Impartiality
- People development
- Accountability
- Commitment
- Excellence.

One reason for the choice of these two organisations was that, apart from the fact that both companies qualify as 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations and use teamwork in their day-to-day operations, I have a broad knowledge of both companies and have acted as a team development consultant in both organisations. Approval for this project was granted officially and both companies offered their full cooperation and support to this research project.

The rationale for this selection was lastly that I have had eight years of extensive experience working with and for the Auditor General and two years of experience working for GijimaAst on team development projects.

Knowledge of the target population made communication, access to respondents and networking easier. However, as a researcher I had to be very alert not to be biased or to exert my influence in conducting the interviews.

The target group also represented the demographics of the country, which made the choice even more suitable.

The **sampling strategy** that was followed was one of **purposeful sampling**, since it best suits the selected research design. Purposeful sampling has the goal of understanding a phenomenon in-depth, and not to represent the population or to generalise findings.

Patton (1990:169-186) identifies 15 different types of purposeful sampling. Based on this analysis, a **combination or mixed purposeful sampling** approach was used to conduct the research. This entailed a combination of various sampling strategies to achieve the desired sample. The combined sampling strategy was helpful in triangulation, allowed for flexibility, and met multiple interests and needs.

### 1.8.2 Data collection

A qualitative approach was selected and the data collection methods were aligned with the research design.

Data was collected by means of personal and group interviews, where the focus was on interaction and an in-depth understanding of perceptions and experiences:

- **focus group interviews:** four focus interviews of one and a half hours each; and
- **individual interviews:** 21 personal interviews of approximately one hour each.

In quantitative research, data collation typically occurs well in advance of data analysis (Ragin, Nagel & White, 2003). However, in most qualitative research projects, data collection and data analysis cannot be differentiated sharply.

Qualitative researchers usually analyse data as they collect it and, based on the results of this analysis, decide which data to collect next. This procedure was followed throughout this study. During and after each interview I made notes, updated my diary and started interpreting the information. I also experienced that, as Klein and Myers (1999) put it, interpretative research is not merely about reporting facts, it is rather about reporting the interpretations of individuals. In many instances, I thus had to interpret and report on individual perceptions as well as attitudes.

## 1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics is concerned with what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in terms of the research process. Since interviews were conducted and the research process directly affected third parties, the following **ethical aspects** were considered when conducting both the personal and focus group interviews.

- **Confidentiality** is a vital requirement for credible research. The individual's right to privacy and anonymity were respected at all times.
- I **explained** the process to the participants and sent them relevant documentation well in advance of the interviews to set them at ease.
- **Informed consent** was obtained from all participants in the research project. Bartunek and Louis (1996) emphasise the importance of repeatedly confirming informed consent. They argue that, in a qualitative research project, prospective participants often do not have full knowledge of the types of research or what might happen as the study progresses. Informed consent must then reflect awareness that such events can not entirely be predicted. Informed consent could and should thus be renegotiated at some stage of the research process and should not be seen as something that can be handled only once at the beginning of the study. Throughout my study, this happened. In a few cases, I had to do telephonic follow-up discussions and in all cases the process was fully explained and consent was obtained.
- **Emotional safety** was guaranteed to all employees. Since interviews in some cases elicited intense discussions and touched on sensitive



issues, the interviewer facilitated discussions in such a way as to protect interviewees.

- Individual and team **privacy** was guaranteed, especially since many issues were raised in confidence. The process of interview transcribing was explained and no hidden cameras or one-way mirrors were used. Tape recordings were used, and in all cases, written permission for this was obtained. Prior to each interview, I demonstrated the tape recorder to set the interviewees at ease.
- **Academic objectivity** was ensured by implementing a sound research methodology and following the selected research design.

## 1.10 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The rest of this study is structured as explained below.

In **Chapter 2** teamwork is defined and team roles, team development, team building and team forming in organisations are explored. I will also briefly reflect on 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations and the individual in the organisation.

In **Chapter 3**, the research design and methodology selected are discussed. I also reflect on the role of the qualitative researcher in the research process. Next, I discuss the data collection methods, as well as the mode of analysis implemented in this study.

**Chapter 4** deals with the analysis of the data and the research findings.

**Chapter 5** is a concluding chapter in which the contributions of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research are made.