



## CHAPTER 3

### BLACK WOMEN AND THE WORK MILIEU: THE AMM CASE STUDY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the data gathered on the attitudes of the black women workers employed at AMM towards “work”. The influence of value judgements and the life- and world-views held by these women on their working behaviour within a western-oriented South African factory are examined. This study focuses on how black women workers perceive and experience certain western work values. This working behaviour and the women’s value judgements are described according to and compared with the criteria set by Raubenheimer and Kotze (1984) and Van Vuuren (1988).

The majority of the members of the labour force operating within a western work environment in South Africa come from a traditional African background (see Table 2.2). Black women are part of the black workforce, thus, western work values (described in detail in Section 1.6.1) are relevant to their work situation, as these criteria imply that these workers are expected to behave in a certain way and, hence, that their working behaviour is predictable, regardless of the culture of employees. In addition, the labour laws and the challenge to achieve gender equality also plays a part in determining the position of black women workers within the South African labour system (see Chapter 2).

#### 3.2 THE WORK MILIEU

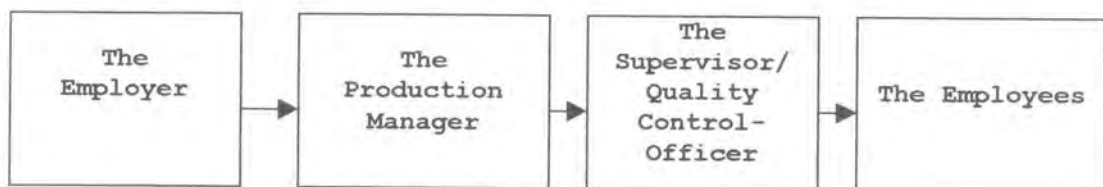
The research group for both the qualitative and quantitative research was 19 black women workers. These black women workers are employed at Automotive Mouldings cc (AMM) in Marble Hall. Their workload is comprised mainly of unskilled labour, including the making of automobile components such as car door frames, vehicle carpeting and car door boards.

They make other items such as sleeping couches and plastic bottles and they produce juice and bottle the juice.

The women who make the automobile parts and the women who make bottles and juice do not work together. The factory is thus effectively divided into two parts, and the juice department is much smaller than the automobile component production department.

The factory operates on a horizontal organisational structure. Thus, the employer is in control, and the production manager is second in command. The production manager is in charge of the supervisor and the quality control officer. The supervisor is in charge of the male employees, while the quality control officer supervises the female employees. There is no complicated or intricate structure of command in the workplace. The workers are employed in an informal fashion as contractors. There are no formal service contracts (see Section 1.7.3) and there is no formal or contractual differentiation in status between employees. All employees are considered equal in the formal organisational structure of the factory and thus the black women workers are not formally subordinate to one another.

**Figure 3.1: The horizontal organisational structure at AMM**



The working circumstances are informal and workers can come and go at the workplace as they wish. There are no formal working hours, as there are no formal service contracts, but the workers are normally expected to be at the factory by eight or half past eight in the morning, and to work until five in the afternoon, if possible. There are regular breaks for the workers: there is a tea break of half an hour at half past nine in the morning and a lunch hour from one to two o'clock in the afternoon.

The factory functions on the principle of direct proportional remuneration, in other words, the more work is done, the greater the remuneration (production equals remuneration). Each of the women receives R360 as the minimum wage per month and the rest of their monthly wages are subject to proportional remuneration. Each black woman worker has specific and



delineated duties to perform and the women are individually responsible for the work that they perform as well as the quality of the work. Each black woman worker is individually responsible for recording how much work she has done and completed, and thus receives remuneration commensurate with the day's work.

As the factory functions on a contract basis, there are deadlines and time limits. This means that a certain amount of work must be completed before a certain date. Mondays are normally loading or freight days, thus all the components that have been made for clients of AMM, such as automobile manufacturers, are loaded onto trucks and transported to the different manufacturers and clients of AMM. The women receive the order for the parts and products required by the manufacturers and are expected to complete the required number of automobile components within the time limit. The women are expected to work overtime, if necessary, to fulfil the contract. Therefore, the black women workers are individually responsible for their monthly income and collectively responsible for the fulfilment of the contracts with manufacturers and other clients of AMM.

The black women workers employed at AMM are diverse in terms of their ages, ethnic affiliations, languages, religions and education. The biographical data of the 19 respondents to the questionnaires are illustrated and discussed in the sections below. Aspects such as the age and education of the black women workers, as will be statistically illustrated, have a direct and real influence on productivity.

### **3.3 AGE OF THE BLACK WOMEN WORKERS**

The 19 black women workers are between 27 and 56 years old. Although there is no formal distinction in the official status of the employees at AMM, age is considered very important within the workplace, as it creates an informal system of seniority and importance among the black women workers, and within the factory. The older the worker and the longer the worker has been employed at AMM, the higher her status, and the more respect she enjoys within the workplace. According to respondents, junior employees are expected to respect the older workers and to listen to their advice. If an older woman is newly employed, she should listen to the advice of the younger women with more experience in the workplace, but she should still be afforded the respect due to her age and her seniority. This behaviour is in line with the principles of the culture of the black women workers (see Section 2.3.4), where seniority and

respect play an important role in the daily interaction between members of these cultural groups (Bruwer 1963:46,55; Hammond-Tooke 1974b:360; Kriel 1992:198; Mönnig 1967:268). Table 3.1 illustrates the difference in age in the workplace.

Ten of the respondents (52,6%) fall in the age category of 27 to 40 years. The other nine (47,3%) of the respondents are more than 40 years old and indicated that they find it difficult to perform their tasks, as the assignments often require manual labour. Nine (47,3%) of the women over the age of 40 also stated that they feel old and tired and cannot work continuously for long hours. These women complained that, although they are old, they could not retire, because they need to work in order to survive and to feed their families. This aspect has a direct and negative influence on productivity within AMM, as most of the labour is unskilled and manual in nature (see Section 3.2).

**Table 3.1: Age differentiation of the black women workers at AMM**

Age categories	Number of Respondents
27 – 30 years old	2
31 – 35 years old	5
36 – 40 years old	3
41 – 45 years old	5
46 – 50 years old	3
51 – 55 years old	0
56 – 60 years old	1

According to the older women, the age of many of the black women workers at AMM (between 41 and 60 years old), limits their employment opportunities outside AMM and confines them to the unskilled labour sector, as no employer will employ an old woman to do manual labour. This last statement is particularly relevant to the black women workers with limited school education (see Section 3.8).

### 3.4 ETHNIC AFFILIATION

According to Schlemmer (1996:179),

Some academics and politicians maintain that ethnicity is very salient and that those that would deny its importance reflect nothing more than the view of a tiny minority of middle-class black urban people. Others argue that black people experience their problems as blacks, not as Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, and so on ... [this]... divergence of views is in part due to the fact that some observers see ethnicity as a fairly invariable cultural absolute while others see it as a variable, dynamic phenomenon reflecting the degree of mobilisation or articulation of power around ethnic symbols. Whatever it is, however, the absence of any consensus would indicate that empirical studies among blacks have certain insights to offer.

As the research group is ethnically diverse, it is important, for the sake of the completeness of this research, to state the ethnic affiliation of the black women. In the completion of the questionnaires, the black women workers stated their ethnic affiliation as set out in Table 3.2:

**Table 3.2: Ethnic affiliation of the black women workers at AMM**

Categories of ethnic identity	Number of respondents per category
Ndebele	2
Pedi	6
Sotho (North Sotho)	8
Swazi	1
Zulu	2

One woman identified herself as Moslem, although this is a religious association more than an ethnic identity. When asked about this association, the spokesperson indicated that she was of Pedi origin but had converted to Islam and thus regards herself as ethnically Moslem.

Two of the women identified themselves as Ndebele, while another two spokespersons considered themselves to be Zulu. Although the Zulu and the Ndebele are both part of the

Nguni cluster, the Zulu women were adamant that they could not be associated with the Ndebele. They were very proud of their Zulu roots.

In the survey, 14 (73.68%) of the black women workers employed at AMM are of North Sotho origin. The Pedi and North Sotho women identified themselves according to certain criteria. Six women identified themselves as Pedi in origin. Although the Pedi are part of the North Sotho cluster (Bruwer 1963:21-22; Kriel 1992:25-33) (see Section 2.4), these women did not experience their ethnic affiliation as merely North Sotho. Eight women of North Sotho origin considered themselves merely as Sotho (see Table 3.2). These women are not Pedi in origin, nor did they identify themselves as South-Sotho or Tswana in origin. The women did not expand on this ethnic identification and merely stated that “that is what we are”. Schlemmer (1996:184-185) states that

ethnic identity and cultural observance are not absolute social differentiators or invariable primordial features of consciousness. These phenomena rise and fall in salience depending on the degree to which the surrounding circumstances and interests support them and on the extent to which they have become mobilised by or incorporated into other aspects of social action.

A direct result of ethnic diversity, however, is a diversity of languages within the factory, as is discussed in the next section.

### **3.5 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF THE BLACK WOMEN WORKERS AT AMM**

A logical consequence of the ethnic diversity is a diversity of languages within the workplace. This can cause problems within the workplace as the black women workers do not always understand one another clearly. Although the majority of the black women workers at AMM are able to speak and understand Sotho, this is not necessarily their language of choice, and when they socialise with other workers in their place of work, the women tend to stick to their own language group and prefer not to mingle with the women with whom they cannot communicate clearly. Meer *et al.* (1990:143) had similar results in their study.

Despite the fact that 17 of the women are able to speak and understand Sotho, they did not distinguish between the languages South Sotho and Sepedi, and merely stated their language

proficiency as SeSotho. Table 3.3 illustrates the language proficiency of the black women workers as indicated by their completion of questionnaires.

**Table 3.3 : Language proficiency of the black women workers at AMM**

Languages in the workplace	Number of respondents per language
Afrikaans	4
English	3
IsiNdebele	5
SeSotho	17
Siswati	1
IsiXhosa	1
IsiZulu	6

Because of the language proficiency of both the research group and the researcher, an interpreter had to be used during the interviews. The researcher were not able to speak Sotho and very few of the black women workers understood Afrikaans or English (see Table 3.3). Thus, the researcher spoke a mixture of Afrikaans and English during the interviews. An interpreter translated the questions and the black women workers answered in the language of their choice (see Section 1.8.2.1). Their answers were then interpreted back to the researcher.

In addition to the communication problems during interviews, this difference in language capabilities also presents an obstacle to effective communication within the workplace. The situation requires an interpreter to be used during meetings between members of the management team and the workers. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 3.19.2.

### 3.6 RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

The above-mentioned diversities imply the possibility of religious diversity in the workplace. Note that the woman worker who identified herself as Moslem in terms of her “ethnic

affiliation” did not state her religion as Islam but merely claimed that she had no church or religious affiliation at all.

**Table 3.4: Religious affiliation of the black women workers at AMM**

Categories of church affiliation	Number of women per affiliation
Anglican	1
Apostolic	3
Church without a name	1
Dutch Reformed	1
No church affiliation	5
Reformed	2
Roman Catholic	3
St John	1
ZCC	2

Five of the respondents (26,3%) to the questionnaires claimed to have no church affiliation at all, whilst 14 (73,6%) of the respondents identified their specific church affiliation (see Table 3.4). Six (31,5%) of the black women workers take part in religious activities such as prayer meetings and choir practices during the week and on weekends. Fairhurst and Moate (1993:42-43) reported similar results in their study on the daily lives of women in Nooitgedacht. During these prayer meetings, they ask for a better life, an end to their suffering and a “sacred heart”, in other words to be a better person. Others state that they do not have the time to take part in such activities. Some of the women claimed to have received financial assistance from the church in times of need, others have received assistance during sickness or when there was a death in the family. This assistance normally includes food, care for the ailing and prayer meetings at the home of the sick or deceased.

Religion is viewed as separately from work performance by the black women workers. When asked about the Divine and work motivation, spokespersons responded that God obviously wanted people to work because He does not like it when people are poor and starving. It was also said that if a person did not work, he/she would be forced to commit sins, such as



stealing in order to survive. According to the black women workers, God does not like stealing; therefore, He would prefer it if everybody had a job.

After long discussions and questioning it became clear that the work values of the black women workers are not founded in religion. Nor is idleness in itself perceived as a sin, as is the case in the puritan work ethic. Although these puritan views of work are idealistic (see Section 1.5.7), this aspect can be seen as the main contrast between the culturally determined work value systems of westerners and those of these black women workers. It also means that work is not perceived as a virtue, but merely as a means to an end, namely to be able to feed one's family. This contrast between the broad western work value system and the work values of the black women workers at AMM was established in qualitative research.

### **3.6 DEPENDANTS AND CHILDREN WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLDS OF THE BLACK WOMEN WORKERS**

According to Van Vuuren (1988:19), black people work mainly to ensure the survival of the group, meaning the survival of the family. The welfare of any one individual is not so important, the group is more important than the individual. This is a strong, traditionally held value (Kriel 1992:21-22). In the case of the black women workers at AMM, motivation to work is directly related to the survival of the children and dependants of these black women. All the black women workers stated that they worked in order to earn money so that their children would not starve. Meer (1984:29) obtained similar results during interviews with 992 women workers, of whom the majority were black women: "The children come first. No matter how much we need the money, the children come first. After all, we are working for the children. When they fall ill, we stay at home and lose the pay."

The composition of genealogical diagrams (see Appendix A) gave the researcher some indication of the number of dependants in each of the households from which these black women workers came. Dependants in this case can be defined as unemployed persons living in the same house as the black women workers, including children, family members or friends without a regular income. By all spokespersons' own admissions, these people all depend on that particular woman for housing, food, clothing, and support.

Black women workers at AMM have an average of 3.7 dependants each, which means that they have to feed, clothe and house these dependants on their monthly wages. Thirteen (68,4%) of the black women workers at AMM are single mothers and have to work in order to provide for their families and children.

The black women workers at AMM have an average of 2.5 children per person. The respondents have 1 to 6 children per household between the ages of 10 months and 27 years old. Four (21%) of the women have one child, whilst only one woman has six children. It is important to note that 11 (57,8%) of respondents have two or fewer children. Table 3.5 provides a breakdown of the number of children compared to the number of respondents, as established through quantitative research. So, for example, four of the respondents have only one child each, whilst seven of the women have two children each.

**Table 3.5: Children per household of the black women workers at AMM**

Number of children per household	Number of households per category of children
1 child per household	4
2 children per household	7
3 children per household	3
4 children per household	4
5 children per household	0
6 children per household	1

Children are very important in the lives of the black women workers (see Section 2.4.2). The welfare of their children forced the black women into formal employment. According to these spokespersons, they have to work in order to send their children to school. The black women workers stated that their children have to attend school to obtain a good education to secure satisfactory employment. This education and chance of employment are important, because the children have to earn sufficient salaries to be able to provide their parent or parents with a comfortable retirement and old age.

### 3.8 EDUCATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

The black women workers at AMM are largely semi-schooled, meaning they obtained a basic primary education. Although a large proportion of the black women workers at AMM had some secondary education, they are not highly literate and their language proficiency is mainly limited to their home language and, in some instances, an additional African language (see Section 3.6). Only four of the black women workers could speak Afrikaans and three of the black women workers have mastered some rudimentary English (see Table 3.3). This causes communication problems in the workplace, as the employer and the production manager use Afrikaans or English to communicate with the black women workers. Thus, in most instances, an interpreter needs to be used in the communication process between employees and management (see Section 3.19.2).

The black women workers perform mainly unskilled labour, therefore the lack of education and literacy in the workplace does not cause any critical problems and does not necessarily influence production in this case study. Nevertheless, it diminishes the chances of the black women workers to find employment outside the unskilled labour market and possibly to earn higher wages than they do at present. Fairhurst and Moate (1993:38) found the following in their study on the daily lives of women in Nooitgedacht in the former Bophuthatswana:

Since the majority [of the black women] have never been exposed to any form of formal education, their chances of enjoying improved employment opportunities and earning better income to the betterment of their lives, are greatly reduced.

Meer *et al.* (1990:89) had similar findings in interviews conducted with 988 women in the Durban-Pinetown region.

Table 3.6 provides a breakdown of the levels of school education per number of respondents.

Six (31,5%) of the black women workers had matriculated, while another six (31,5%) of the respondents were illiterate. Eleven (57,8%) of the respondents who had not matriculated stated that they had dropped out of school for financial reasons. Two of the respondents indicated that they could not finish school because they had fallen pregnant and had had to look after their children. One respondent stated that her husband told her that “enough is enough” and that she did not need any further education. Meer’s (1984:26) study produced similar results.

**Table 3.6: Levels of education of the black women workers at AMM**

Categories of grades according to the present SA education system	Number of women attaining certain grades
No school education	6
Grade 1 – 2	1
Grade 3 – 7	3
Grade 8 – 10	3
Grade 11 – 12	6

Only one woman revealed an interest in adult education programmes, although she did not have a very clear idea of what adult education entails, how or where to enrol for courses, or what she would gain from it. At the end of the discussion, she stated that adult education would be impossible because she and the other women have to look after their children in the evenings and at night. There would thus be no opportunity for them to attend adult education classes if these were presented after hours.

Tertiary education was out of the question, according to the black women workers. Not one of the women who had matriculated could afford further education. One spokesperson expressed an ambition to become a nurse and would study nursing if she could save enough money to pay for the course. The other black women workers stated that they were not satisfied with their current educational situation, but had accepted it as inevitable.

Because of their own lack of education, and because they value education very highly, the black women workers' children of school-going age, attend school. Some of these children have already matriculated, or are matriculating through correspondence courses. Of all the black women workers' children, only one child had dropped out of school in Grade 10, in order to get married. Some of the children at 23 years of age still attend school. This enhances the employment opportunities of these children, according to the spokespersons, but it also places an additional financial burden on the parent(s) and especially on the black women workers. School fees vary between R2 and R450 per month (see Table 3.8).

All the black women workers at AMM regard school education and literacy as essential in order to acquire good employment, to earn a good salary and to enjoy a good life. When

asked about the importance of education for both sexes, the general answer was that education is important for both sexes. However, if for some reason only one child could be sent to school (for instance, for financial reasons), some spokespersons stated that they would rather send a boy than a girl to school (see Section 2.5.2). The spokespersons stated that the reason for this is that a girl will get married or could fall pregnant at an early age and thus drop out of school. It would be a waste of money, in this instance, to send the girl to school. The researcher questioned the black women workers about birth control and the use of contraceptives by their daughters. The spokespersons responded that they could not give their daughters contraceptives, which would make the girls ill, as the girls were not used to them and had never used them before.

According to the black women workers at AMM, it is the duty of sons to look after their parents in their old age. If a son receives a good education, he will be able to secure a satisfactory job and will be able to look after his parents and provide them with a comfortable old age and retirement.

Other spokespersons argued that they would rather send their daughters to acquire a decent education, as the daughter would look after her parents in their old age. If they send their son, he could start drinking, walk about and forget about his parents, because he would be able to secure a good salary with which he would buy various items.

The spokespersons generally reached consensus during the interviews and stated that it would be best to send the child that is most interested in studying or that both sexes should be sent to school because there are no employment opportunities for people who cannot “write and read”.

The black women workers have high occupational ambitions for their children. Sixteen (84,2%) of the black women workers want their children to become medical doctors, teachers or banking clerks. One of the spokespersons stated that her children should do any work that they can find because employment opportunities are scarce. A further viewpoint, expressed by two of the women, was that their children should be employed in the sector of their choice, depending on their predisposition and talent. Maja (1972:103-107,114) had similar results in her research on the personality ideals which govern child-rearing practices among the North Sotho.

### 3.9 RESIDENCE AND TRANSPORT

All the black women workers' homes or places of residence are more or less 15 to 50 kilometres from the workplace, except for those women who live in Marble Hall (see Map 1 and Table 3.7). The majority of the women use buses as transport, although one or two women do occasionally use a mini-bus taxi as transport. The various buses depart from the areas where they live between 6 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. This means that the women are on the road for the greater part of two hours per trip (4 hours per day), as the buses make many stops along the way and they have to wait for people to arrive at the various bus stops. The women do not express many complaints about their mode of transport. The bus might be late on occasion, but that is accepted as inevitable and does not worry the women. The spokespersons did not mind being on the road for two hours at a time. It seems that the journey is quite a social occasion, an opportunity to visit with friends. Table 3.7 illustrates the places where the black women workers reside as well as the distances from these places to the workplace.

**Table 3.7: Places of residence of the black women workers at AMM**

Places of residence	Number of women living in the towns	Distance from these places to Marble Hall
Brakfontein	1	± 15 km
Dennilton	1	± 36 km
Elandskraal	2	± 32 km
Leeufontein	8	± 17 km
Mapoch	1	± 35 km
Marble Hall	1	± 3 km
Rietvlei	3	± 25 km
Vaalbank	1	± 50 km
Van der Merweskraal	1	± 40 km

Four (21%) of the black women workers' families do not live in the same town as the women. Some family members live quite close by in towns such as Elandskraal, while the spokespersons reside in Leeufontein, for example (see Map 1). Other spokespersons' families live in Potgietersrus, Pietersburg and Bloemfontein. These black women workers can only

afford to visit their families once a month and on public holidays, as transport fares and bus tickets to these distant places are very expensive (see Table 3.8).

Two of the black women workers' children live with members of their family in the above far-away towns and cities such as Potgietersrus. This implies that the black women workers only see their children once a month or occasionally during the weekend. Seventeen (89,4%) of the spokespersons' children stay at home and are looked after by family members or friends.

### **3.10 CHILDCARE FACILITIES AT THE WORKPLACE AND AT HOME**

There are no childcare facilities available at the workplace (AMM). The majority of these black women workers have infants, toddlers and school-going children that need to be taken care of during working hours. In most instances, older children, mainly older daughters, or female family members, such as the mother or mother-in-law of the black women workers, take care of the children (see Section 2.4.2). This is largely in accordance with the traditional African-oriented culture of the black women. In that tradition, female children are expected to look after younger family members (Bruwer 1963:108; Krige 1962:96; Mönnig 1967:108). Viljoen (1996:292) found in her research on the family life of black South Africans that "it was a general phenomenon in both urban and rural areas for grandparents to 'act as parents', for various reasons, in the upbringing of their grandchildren or the children of relations". In two of the cases in the AMM study, the father or the eldest son looked after the children during working hours. In both cases, these male family members were unemployed and depend on the particular spokesperson's wage to survive.

However, not all the women have daughters old enough to look after the younger children, or family living nearby to perform this chore. In these cases, the children stay at home alone after school or they live with the spokespersons' parents or family in another place. This means that the black women workers only see their children on weekends, or in some instances, only once a month.

When children are ill, the black women workers normally stay at home and thus leave work for an indefinite period. Consequently, the black women workers lose a part of their monthly income, as the factory functions on a system of proportional remuneration (see Section 3.2).

In some instances, the black women workers bring their children to the workplace. In one such instance, the researcher observed that the black women workers take turns to take care of the child in the workplace, but when work must be done urgently, the child is ultimately the mother's responsibility. Small children are, in most cases, tied to the back of the mother and are carried on the back of the mother as she continues with her work. Within traditional African-oriented cultural groups, such as the Pedi, this is a common practice (Mönnig 1967:104).

However, this practice hampers the woman's ability to work effectively, as she has to concentrate on her work and use both hands to do the work, pick up and carry heavy objects, use knives and sharp objects and work with heavy machinery. This environment is hazardous to children and they can get hurt easily if they are not watched constantly. The attention the mother has to bestow on the child reduces her productivity rate and, consequently, reduces the monthly income of the black woman worker concerned.

### **3.11 THE FINANCIAL STANDING OF BLACK WOMEN WORKERS**

#### **3.11.1 Monthly income and expenditure**

The black women workers at AMM view work exclusively as a means to an end. They work to earn wages to buy food in order to survive. It should be noted that this attitude towards work is not necessarily a cultural phenomenon, but is largely due to the socio-economic position of the black women workers. The reality of their daily lives is not always so simple. Each of the black women workers has dependants and a household to support (see Section 3.7). They have to send their children to school as well as clothe, feed, house and transport themselves and their dependants. The black women workers are, in most instances, caught in what is often called a "cycle of poverty", and live using a process of loans and repayment of debt.

The nineteen black women workers have a collective gross monthly income of more or less R10 930. The black women workers have collective monthly expenditures of R21 065.55 (see Table 3.8). These monthly expenses include the servicing of loans, money given to family, food, electricity, water, school fees, housing, accounts at clothing and furniture stores,

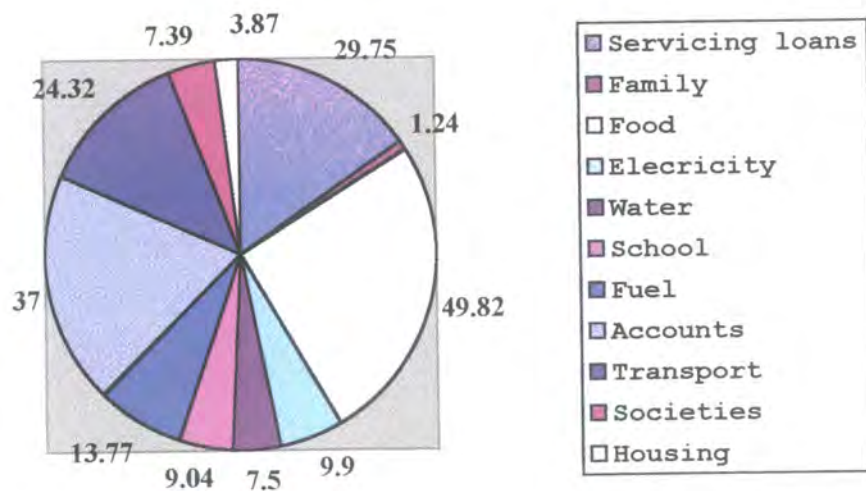


transport and grocery or funeral societies otherwise known as “stokvels”. Table 3.8 gives a complete breakdown of the monthly income and expenditures of black women workers at AMM.

The names of the black women workers are omitted to ensure confidentiality. The first column provides the monthly income of each woman; the total hence equals the entire monthly income of the twenty black women workers at AMM. The other columns illustrate the monthly expenditures of the black women workers, whilst the last column represents the total monthly expenditure of each black woman worker.

Figure 3.2 sets out the monthly expenses of the black women workers at AMM in relation to their income. Their income totals R10 930 and their total expenses are R21 065.25. This implies that, should the black women workers earn the same wage each month and spend more or less the same amounts per month, they will collectively be R121 623.00 in debt within twelve months. This places the black women workers in severe debt, which means they are caught in a “poverty trap”.

**Figure 3.2: Percentages of the monthly expenses of the black women workers at AMM (according to table 3.8)**



**Table 3.7: Monthly income and expenditure per black woman worker at AMM**

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>SERVICING LOANS</b>	<b>FAMILY</b>	<b>FOOD</b>	<b>ELECTRICITY</b>	<b>WATER</b>	<b>SCHOOL FEES</b>	<b>FUEL</b>	<b>ACCOUNTS</b>	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	<b>SOCIETIES</b>	<b>HOUSING</b>	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE PER BLACK WOMAN WORKER</b>	
420	200	0	150	0	20	8	22	150	92	60	0	702	
490	200	0	700	150	5	450	0	810	150	70	0	2535	
700	200	0	400	20	75	3	180	0	97,70	100	0	1075.70	
800	600	0	400	0	30	34	118	750	102,50	50	0	2084.50	
490	100	0	150	50	0	68	0	200	90,60	20	0	678.60	
800	0	0	400	200	50	25	0	100	640	0	80	1495	
400	100	0	300	70	30	10	88	100	90,60	120	0	908.60	
800	100	20	100	170	70	2,50	37	230	105,60	120	80	1035.10	
580	100	0	300	50	27	2	155	100	107,60	10	80	931.60	
670	200	0	200	70	30	12,50	30	320	90,80	80	80	1113.30	
450	120	70	300	80	20	2,50	25	50	90,60	30	0	788.10	
750	200	0	150	0	50	12,50	7	120	102,50	20	0	662	
600	150	0	300	0	60	12,50	20	120	102,50	25	0	790	
360	525	0	125	50	0	5	55	465	194	35	0	1454	
600	50	0	200	0	0	3	150	0	141,20	10	0	554.20	
700	100	50	400	0	72	25	150	100	102,50	18	0	1017.50	
360	100	0	300	0	150	3,30	300	250	150	20	24	1297.30	
360	120	0	200	50	30	305	6,75	130	120	20	0	981.75	
600	100	0	360	10	106	5	162	50	88	0	80	961	
<b>Total</b>	<b>10931</b>	<b>3265</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>5435</b>	<b>970</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>988.8</b>	<b>1505.75</b>	<b>4045</b>	<b>2658.7</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>20165.25</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>29,87%</b>	<b>1,28%</b>	<b>49,72%</b>	<b>8,8%</b>	<b>7,5%</b>	<b>9,04%</b>	<b>13,77%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>24,32%</b>	<b>7,39%</b>	<b>3,87%</b>	<b>192.72 %</b>

According to Mönnig (1967:186), this cycle of debt and repayment is largely due to the influence of western and capitalist economic principles on traditional African economies. Mönnig (1967:186) argues that people from African-oriented cultures, such as the Pedi, understand the principle of credit but not of interest, which is a western phenomenon, and this traps people in a dangerous cycle of debt and repayment. Thus, work is a matter of survival for these black women workers. Money is used to repay debts and this means there is very little of the black women workers' monthly income left for necessities and products such as food and water (see Section 3.11.5).

### **3.11.2 Additional income**

Six (31.5%) of the black women workers had an additional income from subsistence agriculture, including vegetable gardens, fruit orchards and animal husbandry (cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry). In traditional African-oriented cultural groups, farming activities are largely the duty of women (Bruwer 1963:107; Mönnig 1967:145; Shaw 1974:90-91) (see Section 2.4.4). These farming activities normally mainly supply food for household use, but, in some instances, vegetables and cattle are sold to obtain additional income in times of financial need. None of the black women workers sell such goods on a regular basis and thus this type of additional income cannot be regarded as part of their regular gross monthly income.

None of the black women workers received money from their husbands, children or family on a monthly basis. Thus, in most instances, the monthly wages of the black women workers support the entire household and all the persons that are dependent on them (see Section 3.7).

### **3.11.3 Housing**

Only six of the black women workers have housing expenses (see Table 3.8). Five of the women spend a monthly sum of R80 on rent. This type of expenditure normally arises when the black women workers' parents or family members live in another town or city while the women themselves rent a room or a house in the vicinity of their workplace. Most of these black women workers live with family members or they possess their own houses. Some of the spokespersons claimed to have built their own homes, but none of the homes of the black

women workers are informal in nature. The total housing expenditure of the twenty black women workers at AMM amounts to R424 per month.

#### **3.11.4 Electricity and water**

Eleven (57,8%) of the black women workers have electricity and water in their homes. Water supply is often free of charge, but some women pay between R20 to R75 per month (see Table 3.8). Eight (42%) of the women have to fetch water from a central water point as far as 2 kilometres from their homes, or from a communal tap in the street. These women often hire somebody to fetch water during the day, or they buy water from a vendor at more or less R12 per 25-litre drum of water. More or less five drums of water are bought per month, according to the spokespersons.

A certain “supply” of electricity is bought per month based on a “ticket” system. Most of the women buy R100 worth of electricity per month and when that supply is finished, they might buy an additional R50 electricity ticket to supply them with electricity to last until the end of the month. This electricity supply is used for lighting purposes only, and does not include stoves. The women prepare their food on paraffin- or coal-powered stoves.

#### **3.11.5 Loans and debt**

The majority of the black women workers are in debt with various financial institutions (see Table 3.8). Seventeen (89,4%) of the black women workers at AMM have applied for monthly advances on their salaries from the employer. This sum is then subtracted from the workers’ wages at the end of the month. This practice places the women in a vicious cycle of debt and repayment. According to Bruwer (1963:187), one of the most noticeable features of the influence of the western capitalist economy on the economies of traditional African-oriented cultural groups is the popularity of western consumer commodities. This effect is visible in the description of the expenditure of the black women workers at AMM. Seventeen (89,4%) of the black women workers have accounts at various clothing and furniture retailers, and thus have to make monthly payments for these purchases (see Table 3.8). In some instances (10,5%), the repayments of these debts account for more than the individual monthly wages of the workers concerned.

All the black women workers indicated that they realise that it is an encumbrance to borrow money or to request an advance on their wages. However, the spokespersons stated that they do not want to live in poverty or “suffer like the poor”. Hence, they borrow money. Occasionally they purchase articles that they cannot afford and then they have to borrow money in order to repay their debt. The women thus settle debt with newly acquired debt. The spokespersons stated that once people run into debt or fall into arrears on payments, they are caught in a cycle of repayment, which affects their monthly expendable income negatively.

The spokespersons said that everybody has their pride and nobody likes a deprived and impoverished appearance, thus, when they lack money, they (the spokespersons) borrow it or obtain an advance on their wages from the employer. One spokesperson declared that life is a process of debt and repayment, and that people should handle their finances in this fashion. People are supposed to borrow money because this way “nobody will starve”. The spokespersons stated that “maybe the institutions and the retailers would overlook their debt and they would never have to repay it”. Otherwise, they will repay some of their debt the next month. The black women workers handle their finances according to the notion that “tomorrow is another day to do what could not be done today” (see Section 3.18.4).

### **3.11.6 Savings accounts and societies**

Only six (31,5%) of the black women workers have savings accounts. However, none of these accounts is used, in other words, none of the women saves any money in a banking institution.

Spokespersons argued that they do not receive enough remuneration per month to save for the future or to utilise their saving accounts. Their monthly expenditure and the repayment of debts deplete their monthly financial reserves. According to spokespersons, there is no need to save money. They will always be employed at AMM and when they retire their children will take care of them (see Section 3.8).

None of the black women workers are members of a medical fund or have access to pension benefits. This worries the spokespersons, but they stated that it is not their responsibility to establish these funds. It is the responsibility of the employer, according to the spokespersons.

According to these workers, there is nothing that they can do without the assistance of the employer to establish medical or pension funds for the workers at AMM.

Seventeen (89,4%) of the black women workers at AMM are members of “stokvels” or societies. Fairhurst and Moate (1993:49) also found such societies to be popular. All of the women in the stokvels are members of funeral societies. Each member contributes between R10 and R30 per month to these societies (see Table 3.8). When a family member dies, the society pays for the funeral. Three women are members of grocery societies. These societies function on the same principle as the funeral societies. When one of the society’s members wants to entertain guests, for example, for a wedding, birthday or on any other occasion, the society carries the costs of the groceries. The spokespersons stated that they are members of these societies in order to be able to bury their deceased in a fashion that is respectful and appropriate. They also need to be able to feed their family and friends on important occasions such as birthdays.

The financial priorities of the black women workers at AMM differ from those of westerners. Westerners are normally future-oriented. The black women workers at AMM, on the other hand, are oriented to the past and the present. According to Van Vuuren (1988:27), the time concept of traditional South African cultural groups in general, emphasises the past, and the future is not planned for, as it does not influence the existence of humans in the present. The financial standing of the black women workers, especially the process of debt and repayment and the membership to societies, is to a large extent culturally determined, and is the result of their culturally determined values and their pragmatic view of these values. Coertze (1980:52-54) provides a detailed description of pragmatic values (see Section 1.5.4.5). For the black women workers, a suitable burial appropriate to the status of a family member is more important than a medical fund or a savings account. These priorities should not be judged from a western point of view – the African orientation of these black women should be taken into account.

### **3.12 POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE BLACK WOMEN WORKERS AT AMM**

Political orientations, such as capitalism (see Section 1.5.7.2), socialism or communism have a direct influence on the work performance of employees, as these ideologies dictate



behaviour within the workplace (Femina 1993:122; Weber 1958:72). For example, socialist ideology implies a classless society where the state controls workers and industries. Communism dictates the employment of all citizens of the specific state. Capitalists view work as a commodity and believe it is a person's right to sell his/her labour to an employer for remuneration (Van Aardt 1994:63-67). The South African labour system is based on capitalist economic principles and it is within this capitalist system that the research group operate as employees at AMM.

All the above economic and political ideologies imply certain behavioural patterns from the various workforces. Trade unions are engaged to control and direct the working behaviour of employees. It is thus important to determine the political orientations and perceptions of the black women workers at AMM of the political situation in South Africa. The black women workers were questioned about unionisation as well as their perceptions of the function and worth (value) of trade unions.

### **3.12.1 Perceptions of the political situation in South Africa**

Six (31,5%) of the respondents to the questionnaires are members of political parties; nevertheless, they are not highly politicised, nor are the black women workers at AMM "up to date" with current political trends and events. The members of the political parties said that their membership might improve their current living conditions and alleviate their poverty. According to the black women workers, being members of a political party will improve the lives of all black people and "they will not live like blacks anymore". According to spokespersons, political parties will "hear the cries" of their members and these parties will see to it that they (the members) are rewarded for their membership by establishing a good life for these members. This concept parallels the "ubuntu"-principle of caring for members of a group and supporting one another. It is an important concept within the sub-Saharan African life- and world-view. Jabavu (1966:4) describes "ubuntu" as "human feeling" and Murray (1967:88) describes it as "the link that binds man and man together because they are men." Manganyi (1981:9) refers to the same phenomenon when he quotes the South African writer, Ezekiel Mphahlele, describing "ubuntu" as a

humanistic experience, where people treat each other as human beings, and not simply as instruments or tools; where people become committed to one another as

human beings without necessarily declaring commitment; if one of their kind is in difficulties, the others immediately rise to the occasion and do something about it.

Nevertheless, these women regard politics as an abstract force that will improve the daily circumstances and toils of those that pledge their membership and loyalty to a party, some time in the future. However, politics as such were not brought into the workplace and thus a political ideology or the ideology of a politically-oriented trade union did not dictate the working behaviour of the black women workers at AMM.

### **3.12.2 The unionisation of the black women workers**

None of the workers at AMM or the respondents to the questionnaires are unionised, nor do they have a clear idea of the functions and objectives of trade unions within the workplace (see Section 1.7.4). They regard trade unions in a very negative light, stating that trade unions are bad for the workers and that trade unionists and officials are dishonest and rogues. The employer stated that there had been an unfortunate incident with a trade union a few years ago. The workers took part in a strike without being members of the trade union, and without bargaining with the employer or consulting with the employer in any way. This led to lost working hours and thus reduced wages, as the factory functions on the principle of proportional remuneration.

The results of this experience have led these workers to believe that all trade unionists are opportunists and that the unions do not benefit the workforce in general. This incident was not mentioned by any of the black women workers and, when asked about it, they said that they did not know anything. The topic was dropped, as discussing it led to strained relations between the researcher and the spokespersons.

Membership of trade unions in the future was discussed in detail, although the black women workers at AMM had no clear perception of what membership entails. One spokesperson stated that unions are only for registered workers, and they are not formally registered. Another spokesperson said that she would become a member of a trade union if she were certain that the union would improve her daily living conditions and see to it that the workers at AMM received higher wages each month. According to that spokesperson, it would be a good thing to be a member of a trade union if the union would negotiate with the government



and employers for good pension benefits. Other spokespersons agreed that under these conditions, they would become members of a trade union too, but they do not know any trade unions, so they cannot be members of a union.

A question was asked about the value of trade unions for the black women workers in South Africa. The spokespersons stated that trade unions should improve the conditions in which women live and end their suffering. The spokespersons' perception of trade unions is similar to their perception of the use and purpose of political parties, and the "ubuntu" principle and group solidarity, as discussed previously, is present in these perceptions. However, it is possible to deduce that unionisation has no direct political influence on the working behaviour of the black women workers at AMM. The work values of the black women workers at AMM are largely unaffected by political ideology or trade union policy.

### **3.13 CAREER AWARENESS**

In the following discussion, the perceptions of the black women workers at AMM regarding selected western work values, as identified by Raubenheimer and Kotze (1984) as well as Van Vuuren (1988), are described. The following discussions should be read against the background of the work milieu, the above biographical statistics as well as the socio-economic position of the black women workers employed at AMM. One should also bear in mind the political and socio-economic circumstances prevailing in South Africa and the influence of these conditions on the employment opportunities available to black women workers in general, but specifically to the black women workers at AMM.

The black women workers have no illusions that their current employment is a "calling to fulfil a specific role in life" (see Section 1.6.1.1). There is very little or no "career awareness" as a concept and almost no objectives are set and pursued by these black women workers, other than to obtain financial remuneration in order to survive (see Section 1.6.1.1). According to the black women workers at AMM, they work because they have no other choice. This "lack of calling" is not necessarily a cultural phenomenon, and it must be borne in mind that the socio-economic position of the black women plays an important role in the perceptions regarding western work values within AMM by these workers.



The majority of the black women workers at AMM regard work in a negative light. They do not enjoy working and they would prefer to be at home with their children. They work to survive, to earn money to buy food, for housing and electricity, for school fees and to clothe their children and dependants. This attitude towards work was confirmed by both the qualitative and the quantitative research.

Four (21%) of the respondents to the questionnaires had heard about employment opportunities at AMM from family members or friends. Fifteen (78,9%) of the respondents had walked from factory to factory seeking employment. Meer (1984:21) had similar research results. Some obtained employment immediately, other women had to wait a week or two before there were positions available on the factory floor. Thus, any employment opportunity would have been acceptable; seeking employment at AMM had nothing to do with a choice of career or an awareness of career options.

Most of the respondents had previously been employed at other factories, shops, restaurants or farms before they took employment at AMM. They left their previous employment for a variety of reasons, including pregnancy, marriage, bankruptcy of the employer, urbanisation and cuts in wages at the previous place of employment. The black women workers stated that they had sought employment at AMM to end the poverty and suffering at their homes and of their families.

The black women workers at AMM were questioned in detail about their occupational ambitions, choice of career and career objectives. The women were asked whether they would prefer alternative employment, in other words, whether they want to be employed at another factory, or whether they want to do another type of work. Most of the spokespersons answered that they were satisfied with their jobs at AMM and that one job is as good as another. The majority of the spokespersons stated that they would not seek other employment because they find the work at AMM "easy". They are used to the routine of the work day and they know how to do the work at AMM. If the black women workers were newly employed at another workplace, they would have to learn new techniques and routines. The spokespersons stated that they are comfortable where they are.

A few spokespersons stated that they would like to work at another place, such as a supermarket or at a textile factory, but they do not know how to find employment at such a place, because employment opportunities are not readily available. Thus, they would rather



stay where they are, because now they do not have to worry about not getting wages at the end of the month and they know how to do the work.

During interviews, the women were asked whether they would seek other employment if the work at AMM should end, or if their employment at the factory should be terminated in the future. Respondents indicated that they did not worry about this, as there has always been work at AMM and there always will be. Nevertheless, if AMM were bankrupt or laid off its workers, they would be forced to seek other employment, otherwise they will starve. When asked what kind of employment they would seek, spokespersons remarked that one job is just as good as another. They will work at the first place that employs them, but it is not necessary to worry about this, as it will never happen.

The black women workers at AMM were questioned during interviews about their childhood employment dreams; in other words, when they were small, what occupations did they want to have? The majority of the women had childhood dreams of becoming teachers and nurses (see Table 3.9). The spokespersons would have chosen these careers because they wanted to help people who cannot help themselves. Most of the women wanted to work with children, either to heal them or to teach them values and morals. One woman wanted to be a social worker to ease the suffering of the black population in South Africa and another wanted to be a lawyer in order to be “a voice for the black people” that had been wronged in some way. One spokesperson wanted to become a tailor in order to start her own business if she did not find employment at a textile factory. One spokesperson declared that she had not had any childhood ambitions. She always knew that she would be a factory worker. That is just the way life went in her community and it was no use thinking otherwise.

The majority of the spokespersons said that they had not pursued these “dream” careers because of financial problems and a lack of education. None of the black women workers thinks it essential to pursue these ambitions at this time of her life. According to spokespersons, they do not have the time or the money to study in order to pursue such careers and they are satisfied with their jobs at AMM. The same logic applies here as seen earlier in the discussion on alternative employment (see Section 3.13): they are used to the routine at AMM and they know the work. If the black women workers should start to work at another place or pursue their childhood ambitions, they would have to learn new routines and skills.

**Table 3.9: Hypothetical occupational ambitions of the black women workers at AMM**

Occupational ambitions	Number of women per occupation
Factory worker	1
Lawyer	2
Nurse	7
Social worker	1
Tailor	1
Teacher	7

Thus, the choice of career of the black women workers depended on circumstances and their socio-economic position and, in most instances, a random search for employment without any specific requirements and objectives. Realities related to the conditions in which the black women workers grew up plus the lack of appropriate education have, to a large extent, moulded their present situation.

### 3.14 INDIVIDUALISM

According to Kearney (1984:75-76), individualism is prevalent in modern western industrial society and it is

permissible to say that individualism arises with the transition from tribal to class society. In the Western world it becomes even more prevalent with the decline of kin-based agrarian communities that occurred during the gradual transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Kearney (1984:76-77) also describes the enforcement of individualism within the capitalist system:

Whereas the individualism among the propertied classes was re-enforced by the struggle for private profit, among the propertyless it was re-enforced by having to enter the labour market as a lone person. In a communal classless society one's well-



being is dependent on the well-being of the group ... Relationships in a market economy are completely different.

AMM demands a measure of individualism from its black women workers (see Section 3.2). As discussed earlier, these women are individually responsible for the amount of work that they perform, as well as for the quality of this work. The factory functions on the principle of direct proportional remuneration. The black women workers are individually responsible to record how much work is done and thus receive remuneration commensurate with the day's work.

The 19 women were questioned, during interviews as well as in questionnaires, about the fairness of the system of proportional remuneration and the advantages and disadvantages of working alone and working in a group. In most instances, the nature of the work determined whether the black women workers would work individually or as part of a group. However, according to the black women workers at AMM, they prefer working within groups. Spokespersons said that this way they could help one another with the work and they can share the work. Otherwise, one person would have to do it all alone and the amount of work is too much for just one person. The black women workers indicated that working in groups is better than working alone, because if workers do not know exactly how to do the work, or find the work difficult, there is always somebody else to help them.

The black women workers at AMM do not help other workers with their monthly income, in the sense of doing work and transferring the amount of work completed to another person in order to increase that person's income. As indicated already, workers are individually responsible for their monthly income. Spokespersons stated that the more money they want at the end of the month, the harder they had to work. Thus, although the African-oriented culture of the black women workers dictates group solidarity, the economic position of the spokespersons as well as the principle of individual possession do not allow them to assist one another financially. However, on a social level, the black women workers at AMM regard group solidarity as extremely important.

The nature of the work at the factory does not require individual initiative, as each of the black women workers at AMM has specific and clearly delineated duties to perform. Parts and goods must be made according to specific and regulated measurements. If these explicit measurements and guidelines are not followed, the quality control officer or the production

manager rejects the component or object, and the woman who made the item is not paid for it. There is no margin for error and it is the responsibility of each individual to control the quality and quantity of her work.

The black women workers at AMM viewed proportional remuneration as unfair. They declared that they cannot always complete the same amount of work each day; sometimes they are tired and they cannot work hard. On other occasions, their children are sick and they have to stay at home. This means that the black women workers do not receive the same wage each month. According to spokespersons, this causes them to be poor because they do not know how much money they will have at the end of the month and they buy items which they cannot afford. The black women workers stated that they would rather have a fixed wage so that they can plan each month financially. However, this fixed wage should not be lower than the wage they receive in a “good” month based on proportional remuneration.

The black women workers were divided on the issue of whether everybody should receive the same fixed wage. Some spokespersons suggested that this could be unfair as some workers worked longer hours than others did and some workers did more work than others did, so not all workers could receive the same wage. However, the majority of the black women workers stated that it is not good to be rich when other people are poor. This view accords with the traditional African-oriented culture of the black women workers. According to Mönning (1967:143-144), the accumulation of wealth by an individual is frowned upon within the Pedi community, as wealth should be distributed evenly throughout the community. Everybody should receive the same wage because everybody at the factory is human and thus equal. The black women workers argued that if people work together in one place they should receive the same wage.

The majority of the black women workers at AMM did not value individuality highly; the welfare of the group is always more important than the welfare and advancement of the individual. This accords with the traditional African values of the black women workers, for, according to those values, individuality is not a necessity and the welfare of the group should be promoted at all times (Oosthuizen 1977:37; Silberbauer 1968:19; Van Niekerk 1983:61). Mbiti (1969:108) describes this phenomenon as follows:

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.’



According to the spokespersons, there are different types of groups within the workplace. The group may consist of the black women workers at AMM working together in a certain part of the factory or a particular department, or all the black women workers within the workplace (AMM). In some instances, the group includes the male workers employed at AMM as well. The size and type of the group varies according to the issue at hand and the demands or problems experienced by the workers. Within the group (whichever group definition is appropriate), everybody is considered equal. Favouritism of any kind is frowned upon. Spokespersons stated that co-workers should not act or behave in such a way that the welfare of the group is jeopardised. Nzimande (1983:52-53) obtained similar results in a study on the work values of black male industrial workers.

A worker with a grudge against another worker should not complain to the employer, the production manager, supervisor or quality control officer, but the problem should be handled at grassroots level. The black women workers argued that problems between workers should be sorted out within the group and not in an office. The group should work together in harmony and there should be no tension between the members of the group. Proportional remuneration causes tension within the group, because all workers are not "treated equally", one person receives a higher wage than another does, and this is regarded as unfair.

It is particularly the capacity to be industrious, thorough and dedicated to the work and the workplace that emphasises individuality (see Section 1.6.1.8). Within a western-oriented labour system, individuals should be able to do work effectively and be self-sufficient. Consequently, individualism cannot be examined in isolation but can only be fully understood against the background of the elements of western work values, namely the capacity to be industrious and thorough, and the individual's ability to accept personal or individual responsibility and accountability.

### **3.15 THOROUGHNESS AND ALERTNESS**

Thoroughness implies exactness and attentiveness or alertness, and implies attention to detail in an organised and ordered way of behaving. Thus, thoroughness requires a certain standard of work performance. The standard of work performance determines the quality of the product (see Section 1.6.1.5).

Thoroughness goes hand in hand with the level of training of employees (Farrel 1978:91). Workers cannot possibly produce a product of high standard if they do not know how to do the work in the first instance. The black women workers receive training from the production manager and the quality control officer. The black women workers at AMM stated that they had received sufficient training from these persons (this statement was confirmed by the qualitative and the quantitative research). They are especially satisfied with the training presented by the production manager.

The black women workers stated that the production manager had showed them exactly how to do the work and had explained to them how everything in the factory worked. The production manager showed them how to operate the machinery and the workers could ask her questions if they did not completely understand the training. The spokespersons said that if they did the work incorrectly, then the production manager would show them how to do the work correctly. If the black women workers had a problem in completing work, or if they were not certain about how to do the work, they could ask either the production manager or the quality control officer for help. The production manager or the quality control officer then helped them with the problem or showed them how to do the work correctly.

According to the black women workers at AMM, the new employees receive their training from the quality control officer. They seemed satisfied that this training is sufficient and that employees are able to deliver products of a good quality after having received the training.

Although the black women workers at AMM claimed to be satisfied with their training, the production manager and the quality control officer complained that work was sometimes not done thoroughly. The black women workers at AMM admitted that a large number of the products are rejects and thus below the stipulated minimum quality requirements. Nevertheless, this substandard work performance was not blamed on the training that the spokespersons had received, but rather on the system of proportional remuneration, a lack of time and tiredness (see Section 3.20.5).

The black women workers at AMM declared during interviews as well as in the completion of questionnaires that they always do their work thoroughly and correctly. Nevertheless, the women workers admitted that they often rushed in order to produce as many parts or products as possible in order to receive a higher wage at the end of the month. Thus, they do not always perform work thoroughly and, consequently, produce rejects. The black women





workers also alleged that they do not always have sufficient time to produce the amount of parts required by the manufacturer. In these circumstances, the black women workers asserted, it could not be expected of them to produce high quality work all the time. Nzimande (1983:57) found the same argument among his research subjects. According to Nzimande (1983:57), the thoroughness of a black worker is closely linked to the worker's perception of time. This is in turn related to the traditional African-oriented concept of time and the management of time. This issue is discussed later in the chapter (see Section 3.18).

The black women workers indicated in interviews and during the completion of questionnaires that they get tired if they have to work hard the whole day long. When they get tired, they cannot be thorough. The black women workers get especially tired on loading days (the days when the trucks are loaded and products are transported to the manufacturers). On these days, they have to complete all the work required by a manufacturer or client of AMM, and any work which has not been completed during the week. On these days the black women workers hurry and thus produce many products of substandard quality.

The black women workers at AMM expressed the opinion that it is important to do the work thoroughly. If they did not deliver high quality products and produced too many rejects, their employment at AMM would be terminated. Spokespersons stated that if they produced too many rejects, the costs of these rejects might be subtracted from their monthly wages and they would receive less money than ever before. In some instances, the machinery was faulty and it was impossible to do the work correctly and thoroughly, but in these cases, that was not the fault of the workers.

Hence, according to the black women workers at AMM, it is a good thing to do work thoroughly, but time and circumstances do not allow workers to deliver products of sufficient quality all the time. Thoroughness in the workplace is closely related to an acceptance of personal responsibility and accountability. The black women workers at AMM never see themselves to be at fault. Spokespersons remarked that they always do their work thoroughly and exactly. Rejects are not the result of human error, but occur accidentally without the workers' noticing these errors. Thus, the workers are doing their work thoroughly and precisely, "we just do not always keep our eyes open enough". This way, a mistake might slip in without the knowledge of the worker.

A definite distinction is drawn between thoroughness and alertness. The black women workers indicated in the course of the qualitative and quantitative research that they are always thorough in doing their work, but they argued that it is humanly impossible to be alert at all times because they get tired and their eyes get tired as well. This way attention is not always given to detail and the result is reject products.

### **3.16 MOTIVATION TO ACHIEVE**

According to western values (Raubenheimer & Kotze 1984; Van Vuuren 1988), achievement motivation refers to the individual need to achieve the best possible results, given the ability of the individual (see Section 1.6.1.10). Interviews with the black women workers at AMM revealed an apparent absence of this important element of western work values (see Section 1.6.1.10). As already mentioned in previous discussions, the black women workers view “work” exclusively as a means to an end and they work to earn wages to buy food in order to survive (see Section 1.13). None of the black women workers claimed that she enjoyed working, although all of the black women workers stated that it is necessary to work in order to live. This attitude towards work was confirmed in the quantitative research.

There is a clear distinction between whether it is good or beneficial to work and whether the black women workers enjoy working. According to black women workers at AMM, it is good and beneficial to work. If they work, then they earn money and they will not starve. Nevertheless, work is not enjoyable. The spokespersons stated that they have to work long hours, they have to pick up heavy objects, and hence they get dirty and tired. According to spokespersons, it is not beneficial or pleasant to be dirty and exhausted, but everybody has to work in order to eat and to survive. All the black women workers at AMM stated that they did not enjoy working, but at least they received a wage at the end of the month. If they did not work they would receive nothing and they would suffer even more than they already do.

The spokespersons stated that work at AMM is bearable because of the work security the factory provides. According to the black women workers at AMM, the work is tolerable, because the workers know that they will be remunerated at the end of the month and they believe that there will always be work and employment opportunities at AMM.

The black women workers were asked during interviews, as well as in the completion of questionnaires, whether they would prefer to perform a variety of tasks or whether they prefer to do the same work each day. The women stated that they do not always perform the same work each day, as the orders from the manufacturers differ and they have to make different items to meet the orders. The type and varieties of tasks that they perform are thus out of their control. On the other hand, black women workers stated, on occasion they perform the same tasks for long periods. They grow weary of the repetition, but they prefer this situation to performing a variety of tasks. The black women workers stated that they know the tasks at hand, and they do not have to learn new skills and techniques in order to perform the work. Hence, it is more comfortable to do the same work every day.

The black women workers indicated that they do not find their work interesting, but it is not boring either. The work “is just work”, tasks that have to be completed in order for the workers to receive monthly remuneration. The black women workers at AMM indicated that they might be more productive if they received higher wages. Spokespersons stated that they enjoy difficult tasks much less than performing easy tasks. They said that it took a long time to perform challenging work and it exhausts them. Hence, it is preferable and less tiring to perform easy tasks. In this way more work is done, and the workers receive higher wages.

The black women workers at AMM do not persist in problem-solving (see Section 3.15). If a problem exists, it is in most instances reported to the quality control officer, the supervisor or the production manager. If the workers have trouble with certain tasks, another worker is assigned to the same tasks. The spokespersons stated that if they experience problems with work, they ask for help. The spokespersons stated that it is no use to do work if they do not know how to do it or if it is progressing too slowly. Spokespersons said that it is not their job to solve problems, because problem-solving is the responsibility of management.

The black women workers at AMM were asked in interviews and questionnaires if they ever felt proud of the amount of work they are doing and whether they feel satisfied if their work is done well (see Section 1.6.1.10). The women answered that they feel “proud” of the amount of work they have done because they know they will be remunerated accordingly. However, the black women workers stated, they do not feel proud of or good about the work itself, they are just exhausted at the end of the day.

The black women workers at AMM, with exception of the quality control officer and the black women workers working in the juice department, did not know what the items they are making are used for at the end of the manufacturing process. They did, however, know that these products are sent to certain manufacturers such as Nissan and Land Rover. The black women workers indicated during the completion of questionnaires that they would like to know what the components they produce are used for. The quality control officer responded that the employer should show the workers drawings of the completed and assembled automobiles and show the workers where their parts and products fit into the picture. The black women workers remarked that they might be satisfied if they knew what the products they are making are used for, and they would not be so unhappy about working. The employer should consider this proposal seriously in order to improve job satisfaction among the black women workers at AMM.

The black women workers were asked in the questionnaires whether they would still work if they won money at a game of chance such as *Ithuba* or if they married a rich husband. Eleven (57,8%) of the respondents indicated that they would not work if they were rich, as they only work to earn money in the first instance. If they had rich husbands or won money, they could buy anything they wanted to and they would not have to work. Three of the respondents stated that if they had rich husbands they would continue working in order to earn their own money. They do not want to be dependent on a husband for handouts. However, if these black women workers won a large amount of money, they would not continue working. Meer (1984:19) had similar results in her sample, where workers said: "Most of us would leave work this minute if our husbands earned enough money to manage all the expenses. We don't like the work. It is boring and tiring."

Four of the respondents indicated that they would continue working because "money does not last forever". This way they can save some of the money for their old age. The black women workers stated that even a little money each month would help them and prevent starvation, so they would continue working even if they were rich. One respondent indicated that she would continue working no matter how rich she was, because she would be bored at home and would not be able to sit around and do nothing. Other black women workers in the group responded to this comment by telling that particular respondent that she was mad. Again, Meer's (1984:19) results were similar.

The black women workers at AMM stated that if they had rich husbands or won money, they would buy groceries or send their children to university. The women stated that they would build large houses, get telephones and buy cars and they might even save some of their money. All the black women workers wanted new furniture and one spokesperson would start an upholstery business. The black women workers stated that they would financially support their families, especially their parents. The black women workers at AMM thus have certain levels of personal aspirations, but these aspirations are not applied at the workplace, mainly because the black women workers perceive work as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.

The black women workers indicated during interviews and in completing questionnaires that they do not want to change any aspects about the work they are performing, except for improved financial remuneration. They do not enjoy working and nothing will change this. The only motivational factor for the black women workers is the monthly remuneration. The black women workers at AMM exhibit low levels of personal aspirations according to western criteria and prefer easy and effortless tasks to taxing and challenging assignments.

The black women workers at AMM do not have confidence in their abilities and skills. The black women workers view skills as something one must necessarily acquire in order to perform work and complete tasks. The black women workers do not try to control their environment or their lives but leave their lives and environment to destiny. The black women workers at AMM have a very fatalistic approach towards “work” itself.

### **3.17 CAPACITY TO BE INDUSTRIOUS**

The capacity to be industrious includes dedication to work and goes hand in hand with a western work value system (see Section 1.6.1.2). The capacity to be industrious implies the capacity to be productive and is closely associated with other elements of western work values, such as thoroughness and time management.

There was general confusion during interviews between the researcher and the black women workers about whether the capacity to be industrious or “hard working” implied the amount of work or the nature of work (see Table 3.11). The concept “hard working” was ambiguous, because the researcher assumed the concept to mean the capacity to be industrious. The black

women workers interpreted the concept to mean working with heavy objects and performing difficult manual labour. The researcher thus had to make a clear distinction between “hard work” (manual labour) and “hard working” (the capacity to be industrious).

According to spokespersons, it is beneficial to do a lot of work, in other words to be “hard working”, because then the workers receive high wages at the end of the month. On the other hand, it is not good to “work hard”, meaning to perform difficult work or to work with heavy objects, because then they get tired and dirty (see Section 3.16). The black women workers at AMM made a definite distinction between work as enjoyable and work as advantageous because of monthly remuneration (see Section 3.13).

All the black women workers at AMM indicated during interviews and the completion of questionnaires that work is definitely a good thing, because by working, people can earn money and do not starve. However, nobody claimed to enjoy performing work in any way. This has a definite negative influence on productivity, as workers are largely unmotivated and the welfare of the factory, exclusive of the continued employment of the black women workers at AMM, is not a priority.

The black women workers were asked about the amount of work that they complete per day. They responded that they complete as much work as they are capable of doing, and that it is very exhausting to work vigorously all day long. Spokespersons stated that they do not work speedily, but they do not work at a leisurely pace either. They work at a speed in the “middle of fast and slow” and the required amount of work is always completed on time.

Van Vuuren (1988:21) called phenomena of this nature the “work performance-ceiling”. According to Van Vuuren (1988:21), black workers measure remuneration in relation to physical exertion and needs. Within traditional African-oriented cultures, the concept of surplus production does not exist. Thus, the black workers only deem it necessary to complete a certain amount of work. This aspect is culturally determined (Van Vuuren 1988:21), but is not productive within a western labour system.

The black women workers at AMM were asked if it would not be to their advantage to work fast every day, in other words to be productive to full potential on a daily basis. This way they would receive more remuneration per month. The spokespersons stated that one could not work arduously every day. People are more exhausted and overworked on some days than on

others, and it is impossible to work hard and vigorously on a daily basis. Sometimes, according to the spokespersons, people might talk too much and are not fully productive, but this is inevitable and should be accepted as such.

The black women workers at AMM stated that they do not work during teatime and lunch, because they are tired and they have to rest. Most of the spokespersons claim that they leave the workplace at 5:30 in the afternoon and do not work overtime. Occasionally the workers are expected to work overtime, and the spokespersons complained about this (see Section 3.18.4). The spokespersons stated that it is impossible for women workers to work overtime each evening and on weekends, as the women have families and children to take care of and households to maintain.

The black women workers were asked what would happen if the required amount of work was not completed in time to be transported to the manufacturers. According to the women, it has never happened that the required amount of work was not completed at the end of loading days. Spokespersons said that they work vigorously on loading days to complete all the work that had not been done during the week, in time to be loaded on the trucks and transported to the manufacturers. However, they do not enjoy loading days because they get very fatigued. Loading days are the days that the black women workers at AMM are forced to be most productive and industrious.

Interviews revealed that the black women workers at AMM do not enjoy being industrious. The black women workers stated that they do not feel exalted or proud about the amount of work they perform and complete. Van Vuuren (1988:21) reported similar findings. In other words, they are not elated about the fact that they have worked hard or feel proud about the visible results of their labour. Spokespersons remarked that they only feel proud about the amount of work they have done because they know they will be remunerated accordingly. Moreover, spokespersons stated that they do not feel proud or good about the work itself, they are just exhausted at the end of the day.

Spokespersons claimed that they might be motivated to be more productive if they received improved financial remuneration. However, it would not be possible to maintain this productiveness in the long term. The black women workers at AMM stated that, in the long term, they might attain new financial troubles and then the whole cycle of poverty would

continue. Thus, they would worry and grow tired again, and they would not be able to be industrious or productive to full capacity.

The black women workers at AMM are motivated to work solely by financial remuneration. Dedication to the work or the factory itself has nothing to do with the black women workers' ability to be industrious or productive. Improved financial remuneration might improve productivity in the short term, but is clearly not a long-term solution. The employer might consider increasing the minimum number of parts to be completed by each worker on a monthly basis, in addition to improved remuneration per part. Currently R360 is a minimal wage for parts completed (see Section 3.2). If the changes suggested were implemented, the workers would be forced to be more productive while receiving improved monthly wages.

### **3.18 TIME CONCEPTS**

Time management is one of the most important elements within a western work value system and western labour system. All economic activities are evaluated in terms of the availability and management of time. Within a western-oriented labour system, time is regarded as a financial commodity and the effective management of time is stressed at all levels of economic activity within the labour system (see Section 1.6.1.4). However, time is regarded differently by each unique culture. According to Van Vuuren (1988:27), persons of traditional African origin view time in a much less rigid way than westerners do. Time is not divided into seconds and minutes, but rather into days and seasons. Oosthuizen (1977:67) had similar results.

Because of this importance of time management within a western-oriented workplace, the black women workers at AMM were questioned thoroughly during the course of the qualitative and quantitative research about their concepts of time and perceptions of time management within the workplace.

#### **3.18.1 Tardiness**

Interviews with spokespersons revealed that time management started at home. The black women workers stated that if they do not finish their chores at home in time, they are late for



work. Most of the black women workers' living quarters are quite far from the workplace (see Table 3.7). The majority of the women use a bus as transport.

The various buses depart from the places of residence between 6 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. This implies that housework must be done before 6 a.m. or in the evenings. Most of the spokespersons stated that they arrive at their homes at about 8 p.m. at night and go to bed at 10 p.m. to 11 p.m. In most instances, they cook and clean their homes in the evenings. Washing, ironing and thorough housecleaning are done on weekends. According to Fairhurst and Moate (1993:39),

Early departure times and arriving home late in the evenings have a detrimental effect on the execution of domestic chores and over a period culminate in creating a state of physical exhaustion.

Spokespersons indicated that in the mornings before work, they have to wash themselves, get dressed, prepare breakfast and get their children ready for school. This causes them to be late for work on occasion, especially if their children are ill or if the children do not want to go to school.

The black women workers said that they might sleep too late and miss the bus and thus arrive late at the workplace. The bus might be late on occasion and cause them to be late for work. This is viewed as inevitable and as just one of those things that happen in life and do not worry the spokespersons too much, as this inevitability is perceived as a legitimate reason to be late for work.

The black women workers realised that it is important to be at the workplace at the designated time (between 8:00 and 8:30). They do not fully understand the financial implications of time management, but the black women workers did declare that being late for work is wrong. The spokespersons differed in their opinions about why arriving late at work is wrong.

Some of the black women workers at AMM declared that it is wrong to be late for work, because tardiness means that the work will not be done in time to be transported to the various manufacturers on loading days. Spokespersons argued that if they were late for work, they would not finish the minimum amount of work each worker is required to do per day (see Section 3.2). Spokespersons said that workers that are late on a regular basis do not complete enough parts and receive inadequate wages. According to spokespersons, they suffer

financially for the rest of the month if they are late for work regularly. The black women workers at AMM perceive personal financial remuneration as motivation for time management.

The black women workers disapprove of tardiness because all the workers are part of a group. Consequently everybody should start working at the same time and all the workers should go home at the same time. According to spokespersons, everybody should work together and it is not good to arrive at the workplace when all the other workers have already started their work. Therefore, spokespersons stated, it is better to arrive on time for work, because latecomers are behind with their work. According to the black women workers, some workers are late for work often, but they receive the same wage as the others. In other words, those workers that have worked nine hours per day receive the same wages as the latecomers who only work eight hours per day. The black women workers regard this as very unfair and said that this shows favouritism and is to the disadvantage of the group in general (see Section 3.14).

The black women workers said that the supervisor or the employer scolds them if they come late for work too often. However, it was also said that being scolded is a good thing. If workers are scolded for tardiness, they will not be late for work again the following day, according to the black women workers. The women, however, found it embarrassing to be scolded. The supervisor greets them and says “good afternoon” instead of “good morning” and everybody laughs at them. Spokespersons said that they would be teased the rest of the day because they were late. Hence, it is better to arrive at the workplace on time.

### **3.18.2 Absenteeism**

During interviews and the completion of questionnaires, the black women workers at AMM were questioned about their perceptions of absenteeism. The women responded that absenteeism is not allowed and is only justifiable if the absentee has a good reason for not arriving at work. According to the black women workers everybody is absent from work some or the other time. The women indicated that they are absent from work when their children or family members are ill and they have to take care of them. The black women workers are also absent from work when they do not feel well or are ill and are not able to

work. Family celebrations and funerals are justifiable reasons to be absent from work, according to these women.

The black women workers at AMM normally do not notify the supervisor or the production manager when they will be absent or for how long they will be absent from work. If a co-worker lives nearby, the workers might send a message to the quality control officer or the supervisor via the co-worker, telling them that they will be absent from work that day. Accordingly, there are no formal requests for leave by the black women workers. This is a predicament for the employer and the production manager, as the women work in teams or individually and each worker has specific tasks to perform before a certain deadline. Absenteeism implies that another worker will have to do the absentee's tasks and effective time management is impossible, causing entire production lines to be delayed.

The black women workers declared that they do not consider it necessary to notify anybody of their absenteeism. Spokespersons stated that if they are not at work, they are absent and they always had a good reason for being absent. Therefore, why should they notify anybody about it? According to the black women workers, it is only necessary to notify the quality control officer or the supervisor of absenteeism if a person will be absent for a long period. If they do not inform the quality control officer or the supervisor, the supervisor might give the person's job to somebody else.

Spokespersons said that it is not beneficial to be absent too often, because then you lose the day's wages and proportional remuneration. Spokespersons stated that if they were absent too often, they would receive meagre wages at the end of the month and they would suffer financially and physically. If they do not go to work, they will have no food to eat.

### **3.18.3 Time management and thoroughness**

The black women workers at AMM claimed that there is not enough time available to do their jobs thoroughly (see Section 3.15). They alleged that they did not always have sufficient time to produce the number of parts required by the manufacturer. In these circumstances, the black women workers asserted, it could not be expected from them to produce high quality work all the time.



The production manager responded to these statements by saying that in some instances, the factory does receive large orders from manufacturers and the amount of work and the workers available to perform the work are not balanced. However, it is not possible to employ more workers, as the next order might be for a much smaller quantity of parts and items and then there would not be enough work for all the additional employees. The workers are consequently expected, on these occasions, to work overtime in order to complete the required amount of components and items, as they are in any case financially rewarded for doing so.

According to the black women workers, such additional demands are only made occasionally, but it is not an ideal situation. Spokespersons said that they do not choose to work speedily, because then many errors occur and the parts are rejected. However, one should not work at a leisurely pace, because then one does not receive sufficient wages at the end of the month. Spokespersons remarked that it is better to work slowly than to work rapidly. When one works unhurriedly, the “eyes can see all the mistakes and the hands would not make any rejects”, but then the work may not be completed before loading day.

There are regular breaks for the workers: teatime of half an hour at half past nine in the morning and a lunch hour from one to two o'clock in the afternoon. Spokespersons stated that they finish more work before lunch than after lunch, because there are more working hours before lunch than afterwards. After lunch, they might be tired and spokespersons stated that they could not work hard or swiftly when they are weary.

There were complaints from the management team that the workers are extremely unproductive the day directly after pay-day. Some of the black women workers responded that this is not true, as they treat the day after pay-day exactly the same as all other days. Other spokespersons stated that they do not work the day after pay-day because they are angry about their meagre wages. These spokespersons claim that they have to repay loans and debts, but they do not receive enough money. The spokespersons stated that they work very hard during the month and the employer just does not pay them enough. The researcher asked about the proportional remuneration system and said that if they do not work the day after pay-day, the workers would lose a day's remuneration. The black women workers responded by claiming that the proportional remuneration system is unfair (see Section 3.14). Therefore, productivity in general is very low on these days and time-management by the black women workers at AMM in general does not even enter the equation.

#### **3.18.4 Perception of the future**

The black women workers do not seem to be distressed about their future at AMM or about the future in general. Oosthuizen (1977:67) had similar results regarding such a perception of the future within African-oriented cultural groups. When asked whether they are concerned about the possibility that they might be unemployed in the future, their response was troubling from a western point of view. The black women workers responded that they would never be unemployed because there will always be work available at AMM and commensurate remuneration.

Only six of the black women workers have savings accounts, and none of these accounts is used. According to the black women workers, there is no need to save money, as they will always be employed at AMM and, when they retire, their children will take care of them. Some of the spokespersons are worried about the future of their children, as employment opportunities in South Africa, outside AMM, are limited. The black women workers at AMM were positive that the government and unknown forces would rectify this situation and they would live a comfortable old age. This issue is closely related to individual responsibility and accountability within and outside the workplace (see Section 3.20).

#### **3.18.5 Summary**

The black women workers at AMM perceived time management to be equal to financial remuneration. The more work they do, the higher their wages at the end of the month. As long as they receive the wages they expect and do not produce too many reject products, time management does not trouble them. The black women workers start to work when they arrive at the workplace, they rest when they are granted breaks and they normally leave the workplace at 5 p.m. Time is only of the essence on loading day, according to the black women workers, because then the work that has been neglected during the rest of the week has to be completed in a hurry.

The black women workers at AMM perform their tasks on the assumption that there is always a tomorrow to complete the work, except on loading days. The black women workers lack the western perception that time itself is a financial commodity and the women at AMM do not perceive or comprehend time beyond the present.



It can be concluded that the black women workers at AMM do not work according to a personal time schedule and their actions are not planned beforehand. Silberbauer (1968:17) obtained similar results. The black women workers at AMM feel no guilt when time is wasted or when time is not utilised to full capacity, as would be expected in accordance with western work values (see Section 1.6.1.4). According to Mbiti (1969:19), black people do not view themselves as slaves of time, but believe instead that time should be used to the advantage of humans. One should wait for the right time to perform tasks and one should make time to rest and talk. This leads to frustration in a western labour system. Employers should consider this culturally determined value of the indigenous cultural groups of South Africa. When workers are sitting around seemingly doing nothing, they are in fact “creating” time for selected actions.

### **3.19 COMMUNICATION**

Within the western labour system, the value of effective communication is frequently emphasised (see Section 1.6.1.9). However, interviews with the black women workers and responses given to the questionnaire revealed a lack of communication within the workplace. The black women workers at AMM are particularly dissatisfied with the nature of communication between management, including the employer, the production manager, the quality control officer and the factory workers. Note that only communication with these particular members of the management team was discussed, because they are directly involved with the supervision and control of the black women workers at AMM.

#### **3.19.1 Language diversity**

Language diversity can hamper communication between management and the black women workers. When a meeting is held between the management and the workers, an interpreter must be used. In most instances, the quality control officer or the supervisor acts as interpreter. The meetings are time-consuming and there is no certainty about whether the workers involved have understood the translation of the interpreters, or whether the interpreters have translated correctly. Verster (1976:32) had similar results regarding

translation and interpretation in her research. Communication at AMM is strained and is not effective (see Section 3.5).

### **3.19.2 Communication with management**

#### *3.19.2.1 The employer*

The black women workers at AMM seemed generally satisfied with the employer and the women were all grateful to him for employing them. Some women remarked that the employer is always friendly and willing to help. According to the black women workers at AMM, the employer is prepared to give them advances on their monthly wages if they need money and he is prepared to employ people who are in financial trouble and urgently need employment. However, all the spokespersons complained that it is the fault of the employer that they receive such meagre wages each month. The spokespersons requested the researcher to talk to the employer and negotiate higher wages. The researcher had to explain that it is not her place to be involved in wage negotiations and that the researcher is only an observer. The spokespersons eventually accepted that the wage issue is something that they had to negotiate for themselves.

Some black women workers stated that they are dissatisfied in their work, and that there are problems in the workplace that need to be solved, but that there is nobody to talk to about these problems. The spokespersons said that this situation is just as well because nobody would listen to what they say anyway. Spokespersons felt that production is the only important issue at AMM. Some spokespersons said that the employer did not care about the welfare of his workers. Other spokespersons said that they did not know whether the employer cares about their well-being or not, because they (the employer and the black women workers) never communicate with one another.

The black women workers at AMM confirmed that communication between the employer and the workers is extremely important. People should talk to one another in order to find out what others are thinking, according to spokespersons. The black women workers stated that if people do not talk to one another, problems will never be solved and the employer and the workers would not be able to work together in harmony. Spokespersons declared that they

would be much more satisfied with their situation at the workplace if they could tell the employer about the problems that they are experiencing, such as the wage issue.

Three spokespersons stated that the employer should not talk to the workers directly. It is just not the way things are done, communication should proceed systematically according to the specific hierarchy of the factory. The employer should talk to the production manager and the production manager should talk to the workers. If the workers have a problem, they should talk to the production manager and this person would relay the message to the employer. According to these spokespersons, everybody has a place in the structure of AMM and every worker should stay in his/her place in order to promote stability and harmony in the workplace. If everybody stayed in his/her designated position, there would be no conflict in the workplace, according to these spokespersons.

The black women workers' perceptions of communication and the proper channels of communication differ. However, all the black women workers at AMM regard communication between the employer and the workers, directly or through specific channels, as necessary for the preservation of harmony and the prevention of conflict in the workplace.

### *3.19.2.2 The production manager*

The black women workers at AMM complained that the production manager does not speak to the workers when a problem arises, but consults the employer directly. The black women workers view the production manager with mistrust and thus do not tell the production manager about potential crises or dilemmas present in the workplace. Spokespersons stated that they would prefer it if the production manager consulted the workers instead of the employer when a problem concerning the workers arises or one of the workers is at fault. Another complaint from the black women workers was that the production manager is always negative towards them and they are unable to do anything right in the eyes of the production manager. These misgivings hamper effective communication within the factory and consequently hinder production because many problems and errors are unreported and unresolved. A study by Verster (1976:27) had similar results. The production manager should communicate more effectively with the workers and implement motivation techniques to promote work satisfaction and consequently productivity.



All the black women workers noted that the production manager is a good teacher, and that she shows everybody how to do their work. If they had difficulty in performing their tasks, the production manager would show them how to do it correctly (see Section 3.15)

### 3.19.2.3 *The quality control officer*

The black women workers at AMM indicated that there is a communication gap between the women workers and the quality control officer. The quality control officer does not communicate the daily workload or the specific orders for the day effectively. The black women workers stated that they only find out what they were supposed to do during the day just before it is time to leave the workplace. Thus, they cannot complete the work on time.

The quality control officer reacted to this comment by saying that everybody knows what she is supposed to do and the black women workers only blame her because they cannot complete the work on their own. The quality control officer declared that this accusation is an evasion of responsibility on the part of the workers. This potential conflict situation will have to be urgently addressed by the employer or the production manager. However, these members of management were not aware of this particularly volatile source of conflict.

### 3.19.3 **Relations with co-workers**

The black women workers at AMM stated that they do not experience problems with their co-workers and they all communicate well with each other. If problems arise that are work-related, such as broken machinery or flawed materials, these problems are reported to the supervisor or the quality control officer. The black women workers claimed that they all work well together. If a personal problem presents itself, the workers involved solve it.

The black women workers indicated that they could not work together effectively if relations between the workers are strained. Godsell (1983:81) obtained similar results in her sample. The black women workers at AMM stated that they should all “work in the truth”. People should not lie and they should not be angry with one another. If the workers could not solve problems and talk to one another, they would argue all the time and the work would not be



completed. The welfare of the group (see Section 3.14) is at stake and it is important that the group works together in harmony.

The black women workers indicated that all the women workers work together well and they do not have serious problems with one another. According to the black women workers, they are not all necessarily friends and they only work together. If somebody has a problem with the work or difficulties in performing certain tasks, another worker will be assigned to the same tasks and they help one another and share the work. If a person was performing tasks incorrectly, the other workers would talk to the person and show her how the work should be done. The spokespersons argued that they do not normally comment on one another's work, they only expressed a view if the work was done incorrectly. This tactfulness protects the harmony in the group.

The black women workers at AMM stated that each of them has her special friends in the workplace with whom she shares her problems. The women stated that all the workers do not necessarily like one another, but nobody argues with the others. Thus, personal conflict does exist, but it is suppressed or solved by the group. The black women workers talk to one another during working hours. The women said that they talk about the work most of the time, but during and after lunch hour, they discuss problems they are experiencing at home.

Spokespersons working in the juice department of the factory claimed that their relations with the other black women workers are strained. According to these spokespersons, they do not work together with the other black women workers, and they are therefore not part of the group. The spokespersons stated that they felt left out. However, these spokespersons claimed, they are all (the women workers in the juice department) very good friends and they would like to visit each other outside the workplace. Unfortunately, they live too far from one another for visiting after working hours and on weekends. It seems that the black women working in the juice department have developed friendships, whereas the other women working in the automobile component production department have remained merely co-workers.

#### **3.19.4 Summary**

Communication and relations with co-workers are particularly peaceful within the workplace, with the exception of occasional personal conflict, which is solved within the group. On the other hand, communication with the management of AMM, including the employer, the production manager and the quality control officer, is strained and reflects potential conflict. In order to prevent conflict, it is the duty of the employer to improve communication within the factory, especially between management and the workers, and to educate the workers in the proper channels of communication. The employer and production manager should convey methods and guidelines to improve communication in relation to communication as a medium and external factors influencing communication to the workers and members of management. After all, it will benefit the factory as a whole.

### **3.20 RESPONSIBILITY AND DISCIPLINE**

Responsibility and discipline are included in each element of western work values. Responsibility includes personal involvement and personal liability (see Section 1.6.1.6). This western work value implies a readiness and ability to accept responsibility and to act in all circumstances in an orderly way that is to the advantage of the industry and improves productivity.

Within a modern western-oriented labour system, the main emphasis is on personal discipline and order, rather than on social discipline. Discipline implies the ability to perform tasks systematically and with reliable regularity (see Section 1.6.1.3). It also implies obeying certain rules and regulations within the workplace in order to enhance productivity. Discipline is closely linked to an ability to accept responsibility for individual behaviour and work performance.

#### **3.20.1 Proportional remuneration**

The functioning of the factory forces the black women workers to accept individual and collective responsibility for their proportional remuneration and the fulfilment of contracts

(see Section 3.2). According to the black women workers at AMM, there have been complaints that women workers have cheated on the invoices, in other words, that they are recording more work than they have actually done in order to receive more remuneration. It is the job of the quality control officer to verify the recorded work and the amount of work that is completed as well as the quality of this work. The quality control officer (a black woman) then changes the invoices according to the amount of completed and the number of components accepted. This causes tension in the workplace as the black women workers blame the quality control officer for reducing their monthly income and accuse her of unwillingness to help them when they experience financial trouble. The quality control officer, on the other hand, stated that she could not allow these “lies” on the invoices and that she is only doing her job.

The black women workers at AMM were unwilling to accept individual responsibility and accountability for these incorrect invoices and chose to blame the quality control officer and the employer for their financial predicament. The spokespersons stated that if the employer paid them more, it would not be necessary to cheat on their invoices. Also, if the quality control officer was less strict and rigid, they would receive higher remuneration and their lives would be easier.

### **3.20.2 Thoroughness and alertness**

Thoroughness in the workplace is closely related to the acceptance of personal responsibility and accountability. The black women workers at AMM claim that they are never at fault. These workers stated that they always do their work thoroughly and faultlessly (see Section 3.15). Rejects are not the result of human error, but occur accidentally without the workers’ noticing these errors. There is a definite distinction between thoroughness and alertness. Thoroughness is subject to personal responsibility, but alertness is not a matter within human control and, for this reason, the black women workers say they cannot be held responsible.

### **3.20.3 Time management**

The black women workers at AMM do not accept responsibility for personal time management, as was seen in the discussions on tardiness and absenteeism (see Section

3.18.1). The black women workers regard tardiness and absenteeism as inevitable. According to the black women workers, there is no need to notify the quality control officer or supervisor of absenteeism. If one is not at work, one is obviously absent. This type of behaviour is regarded as unacceptable within a western labour system (see Section 1.6.1.4). Tardiness and absenteeism are perceived by westerners as irresponsible and as being to the disadvantage of the industry, as it makes a factory unprofitable and unproductive.

#### **3.20.4 Rules and regulations at the workplace**

The black women workers at AMM were questioned during interviews and while completing the questionnaire about the necessity of rules and regulations at the workplace. All these workers agreed that it is necessary to have rules and regulations in the workplace. According to the black women workers, if there were no rules, all the workers would just stand around all day and do nothing. Everybody would just do what he/she wanted and the workers would all arrive late for work every day. The spokespersons stated that, without rules and regulations, everybody would just take what they needed and they could not be paid at the end of the month because all the money would have been stolen. Nobody would come to work, the factory would have to be closed, and everybody would starve.

The black women workers said that it is wrong to steal, but sometimes people are hungry and they have to steal in order to eat. Thus, they believe that theft is morally justifiable in some instances. The spokespersons claimed that there are no thieves at AMM, because everybody is remunerated at the end of the month. Maybe missing items, such as tools and materials, have just been misplaced or might have “disappeared”. According to members of the management of the factory, there is a substantial theft problem at AMM, although the workers at AMM were not accused in any way of the crimes committed.

#### **3.20.5 Summary**

According to the production manager, the workers refuse to accept personal responsibility and accountability for any errors or mistakes in their work or problems within the workplace. Elements in the workplace are blamed for rejected or flawed parts and products. According to the black women workers, the materials with which the parts are made are flawed (too soft or too hard), the machinery is faulty or the ovens and presses are overheated or too cold.

Sometimes some things are simply beyond human control and mistakes just happen, because of destiny or supernatural forces such as heat or sudden tiredness. These views are closely linked to the traditional religion of the North Sotho where heat is associated with evil and badness, while coolness, on the other hand, is seen as a condition of well-being and goodness (Kriel 1992:173-179; Mönnig 1967:67). Within traditional North Sotho religion, supernatural forces can cause either prosperity, health and happiness (Kriel 1992:173-179; Mönnig 1967:67), or, in some instances, unfortunate events (Kriel 1992:226, Mönnig 1967:44,78; Eiselen & Schapera 1962:254; Hammond-Tooke 1974b:331). Sometimes these forces cause workers' eyes to miss a mistake the workers' hands have made and a product is rejected. According to the black women workers, a worker can hardly be blamed for these rejects, as it is the result of forces beyond human control. The result, however, is that products are rejected on a regular basis whilst workers refuse to accept accountability. This is not financially profitable and has a negative influence on productivity. The continued theft at the factory causes immense financial losses and is a problem that will have to be addressed aggressively.

### **3.21 WORK STATUS**

Work holds a special value in the lives of most westerners. Western life revolves around work, and work values are imprinted from a very early age and are subconsciously viewed as a moral (and sometimes religious) obligation. The work westerners do determines the status a person enjoys and the position the person occupies in society outside the workplace (see Section 1.6.1.7). The black women workers at AMM do not necessarily regard work as a religious or moral obligation (see Section 3.6), but the qualitative and quantitative research has confirmed that the black women workers do enjoy status and respect within their particular societies because they are employed.

Kriel (1992:21-22) comments on the world-view of the North Sotho and states that the North Sotho see reality intuitively and subjectively. The world, life, humans and other phenomena in reality are not categorised, abstracted or reflected as an object of thought, but are seen and experienced as one coherent whole. There is no clear distinction between reality and appearances within the world-view of the North Sotho. According to Kriel (1992:22), the meaning of human existence for the North Sotho lies in the present and not in the future or in a continuous struggle for improvement or "progress" as in the case of westerners. This is particularly relevant to the 19 black women workers at AMM, where the work status they

enjoy does not revolve around the accumulation of wealth, but rather around the social purpose of their employment, namely their ability to provide for their families.

The black women workers at AMM indicated that they especially enjoy work status within their families and households. They are respected because they support their households financially and because they can afford to send their children to school. Their families respect them, because they can afford to buy food and nobody in the household goes hungry. The spokespersons said that in some instances their children were not happy about their parents' working hours. The children stay at home alone and they miss their parents. However, according to the black women workers, the children do not complain too much because they all receive something at the end of the month and they can all go to school.

The black women workers stated that they also enjoy work status within their communities, because unemployed people suffer financially and they are hungry. However, spokespersons asserted, one should not look down upon unemployed people. One should respect them and help them. "Something" can happen and then all the people at AMM would be unemployed. The spokespersons stated they would not like to be treated disrespectfully or differently just because they were unemployed. Hence, one should treat all persons with respect and not only employed people.

However, the black women workers indicated during the completion of questionnaires, that one should not be unemployed because of laziness. If a person is lazy, such a person will die of hunger. According to the black women workers, people should always be "willing to work". If people are willing to work, they will never go hungry. The black women workers declared that lazy people are despicable, they are always asking for money and they cannot do anything for themselves. Hence, lazy people do not deserve respect, nor do they enjoy status within the community. The respondents regard laziness as a sin, as lazy people are mostly thieves. Thievery because of laziness is not morally justifiable in the eyes of the black women workers at AMM. These women said that unemployed people that are willing to work deserve respect because they are trying to do things for themselves. These unemployed people do not sit at home and do nothing all day long, according to the black women workers.

Work status as perceived by the black women workers at AMM differs from the western interpretation of the term. The black women workers argued that work status is not based on the position the worker occupies within the workplace, but merely on the fact that a person is

employed and is able to support his/her family and dependants. Thus, work status is based on the single most important motivational element within the work values of the black women workers at AMM, namely financial reward and the ability to care for one's family and dependants.

### **3.22 GENDER AND WORK**

During the interviews, the black women workers were asked about their perceptions of feminism (see Section 2.3), gender (see Section 2.2), gender equality and equal employment opportunities (see Section 1.7). The black women workers stated that there is a definite role differentiation between males and females, at home and at work (see Section 2.4.4). The majority of the spokespersons stated that it is a woman's duty to maintain the household. The traditional role differentiation as well as the division of labour within African-oriented cultures underpin this perception, because traditionally all housework is the responsibility of women (Bruwer 1963:108; Mönnig 1967:145). According to spokespersons, women should preferably not be formally employed, but their husbands or male family members should support them. Thus, women should be the housekeepers and the men should be the breadwinners, according to the black women workers at AMM. However, spokespersons said, circumstances had forced them into employment. The spokespersons indicated that they had started working because of economic pressure. According to them, they just could not afford to be unemployed, because everything is so expensive these days.

#### **3.22.1 The household**

According to the black women workers at AMM, men should normally not be involved in housekeeping (see Section 2.4.4). Meer *et al.*'s (1990:151) findings were similar. Nevertheless, circumstances and the employment of these women require men to assist in raising the children and even occasionally to cook in the evenings. Spokespersons asserted that washing and ironing are women's work. The black women workers perform these chores during weekends. Some spokespersons argued that, no matter what the circumstances, men should help women with the household chores. Men should not sit around and do nothing, especially if the men are unemployed. Some of the black women workers indicated that they



would appreciate it if their husbands or sons would assist them with household chores on a regular basis.

Other spokespersons were adamant that men should not take part in housekeeping. These spokespersons viewed household chores as an exclusively female domain and are content to perform these tasks in addition to their formal working hours. This is a strongly held traditional value in the sub-Saharan African-oriented cultures of the black women workers (Bruwer 1963:108; Mönning 1967:145). The spokespersons stated that they would only make an exception to this rule if they are ill and are not able to perform the chores themselves. These black women workers stated that they are respected because of their ability to maintain the household and are judged to be worthy wives and/or mothers.

### **3.22.2 Decision-making**

According to the black women workers, the men, husbands and other male family members, are the decision-makers in the household (see Section 2.4). Kriel (1992:89) states that the North Sotho are normally patrilineally oriented, and thus it can be concluded that men are normally the heads of the household within this cultural group (Mönning 1967:237; Hoernlé 1962:71,87). Spokespersons stated that women should obey their husbands. Nevertheless, the spokespersons argued, men should listen to the opinions of their wives before making a decision. The black women workers declared that women are not subordinate to men, but somebody has to make the decisions. If both parties were involved in decision-making, they would argue all the time. Spokespersons said that they do not always agree with these decisions, but this is just the way arguments are resolved and decisions are made.

The black women workers indicated that they do not discuss their problems with their husbands, sons or male family members. If the black women workers experience a personal or family-related problem, they prefer to discuss it with a female family member such as their own mother or a sister. These confidantes are on the spokespersons' side of the family; problems are not discussed with in-laws, mostly because the women trust their own family and receive sympathy and support from these female family members. According to spokespersons, "one should not complain about a husband in his mother's ears".

### **3.22.3 Marriage goods**

All the black women workers at AMM maintained that marriage goods should be given if a man wants to marry a woman (see Section 2.3.4). Bride wealth should be delivered in the form of cash, and, if this is not possible, in the form of cattle. All the married spokespersons claimed that their fathers had received marriage goods in order for these women to get married. They were very proud of the amounts their husbands had “paid” for them. The black women workers stated that their husbands could not just marry them “for free”, that is just not the way things are done. According to these spokespersons, the presentation of marriage goods is traditional. The spokespersons said that marriage goods show commitment and bind a man to a woman. A man cannot leave a woman if he has presented marriage goods and he is obliged to look after his wife and his children (see Section 2.4.1). The black women workers said that if a man did not deliver marriage goods, he would be able to leave his wife whenever he wanted, and marry another woman, because it is easy and inexpensive. No negative perceptions about the custom of marriage goods was expressed by these women and the spokespersons regarded it as part of the wedding ceremony and as a sign of a permanent commitment by the husband. Marriage goods are not regarded by these women as a discriminatory instrument of the patriarchy or as a sign of the subordination of women. According to the black women workers at AMM, it is a tradition which benefits women because it symbolises the commitment of the husband to his wife.

### **3.22.4 Concluding remarks**

The black women workers at AMM make a definite distinction between the labour and role divisions of men and women. This particular role division is very traditional in nature and in accordance with the indigenous African cultural orientation of the black women workers. They are satisfied with their choices and do not view them as a form of feminist ideology or gender discrimination. The black women workers do not want to be treated as equals to men, because of the difference in role ascription between the sexes. Nor do the black women workers want to be equally employed, they would prefer to be housekeepers while their husbands and male family members are the breadwinners. These women do not regard themselves as subordinate to men in any way; they are equals within specific culturally determined role and labour divisions (see Section 2.4.2).

The feminist and gender agendas in South Africa (see Section 2.2) need to be seriously re-evaluated and the voices of women in general and black women workers in particular need to be heard. Interviews with the black women workers at AMM revealed that the unique needs of black women are often taken for granted in discussions on gender equality, and are frequently looked at totally out of context (see Section 2.6.2.1).

### **3.23 PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT**

The black women workers at AMM were asked questions in the questionnaire about the physical circumstances of the workplace and whether they would want to change anything in the factory. At first, the black women workers responded that the factory was like somebody else's house. They do not necessarily like it but they cannot change anything because they do not own it. The researcher rephrased the question and asked, what, if the respondents were the owners of the factory, they would change. All the respondents indicated that they would pay themselves more.

The women stated that the factory is cleaned regularly and is not too dirty: they enjoy the clean working environment. The black women workers also stated that they are satisfied with the working environment in summer, but that the factory is cold in winter and that they would like to install heaters. Five of the respondents would like a tea room where they can prepare tea for teatime and a kitchen where they can prepare food for lunch.

The black women workers indicated that machinery breaks down frequently but is normally fixed within a short period. If a machine breaks, the workers report it to the production manager, the quality control officer or the supervisor. The black women workers stated that they are satisfied with the equipment that they have to use in order to perform their tasks. The respondents argued that the working environment is satisfactory because it is not dirty, extremely hot or extremely cold. These workers said that they are satisfied with the physical working environment and would not want to change anything, except for the above proposals.

### 3.24 JOB SECURITY

The black women workers at AMM are convinced that employment at AMM is limitless. This notion of job security is one of the few aspects that motivate workers to be productive and to complete the required amount of work within the specified time limit. Spokespersons declared that they have job security at AMM and that it is important for the workers to know that there will always be wages or a salary at the end of the month. According to the black women workers, they have work from January to January at AMM, and they do not have to worry about the next month's income, as there will always be work at the factory.

The black women workers are not worried about their future at AMM. The spokespersons were asked whether they ever worry about the possibility that they might be unemployed in the future. The black women workers once again responded that they will not be unemployed because there will always be work at AMM.

**Table 3.10: Period of employment of the black women workers at AMM**

Period of employment	Number of women
1 month – 1 year	3
2 – 5 years	5
6 – 10 years	7
11 – 15 years	2
16 – 20 years	-
21 – 25 years	2

Eleven of the black women workers have been employed at AMM for six years and more. All the respondents stated that they are comfortable with the work and the daily routine at AMM and that they do not need or wish to seek alternative employment (see Section 3.16).

### 3.25 IMPORTANT WORK-RELATED AFRICAN LANGUAGE CONCEPTS

According to Kellerman (1979:1), black workers, in many respects, lack precise and scientific terms for many industrially relevant concepts, especially in their active vocabulary. This means that a black worker entering the western labour system may be less familiar or even unfamiliar with concepts relevant to western industry. The question therefore arises whether the black women workers at AMM attach the same meaning(s) to certain work-related concepts as the researcher does.

Consequently, the black women workers at AMM were asked to translate different work-related concepts into Sotho (see Table 3.11). This particular language was chosen because most of the black women workers at AMM were able to understand and speak Sotho (see Section 3.5). However, not all the answers given by the black women workers were in Sotho. This is largely so because of a lack of language proficiency and because Sotho is not the language of choice of many of these women.

The black women workers gave different translations for different work-related concepts (see Table 3.11). These concepts as translated by the women were written down, and with the help of Mr Ben Goslin of the African Languages Department (UP), transcribed and checked for correct spelling as well as correct interpretation. In this way, the researcher was able to analyse the perceptions of the black women workers about “work” itself and work-related concepts.

The researcher was able to review the interviews in the light of semantic translations of the work-related concepts, and could thus understand the answers of the black women workers more clearly. This was necessary as the black women workers might have interpreted certain work-related concepts differently from the way the researcher did. With the direct translation of these work-related concepts, the researcher was able to transcribe the interviews from the point of view of the black women workers and largely eliminate western-oriented bias in the researcher’s interpretations of answers.

**Table 3.11: Important work-related African language concepts: black women workers at AMM**

<b>Important work-related concepts</b>	<b>Translation of concepts in Sotho by the black women workers</b>	<b>Meaning of work-related Sotho concepts as given by the black women workers</b>
<b>Work</b>	Mmereko	Work. A job.
	Mošomong	At work, on the job, to work, from work, in the workshop.
	Mošomo	Work, a job. Task, assignment.
<b>I am now going to work</b>	Ke ya mošomong.	I am going to work. I am on my way to work.
	Šala gabotse, ke ya mošomong.	Good-bye, I am off to work now.
<b>Workplace</b>	Ke kae mo o berekang?	Where do you work? Where are you employed at present?
	AMM	Automotive Mouldings.
<b>Factory</b>	Mašemong	In the fields, in the gardens, in the agricultural fields.
	Ifabriki (Zulu) Faporiki (Sotho)	A factory.
<b>Good work</b>	Go siama (Sepedi) Go botse (Setswana)	It is good, all right, it is okay. It is right.
	Mošomo o mobotse.	The work is good. The job is nice.
	Go se šome gabotse.	Not to work well.
<b>Bad work</b>	Mošomong umubi.	The workplace is bad, unpleasant.
	Go šoma boima.	To work hard. To do difficult work.
<b>Hard work</b>	Mošomo o boima.	The work is difficult.

Continued overleaf



Table 3.11, continued

<b>Work that is enjoyable</b>	Go šoma gabotse.	To work well.
	Mošomo o o kgamišago.	A backbreaking job.
<b>The people working at the factory</b>	Babereki	The workers, employees, the labourers.
	Bašomi	Employees, workers.
<b>The person that employed you</b>	Ke molebeledi.	I am a foreman, I am a controller, I am an overseer.
	Mong mošomo (Setswana)	Another job, other work.
<b>The employer</b>	Kgoši	Chief, sir, king, God, Head.
	Matsogo a mong mošomo.	Talent for another job/work. To have an aptitude for other kinds of work.
<b>Quality control officer</b>	Molebeledi	Overseer, foreman, monitor.
	Molekodi	Inspector, controller, quality controller.
<b>A worker</b>	Mmerekhi	A worker, a labourer, an employee.
	Mašomi	A group of workers, employees.
<b>A good worker</b>	O šoma mošomo wo mokaone.	You are doing a better job. You are working better.
	Seroto	A diligent person. A hard-working person.
<b>A bad worker</b>	Mošomo o mobe.	Bad job, unpleasant work, bad work.
	Sebodu (Sepedi)	A lazy person.

Continued overleaf

Table 3.11, continued

<b>Lazy people</b>	Go namešša.	To raise, to give a lift.
	Sebudu	A sluggard, a lazy person. Lazy-bones.
<b>Spry people/hard-working people</b>	O bereka gabotse.	You work well. You are doing a good job.
	Seroto	A diligent, hard-working person.

The work values of the black women workers at AMM are evident in the meanings and interpretations attached to the western work-related concepts in Table 3.11. The black women workers' attitude towards "work" as a means towards an end is apparent from Table 3.11. "Work" is regarded as a job or an assignment and not, as in western culture, as an essential way of life. For the black women workers at AMM, work is thus only a series of assignments to be completed in order to earn a monthly wage. Note that there is no clear translation for "enjoyable work" and that this concept was translated as work that has been done well. It was also stated that to do a job well is "backbreaking work" and thus definitely not enjoyable. The black women workers at AMM do not enjoy working and this confirms that these women regard work as a means to an end and not as an end in itself, as perceived by many westerners.

It is evident from Table 3.11 that the black women workers at AMM perceive certain concepts within the work situation, such as "hard work", differently from the way westerners do. Ideally, westerners regard work, especially hard work, as a (religious) duty and inherently noble way of life, whilst the black women workers at AMM regard work as assignments that must be completed in order to earn wages. "Hard work" is interpreted as difficult assignments and is viewed in a negative light by the black women workers at AMM.

The black women workers at AMM interpreted the concept "a bad worker" as a person who is lazy. The concept also led to a response by the black women workers at AMM that there is no such thing as "a bad worker" and that it is the work itself that is bad. This confirms the reluctance of the black women workers at AMM, as was discussed earlier in the chapter (see Section 3.20), to accept responsibility and accountability within the workplace.





The difference in attitudes towards work and the different meanings assigned to western work-related concepts by the black women workers at AMM influence communication and relations within the workplace. The employer might give certain orders, but receive unexpected results as the workers interpret certain western work-related terms differently from the interpretation given to the concepts by the employer, and thus the black women workers may appear not to follow orders. The employer should take this into account during meetings and when work orders are explained. The working behaviour of black women workers, are in many ways, quite opposite to that of westerners. This should be taken into account by the employer in order to predict the working behaviour of his employees and to enhance productivity.

### 3.26 SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to provide an ethnographic description of how black women workers experience and perceive selected western work values within a particular South African factory, namely Automotive Mouldings cc (AMM) in Marble Hall. The culturally determined attitudes of the black women workers towards “work” were determined. The influence of their culture(s), value judgements and life- and world-views on the working behaviour of these black women workers within this western labour set-up were discussed. Thus, the culturally determined attitudes of these black women workers towards “work” were described.

Raubenheimer and Kotze (1984) as well as Van Vuuren (1988) commented on a number of western work values. It is described how these black women workers experience and perceive these western work values. The criteria by Raubenheimer and Kotze (1984) and by Van Vuuren (1988) are not necessarily culturally relevant to the African-oriented and culturally determined work values of the black women workers at AMM. However, both the South African labour system and the relations which are the consequence of its policies, as a whole, are founded on western value systems and capitalist economic principles. Hence, a western work environment exists in South Africa (Raubenheimer & Kotze 1984:10). The criteria of Raubenheimer and Kotze (1984) and those of Van Vuuren (1988) select certain elements of a western culturally determined work ethic. These elements play a central part in the working behaviour valued in and required of workers in this western labour system. The above-

mentioned work values are relevant to the work situation of black women workers, as these criteria imply expected and, hence, predictable working behaviour.

Black women workers bring with them to the workplace an African-oriented “culture”. Collectively, black women workers share a more or less similar African-oriented lifestyle (Els 1993:51). This more or less similar lifestyle with its own value system forms a system different to the overall western work value system. The African-oriented value system of black women workers is brought into a western-oriented workplace, thereby influencing labour relations and productivity. It is thus important that the perceptions of black women workers regarding western work values are researched so that employers can understand and predict the working behaviour of black women workers. Employers should be aware of the working behaviour of traditional Africans in general, but specifically the working behaviour of black women workers in their areas in order to prevent conflict in the workplace and to enhance productivity.

The research group was comprised of 19 black women workers employed at AMM. The factory functions on a principle of direct proportional remuneration, in other words, the more work is completed, the greater the remuneration. Each black woman worker at AMM has specific and defined duties to perform and the women are individually responsible for the work that they perform as well as for the quality of the work.

The spokespersons/respondents represented considerable diversity in age, ethnicity, language, religion and education. This biographical background has a definite and direct influence on the black women workers’ employment opportunities and their performance and behaviour within the workplace. Aspects such as the age and levels of education of the black women workers at AMM have a direct influence on productivity.

A western perception of work as a (religious) obligation is not present in the work values of the black women workers at AMM. The work values of the black women workers are not founded in religion and this aspect can be regarded as the paramount difference between the culturally determined work value systems of westerners and of the African-oriented black women workers at AMM.

The working behaviour of the black women workers at AMM is largely unaffected by political ideology or trade union policy. The black women workers view work exclusively as



a means to an end. They work to earn wages to buy food in order to survive. According to the black women workers at AMM, they work because they have no other choice. The majority of the black women workers at AMM regard “work” in a negative light.

The culturally determined work values of the black women workers at AMM are, in most instances, the exact opposite to western work values. A definite distinction is drawn between thoroughness and alertness. The black women workers are, according to their own perceptions, always thorough in doing their work, but they argued that it is humanly impossible to be alert at all times, because they get tired and their eyes get tired as well. This attention is not always given to detail and that results in rejected products as well as low productivity.

Another contrast between the culturally determined work value systems of westerners and those of the research group is dedication to work and motivational aspects in employment. Job satisfaction is not a priority in the work values of the black women workers. The black women workers at AMM stated that they do not want to change any aspects about the work they are performing, except for improved financial remuneration. They do not enjoy working and nothing will change this. The only motivational factor is the monthly remuneration.

The black women workers at AMM exhibit low levels of personal aspirations and prefer easy and effortless tasks to taxing and challenging assignments. These women do not have much confidence in their abilities and skills. The black women workers at AMM view skills as something one must of necessity acquire in order to complete assignments. The black women workers do not try to control their environment or their lives, but leave it to destiny or supernatural forces.

The black women workers at AMM perceive time management as equal to financial remuneration. The more work they do (in terms of longer hours of work), the higher their wages at the end of the month. As long as they receive the wages they expect and do not produce too many rejected products, time management does not trouble them.

Communication and relations with co-workers are particularly important to the black women workers at AMM and are largely relaxed within the workplace, with the exception of occasional personal conflict, which is solved within the group. Communication with the

management of AMM, including the employer, the production manager and the quality control officer, is strained and reflects potential conflict situations.

The black women workers do not accept personal responsibility and accountability for any errors or mistakes in their work or problems within the workplace. Every element in the workplace other than themselves is blamed for rejected or flawed parts and products. The result is that products are frequently rejected whilst workers refuse to accept responsibility. This is not financially profitable and has a negative influence on productivity in the factory.

The black women workers do enjoy status and respect within their particular communities because they are employed. The black women workers stated that they particularly enjoy work status within their families and households. They are respected because they support the households financially and because they can afford to send their children to school. Their families respect them because they can afford to buy food and nobody in the household goes hungry.

Work status as perceived by the black women workers at AMM differs from the western interpretation. The black women workers argued that work status is not based on the position the worker occupies within the workplace, but merely on the fact that a person is employed and is able to support his/her family. Thus, work status is based on the single most important motivational element within the work values of the black women workers at AMM, namely financial reward.

The black women workers at AMM are not worried about their future at AMM. The women were asked whether they ever worry about the possibility that they might be unemployed in the future. The black women workers responded that they will not be unemployed, because there will always be work at AMM. According to these women at AMM, they do not have to be concerned about next month's income; there will always be work and commensurate remuneration.

The gender issue in South Africa needs serious re-evaluation – the voices of women in South Africa in general and those of black women workers in particular need to be heard. Interviews with the black women workers at AMM revealed that the unique needs of black women are often taken for granted in the discussions on gender equality and seen out of context. The traditional division of labour and gender role division as found in the cultures of African



origin should be studied by employers and exponents of gender equality. The culturally determined value systems and needs of black women should be taken into consideration at all times. The leaders in gender equality should not concentrate on the issues that are considered “politically correct”, but the real needs of women in general and black women in particular, must be addressed.

According to Kellerman (1979:1), black workers, in many respects, lack precise and scientific terms for many industrially relevant concepts, especially in their active vocabulary. The question therefore arose whether the black women workers at AMM attached the same meaning to certain work-related concepts as the researcher. Consequently, the black women workers were asked to translate different western work-related concepts into Sotho. The black women workers gave different translations to different work-related concepts. In this way, the researcher was able to analyse the perceptions of the black women workers at AMM about “work” itself and work-related concepts.

The difference in attitudes towards work and different meanings assigned to western work-related concepts by the black women workers influence communication and relations within the workplace. The employer should take this into account during meetings and when work orders are explained. The working behaviour of the black women workers is, in many ways, different to that of westerners. This should be taken into account by the employer in order to predict the working behaviour of his employees and to enhance productivity at AMM.

## CHAPTER 4

### EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

#### 4.1 CONCLUSION

According to Maja (1972:115), it should **not** be assumed that

western influences have completely destroyed all rudiments of traditional values and practices. The fact of the matter is that they have had such a profound impact on these traditional North Sotho values that it is becoming increasingly difficult to come across North Sotho values in their unadulterated form.

The emphasis of this study falls on how black women workers experience and perceive selected western work values within a particular South African workplace, namely AMM. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, a problem that constantly arises within South African industries is that there is a discrepancy between work values and the working behaviour of the workforce. Hence, the study emphasises the largely African- and culturally oriented value judgements and life- and world-view of the research group, 19 black women workers employed at AMM. Specific reference is made to the working behaviour of the 19 black women workers employed at AMM and their culturally determined value judgements and life- and world-views concerning certain requirements and elements within the western labour system.

From the qualitative and quantitative research findings, it would appear that one could hardly speak of any attitude as typically traditional or typically western, nor of any attitude as typically rural or urban. Rather, one observes shifts to and fro in terms of attitude between traditional and western practices. The work values and thus the working behaviour of the 19 black women workers appear to be an amalgamation of traditional and western patterns. As Rollwagen (1986:108) points out,

corporations [in this case labour corporations], being composed of a number of individuals linked together in various ways through time, create a variety of formal and informal understandings which define the nature of the thoughts and behaviours of members of that population while at work and which affects their behaviour at



other times as well. Individuals who join such corporations learn that corporate culture and add it to the cultural frameworks already in their minds from people in other specific cultural systems.

Despite this amalgamation of traditional and western patterns in the work values and working behaviour of the 19 black women workers at AMM, their working behaviour was and is in some instances opposite to accepted and expected working behaviour within the western labour set-up in South Africa. These disparities between accepted western work values and the culturally determined work values of the 19 black women workers from various black South African cultural groups employed at AMM are summarised in Table 4.1.

#### **4.1.1. Guidelines and conclusions**

Through extensive research, including literature research as well as quantitative and qualitative research discussed in the previous chapters, the researcher reached the following primary conclusions. These conclusions can be used as guidelines by the employer and management team at AMM in order to judge and predict the working behaviour of the black women workers employed at the factory and also to understand the culturally determined value judgements and life- and world-views of black women workers concerning certain elements within a western work ethic and a western work milieu.

These guidelines and conclusions concerning western work values and how the black women workers at AMM perceive and experience these western work values within a western work-milieu are presented in random order. The guidelines and conclusions could not be prioritised, as aspects of working behaviour and work values are closely related to one another. The value judgements and perceptions of the 19 black women workers on elements within their western-oriented workplace cannot be categorised or prioritised, and this is consistent with the holism of the life- and world-view of the black women workers. The value judgements and perceptions of the 19 black women workers concerning these selected western work values are thus evaluated with the emphasis on the criteria of Raubenheimer and Kotze (1984) and of Van Vuuren (1988).

**Table 4.1: A comparison of western work values and those perceived by the black women workers at AMM**

<b>Elements of work values</b>	<b>Westerners</b>	<b>Black women workers at AMM</b>
<b>Career awareness</b>	Religiously grounded (Section 1.6.1.1)	Extension of culture (Section 3.13)
<b>Motivation to achieve</b>	Religious duty (Section 1.6.1.10)	Survival of the group; financial remuneration (Section 3.16)
<b>Discipline</b>	Personal (Section 1.6.1.3)	Welfare of the group (Section 3.20)
<b>Responsibility</b>	Involvement and liability (Section 1.6.1.6)	Role of the supernatural (Section 3.20)
<b>Work status</b>	Work as a status symbol (Section 1.6.1.7)	The survival and welfare of the group (Section 3.21)
<b>Individualism</b>	Individual competition and achievement (Section 1.6.1.8)	Affiliation and group solidarity (Section 3.14)
<b>Gender and work</b>	Gender equality (Section 2.2)	Gender-oriented role differentiation (Section 3.22)
<b>Communication</b>	Time effectiveness and clarity (Section 1.6.1.4)	Method of peacekeeping and group affiliation (Section 3.19)
<b>Thoroughness and alertness</b>	Implies the quality of work (Section 1.6.1.5)	Thoroughness probable, alertness impossible (Section 3.15)
<b>Perception of the future</b>	Time as a commodity and provision for the future (Section 1.6.1.4)	Subsistence way of life and past and present orientation (Section 3.18.4)



- (1) One should bear in mind that the work values as well as the working behaviour of black women workers are culturally determined and that these culturally determined work values of black women workers dictate their working behaviour within the western-oriented South African labour system (see Section 1.5.2 and Section 1.5.7.4). According to a definition of “values” by Coertze and Coertze (1996:336), a value system is a cultural aspect. Values are a product of a specific cultural group’s life- and world-view and are judged and lived accordingly (see Section 1.5.2). Thus, employers should bear in mind that the working behaviour of black women workers from indigenous African-oriented cultural groups in South Africa is often very different to the working behaviour of westerners and, hence, contrasts with working behaviour expected in the western labour system.
- (2) Black women workers do not live in a vacuum – historical experiences and attitudes influence the working behaviour and perceptions by black women workers (see Section 2.1). The position of black women workers within the labour market was manipulated under a system of apartheid and the reservation of employment opportunities, and, after the abolition of apartheid, by affirmative action (see Section 2.5.1 and Section 2.7.9). Beyond the workplace, black women workers have certain obligations and a certain status within the traditional hierarchy (see Section 2.4 and Section 2.6.3). These factors and experiences are carried over into the workplace, because black women workers function as holistic cultural beings within and outside the workplace. Thus, black women workers cannot be looked at separately from historical and current economic, legal, political and social factors that influence their daily lives, entrance to, and position within the workplace.
- (3) The black women workers at AMM have a specific system of seniority which is consistent with their traditional African-oriented culture (see Section 2.4.3 and Section 3.3). Thus, age is important in the workplace (AMM) as a system of seniority is established and, accordingly, workers treat one another with due respect (see Section 3.3).
- (4) Although the research group is ethnically diverse (see Section 3.4), ethnic affiliation did not influence the perceptions on western work values or the work performance of the black women workers at AMM directly, as all of the women share a more or less similar sub-Saharan African-oriented lifestyle (Els 1993:51). However, ethnic

affiliation does influence social relationships and social interaction within the workplace. Diverse ethnic affiliation, however, implies a diversity of languages and this aspect definitely influences communication and group solidarity at AMM (see Section 3.5 and Section 3.19). Communication is very important to the black women workers at AMM. Ineffective communication is viewed as a breach in the solidarity of the group (see Section 3.19.3). Problems between co-workers should be solved within the group, without arbitrary involvement of members of the management team at AMM (see Section 3.19.3).

- (5) The work values and working behaviour of the black women workers at AMM are not founded on religion (see Section 3.6). The idealistic western perception of work as a (religious) obligation (see Section 1.5.7), is not present in the work values and working behaviour of the black women workers. The work values and working behaviour of the women workers at AMM are not founded on religion and this can be regarded as the most important difference between the culturally determined work value systems of westerners and those of these African-oriented black women workers.
- (6) “Work” is viewed exclusively as a means to an end, meaning that the black women workers work in order to feed themselves and their children and dependants (see Section 3.7 and Section 3.13). Work is a means of survival and not a moral obligation, as is the case within the puritan western work ethic (see Section 1.5.7). This perception of “work” is largely due to the socio-economic position of the black women workers: many of them are caught in a cycle of debt and repayment (see Section 3.11.5). It can thus be concluded that poverty plays an important role in the perceptions of the black women workers on the concept “work”. Poverty also has a negative influence on the productivity of the black women workers, as they suffer from “tiredness” and work in order to repay their debts (see Section 3.17).
- (7) The black women workers perceive education to be very important for their children (see Section 3.8). The black women workers perceive education as a necessity and prerequisite for their children to enjoy wealth and white collar employment (see Section 3.8). However, for themselves, they only regard the acquisition of skills as a necessity to complete assignments and not as a means to better employment

opportunities (see Section 3.16). The lack of education of many of the black women workers limits their employment opportunities to unskilled labour (see Section 3.8).

- (8) The single most important motivational aspect in the working life of the black women workers at AMM is financial remuneration (see Section 3.16). The black women workers at AMM do not enjoy working and virtually no improvement in the workplace will motivate them to be more productive. The black women workers indicated that they might be more productive in the short term if they received improved financial remuneration (see Section 3.17). The black women workers do not experience work as a calling and regard their employment merely as a means to an end. Job satisfaction is not a priority in the work values of the black women workers at AMM (see Section 3.24). Adequate financial remuneration is viewed as the only satisfaction a worker needs within the work situation.
- (9) Within the workplace, the black women workers regard group solidarity and cohesion as very important. Individualism is not a valued characteristic within the group (see Section 3.14). The group requires black women workers to function individually through and in harmony with the group. This view accords with the traditional African values of the black women workers, where individuality is not a necessity and the welfare of the group should be promoted at all times (Oosthuizen 1977:37; Silberbauer 1968:19; Van Niekerk 1983:61).
- (10) The black women workers at AMM distinguish clearly between thoroughness and alertness (see Section 3.15). Work is always perceived to be done thoroughly, but permanent alertness is impossible and beyond human control; consequently, errors are made. Therefore, thoroughness cannot be achieved as an ultimate goal (see Section 3.15).
- (11) The black women workers are not equally productive or industrious at all times (see Section 3.17). They are more productive on some days than on others and do not function to full capacity and potential within the workplace, mainly because they have culturally determined perceptions about the amount of work that needs to be completed within a certain time limit (see Section 3.17). The black women workers are not slaves of time. Time management is not a priority and time is “made” to rest, talk and work (see Section 3.18). Time is perceived in the terms of the recent past and

the present. The future and the advance planning of time schedules are not priorities (see Section 3.18).

- (12) The black women workers do not accept responsibility or accountability for errors or mishaps in the workplace (see Section 3.20). Problems and mistakes are blamed on the machinery, materials and forces beyond human control, such as the supernatural (see Section 3.20.5). This attitude influences productivity in the factory as the black women workers do not accept responsibility for rejected components. The black women workers at AMM have a very fatalistic approach towards “work” (see Section 3.17).
- (13) Work status as perceived by the black women workers at AMM differs from that of westerners (see Section 3.21). The black women workers enjoy status within their communities and families because they are employed. It is not their position within the workplace that is important, but the fact that they provide for their families and dependants that earns respect (see Section 3.21). Work status is based on the single most important motivational element within the work values of the black women workers, namely financial reward (see Section 3.21).
- (14) The black women workers at AMM value job security (see Section 3.24). All the black women workers stated that work at AMM is tolerable because of job security (see Section 3.16). The black women workers are reassured by their perception that there will be continued monthly remuneration and employment at AMM for an unlimited period of time (see Section 3.24).
- (15) The physical work environment is not important to the black women workers at AMM (see Section 3.23). The black women workers regard the factory as a place where they work, and that cannot be changed (see Section 3.23). The spokespersons regard the factory as equal to “somebody else’s house”: they do not necessarily like the appearance of the factory, but they do not have any power to change anything within it (see Section 3.23). If possible, the black women workers would like to have heaters and an equipped kitchen installed (see Section 3.23). The black women also stated that they are satisfied with their work environment, as it is not too hot or too dirty (see Section 3.23).

- (16) Gender and the position of black women within the labour situation are perceived according to an African-oriented cultural point of view (see Section 3.22). The black women workers perceive the roles of men and women according to traditional guidelines of sub-Saharan African origin (see Section 3.22.1). The black women workers at AMM do not regard themselves as the equals of men nor do they want to be treated as such; a definite distinction between the roles of men and women is made (see Section 3.22).
- (17) The work values of the black women workers at AMM are largely unaffected by political ideology and trade union policy (see Section 3.12). Although some of the black women workers at AMM are members of political parties, these parties have no direct influence within the workplace and the working behaviour of the black women workers is not directly influenced or dictated by political guidelines (see Section 3.12).
- (18) Black workers often lack precise and scientific terms for industrially relevant concepts (see Section 3.25). Translations into Sotho of work-related concepts supplied by the black women workers at AMM revealed that they perceive “work” in itself not as a way of life, but as a means towards an end (see Section 3.25). It is indisputable that the black women workers at AMM perceive certain work-related concepts differently from the way westerners do (see Table 3.11). This has a negative effect on communications and relations within the workplace. It is especially relations between management and the employees at AMM that have to be reviewed (see Section 3.25).

#### **4.1.2 Limitations of the research**

The research was limited to an exclusively female research group within a single factory, namely AMM. The reason for this was that very limited research (particularly anthropological research) has been done, within academia, on the working behaviour of black women workers in a western working environment. The research was further limited by the size of the research group, and this research sample cannot be seen as representative of the entire South African population. For this reason, the recommendations, guidelines and conclusions in this study are mainly relevant to the factory, the management team and the

employees at AMM. The value of this study lies in demonstrating that a cross-cultural approach can be applied to the situation of **black women workers** in a western workplace and the performance of these women within this particular working environment.

#### **4.1.3 Further research**

Very limited anthropological research has been done on the situation of women from indigenous South African culture groups within the western working environment. It is essential that more cross-cultural research is done in this area so that the South African labour system can better accommodate the work values, perceptions of work values and the working expectations of a large proportion of the South African labour force, namely black women workers.

#### **4.1.4 Concluding remarks**

Black women workers at AMM regard and perceive “work” as well as elements within the western work ethic in a different way from the way westerners would. It is imperative that the employer at AMM in particular and employers within the South African labour system in general acknowledge the disparities between the culturally determined perceptions of “work” and the work values of westerners and the African-oriented black women workers. Employers and South African industries should try to effect a compromise between these two value systems (western and African-oriented) in order to improve labour relations and productivity and to be able to predict and judge the working behaviour of black women workers. This is not possible without knowledge of the work values, perceptions of western work values and the working behaviour of black women workers with a sub-Saharan African orientation.