

“There’s a soul-searching epidemic afoot in the workplace. Employees are no longer content with just a pay cheque and good benefits: they want meaning and passion”.  
(Shari Caudron: Training and Development, September 1997)

## 1 CHAPTER 1

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### **A MEANINGFUL WORKPLACE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

*This chapter 1 provides an overview of an identified problem area in the work life of employees and positions the study in the context of Organizational Behaviour. Organization Behaviour is imbedded in a broader framework that is commonly referred to as Human Resource Management or People Management. The implication is that content emanating from Organization Management and -Theory will also contribute towards the current research. The purpose is to provide the reasoning whereby the specific problem (loss of meaning at work) was identified and the process that gave rise to the embarkation on this study. The chapter engages literature in an effort to substantiate the identified problem; to formulate the purpose of the study and to provide an overview of the structure of the written document.*

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Work has been the centre-piece of human existence since times immemorial, whether the purpose was to gather food or to defend the tribe; to bury the dead or sustain life or security; whether as individuals or collectively, the expenditure of energy towards goal attainment was and still is a common trait of humans. Irrespective of the goals that were pursued, then and now, the common underlying denominator with modern times is that it requires a coordinated effort and therefore some form of work-organization to attain goals. The under-girding fundamental factors in this respect are (on the one hand) that people had to (and still have to) demonstrate behaviour that, in the broadest sense of the word, could be termed as "work related behaviour", and, on the other hand, it is assumed that this behaviour was and still is, goal orientated (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988, p. 18). In a certain sense, therefore, all of mans behaviour since earliest times can be defined as "organized" and goal directed behaviour.

In essence a study of the way that people behaved in respect of their collective (or individual) efforts to achieve certain objectives, although the formal terminology in the stricter sense of the word might not have been used, is the study of Human Behaviour, in the broadest sense of the word. With the advent of more formally structured Human Organizations, and the scientific study of management, against a background where individuals are integrated into a formally structured work or organizational environment, the study of human behaviour in that particular context is typified as the study of Organizational Behaviour (OB). (We should however bear in mind that field of OB is not limited to a job, role or work which is remunerated. In voluntary organizations such as social, non profit NGO's, the Church, and the like, human behaviour in respect of work tasks is still within the field of OB.)

The way in which behaviour is described is determined by the intent and the point of departure, but the observable content from which deductions and conclusions are derived remains fundamentally the same – human behaviour. Any endeavour to establish an understanding of such behaviour cannot be undertaken without taking

cognisance of the contexts within which this behaviour is demonstrated; nor can the different contributory fields, from latter and more "formalised thought" be ignored. These contributions include contributions from such diverse fields as Management Science, Organizational Behaviour (OB) (which has its roots in Psychology, Sociology, and other subject fields), Organizational Theory, Communication Theory, and Anthropology to name but a few.

A third factor that cannot be ignored in the study of human behaviour at work is the reciprocal influence of all the contexts within which an individual functions. The different contexts have been described by authors such as Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Hattingh (1996). The question pertaining to the balance between life and work has also been addressed, as has the issue of the Quality of Work life context (e.g. Luthans, 1989). It is accepted that the individual human being, having to contend with various life roles, must somehow cope, not only with the different life roles, but must also adapt to continuous change and transition between these roles that are performed in various changing contexts. Coping with life roles, whilst at the same time adapting to a variety of changes, inevitably impacts on the consciousness; the mental-, emotional experiences, and behaviour patterns of humans. Coping with the work role, adapting to change and fulfilling new roles, within the work *context* and balancing this role with other life roles, is the subject of the field of OB.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY PROGRAM

The primary concept that struck a chord of interest for further research is the concept "meaning" and "meaningfulness" which seemed to be amiss in the work life of the individuals with whom the current researcher came into contact with on a professional level within a work setting. This initial observation was accompanied by a second, albeit initially a superficial observation, that the individual seems to have become trapped in a framework of labels that are somehow perceived to be *the answer* towards managing and predicting his/her behaviour. Not only has the individual been trapped in a framework of labels, but it is also perceived that the

work environment and the behaviour of the individual can be managed in such a way as to create a predictable and therefore a linear cause and effect chain of events related to the behaviour of employees in organizational settings. This perception is borne out by the current perception in organizations that individual and group behaviour can be managed by policy and regulatory statutes in the organization for the employees of the organization. The observed and experienced problem which served as the initial stimulus for this research was/is perceived as a loss of meaning at work. It would seem that human Resource practitioners and managers alike tend to assume that if a certain cause is created the individual will respond in a predictable way. Other practices that are operationalised in organizational settings result in the atomization of the individual and the subsequent suspension of the individual into a team/group and the bigger organization.

The paradox in the study of organizations and OB is to be found in the strange and complex relationship between the individual (on the one hand) and the organization (on the other hand). The paradox is situated in the phenomenon that the individual is at one and the same time also the “organization”. On the one hand, the individual constitutes the organization together with many other individuals that are somehow (based on the work breakdown structure of the total organization) grouped together in smaller teams or groups that constitute a specific task or sequence of tasks in the workflow process of the “organization”.

A further dimension that compounds the problem is the colonization of everyday life by managerialist markers, reducing the individual to a project-object. This is a further indication of the pervasive effect of organizational managerialist and rational culture into everyday life. Thus the individual is further atomized and manipulated into a framework of the achievement and performance imperative that is a characteristic of organizational life. These and other tendencies (that are addressed below) lead to the very pertinent question whether the organizational work space (and the pervasive effect of certain characteristics into the sphere of everyday life), can be described as contributing towards a meaningful existence; specifically meaningful work experiences? Or, more specifically, **do individuals experience the workplace as a meaningful environment?**

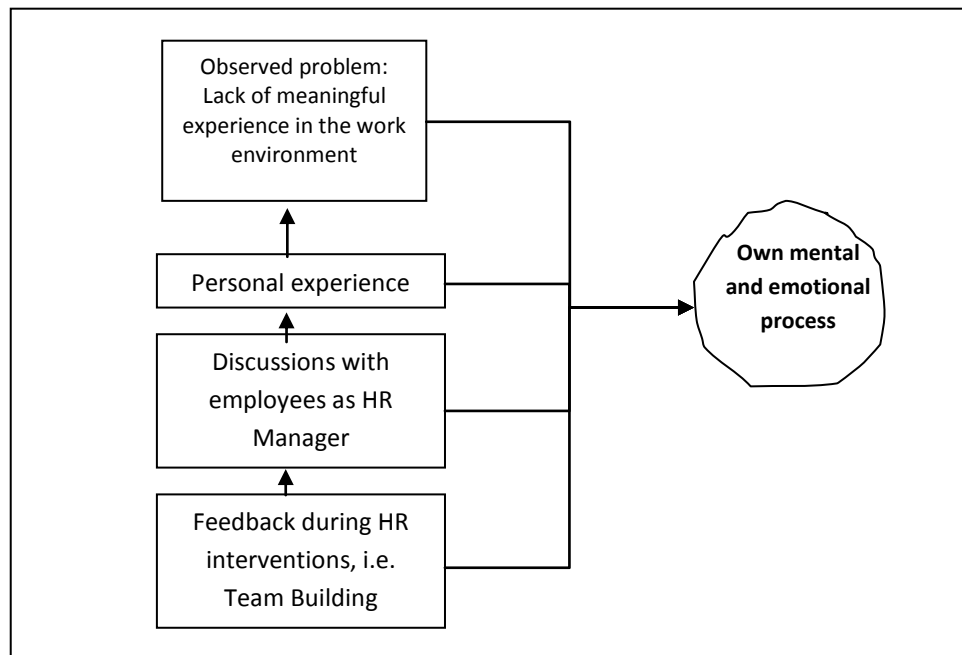
### **1.2.1 The initial journey: Towards formulating the study program**

The original idea to pursue this specific study programme was born during a PhD seminar at the University of Pretoria during 2003. As an HR Manager the researcher was often confronted with employees who indicated that they do not enjoy their work and that work has become a burden (see also Chalofsky and Griffin, 2005). Employees came to work “feeling as if they were carrying a huge burden” complaining that they felt “unmotivated”; that they did not derive “satisfaction” from their work because work had become a slur (Personal interviews with employees as HR Manager/Business Partner for a particular division). In addition other opportunities presented themselves such as team building exercises, where employees were encouraged to voice their frustrations with the company, their work, supervisors, and management. In a safe surround these opportunities were fully utilised and many comments (in addition to the above) were noted. (These comments will be discussed during a later chapter when feedback and the interpretation on the content of the Repertory Grid Interviews are presented.) From all of these discussions it seemed as if employees had lost a sense of meaning and direction as a result of certain organizational aspects that were experienced as depressing and inhibiting of their energy and needs to contribute in a meaningful way. The dimensions that were identified as inhibitors in this sense, included such dimensions as policies and their application; remuneration structures that did not allow for flexibility; the general culture of the organization which appeared and was experienced as punitive; supervisory and management incumbents that were seen as being incompetent as managers and furthermore lacked leadership capabilities, as evidenced by the tendency to micro manage subordinates; not respecting the individual as a unique contributor; the breakdown of trust relationships; and many other comments that breath the same type of frustrations.

In addition to the above comments, the researcher personally also experienced some of the above at work. In an attempt to analyse the lack of motivation, introspection also created awareness that it was not only a lack of intrinsic

motivation, but a loss of meaning at work. The workplace had lost its sense of meaning and resulted in a measure of disengagement and self inflicted isolation. The short background provided above, of necessity gave rise to the researchers own mental and emotional processes. The question however, is how to transcend the intrapersonal emotional bias? One way of doing just this was to embark on the process of bracketing, which, in this particular case, implied a disciplined program of investigation.

The awareness motivated the current researcher to enrol and register for the PhD in Organization Behaviour with the intent of discovering the underlying dynamics of the loss of meaning and associated behaviour at work. This train of thought can be presented as in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1: The initial motivation leading towards the research**

This route facilitated a reading program that focussed on Organizational Behaviour. The reading program and seminar work gradually provided a framework for an understanding of not only behaviour *in* working, but also behaviour *at* work. The difference between the two expressions can be summarised in the words of Chalofsky, who distinguishes between meaningful work or meaning in work on the one hand and meaning at work on the other. (2010, pp. 11-12)

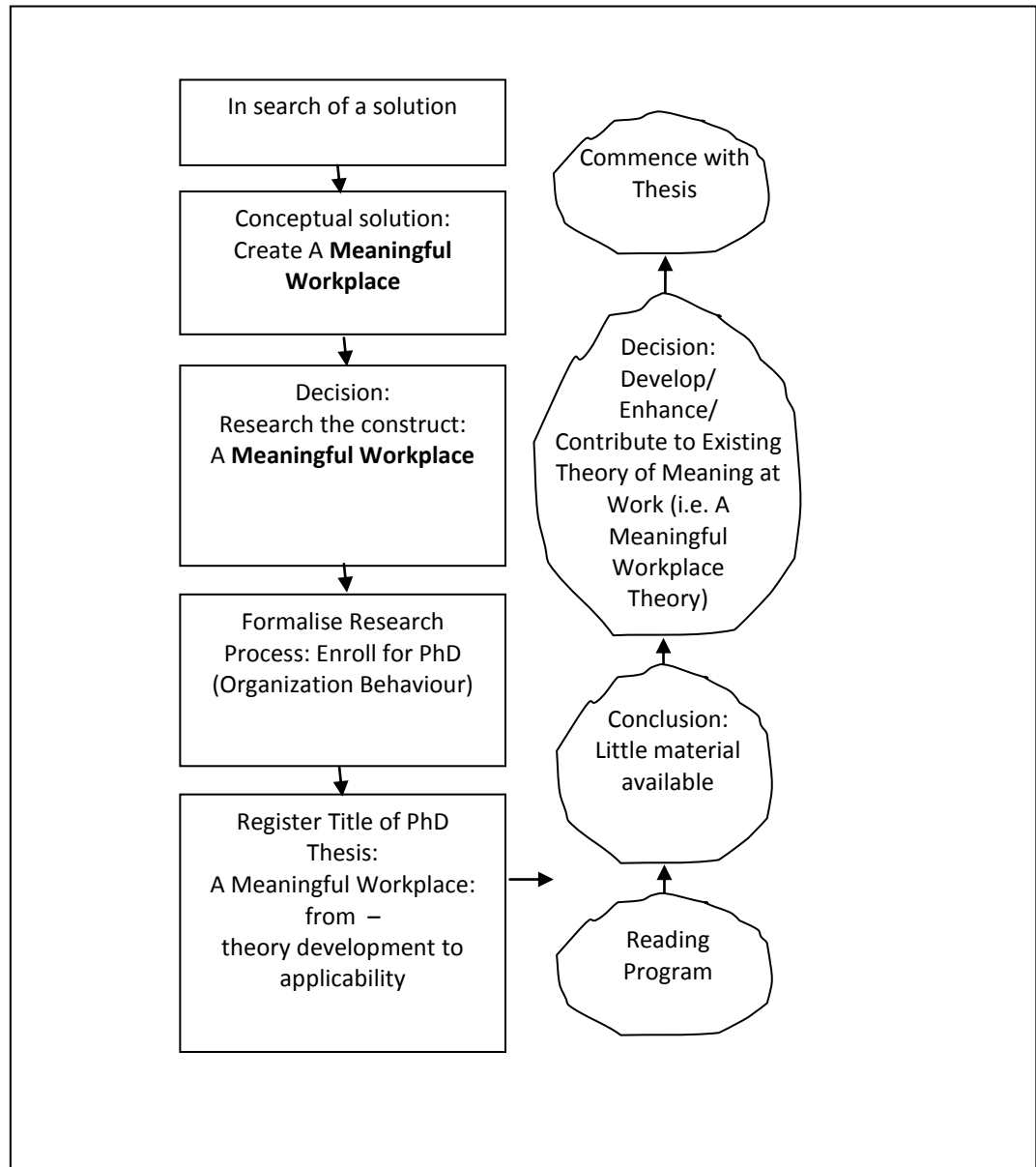
Meaning *in* work, or *meaningful work*, suggests an inclusive state of being. It is the way we express the meaning and purpose of our lives through the activities (work) that take up most of our waking hours...Meaning *at* work implies a relationship between the person and the organization or the workplace in terms of commitment, loyalty and dedication...Meaning *of* work implies a sociological and anthropological concern for the role of work in a society; it is discussed in terms of the norms, values and traditions of work in the day-to-day life of people.

Behaviour *in* working thus refers to the behaviour of individuals whilst performing their work based on their competencies, skills, experiences, emotions, values, and the sense of meaning that is derived from performing that particular piece of work. Behaviour *at* work on the other hand, refers to the behaviour of people whilst performing their work *within* their workplace and as such provides the visible and audible markers of the underlying emotions and experiences regarding the workplace as such. Figure 1.2 presents a further step in the development of the interest and eventual embarkation on the current study program.

It is noteworthy that in addition to the literature addressing the *meaning of work* construct, there seems to be an emerging literature that actually pursues the construct of meaning *at* work. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) (a worthy example of such theoretical grounding) for instance, distinguish between factors (or organizational practices) that foster meaningfulness *in* work and distinguish these from organizational practices that foster meaningfulness *at* work, and, in the third instance, identifies those factors that foster transcendence. (This distinction will be discussed in a further chapter of the current study.)

Having provided a short background of the motivation that initiated the study program, it is now time to turn to a discussion of the perceived problem

See Figure 1.2 for a graphic presentation of the above paragraph



**Figure 1.2: Background: Registering the title of the thesis**

### 1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM AREA

Although the above has already alluded to the development of a potential problem for the purpose of study, it is nevertheless also necessary to discuss the background to the perceived problem area prior to defining the problem for the purpose of this study.



### **1.3.1 Preliminary description of the observed problem: Behaviour is dynamic and unpredictable**

There seem to be a confluence of factors that somehow give rise to the perceived problem, i.e. that employees experience a lack of meaning *at work*.

#### **1.3.1.1 The legitimization and channelling of behaviour in organizations**

The first strand emanates from the field of Organizational Behaviour (OB) which seemingly has been reduced to a perceived set of predictable dimensions, described by means of institutionalised concepts which appear to be regulated by fixed organizationally manipulated interventions.

In this regard, Cilliers and Koortzen (2000) assert that managers and scholars alike perceive OB as only being “conscious, mechanistic, predictable, uncomplicated and easy to understand”. Yet, when people react to the pressures of the workplace and the organisation, their behaviour becomes *unintelligible*.

As early as 1978 Katz and Kahn referred to the fact that Organizational Behaviour was not static. They refer to the interdependence of the behaviour of humans in organizations, implying two levels of interdependence. The one level of interdependence that is implied in their statement, although they might not necessarily have meant it to be so, reflects the interdependence of behaviour amongst and between people and, secondly, the interdependence between humans and the flow of inputs into the organization as system. They however also state that the “...classical organizational theory...was not suitable to understand or conceptualise behaviour at work. The reason they offer is that classical organization theory implicitly assumes a “...closed character of social structures” (1978, p. v).

Open systems theory on the other hand furnished a more dynamic framework for the conceptualisation of OB. One of the implications of an open system assumption,

specifically in relation to conceptualising behaviour at work, is that it facilitates dynamic and unpredictable behaviour due to its lack of constancy. In an open system where no inflow consistency (1978, p. 31) can be assured, “much of organizational behavior becomes unpredictable”. Humans tend to drift as a result of many factors which somehow influence the choices that they make. The drift might not necessarily be of a physical nature, but can also be of a cognitive, emotional and/or spiritual nature, resulting in psychological closeness or aloofness in organizations, which can be translated as engaged or disengaged. The reason for this drift is related to the fact that humans make up the so called “walls” (or perimeters) of the organizational system (1978, p, 41). The organization thus employs measures to force employees into certain (at least) observable behaviour patterns so as to contain its own boundary. These measures can be viewed as mechanisms to stabilise the organization by seeking to formalise or institutionalise “all aspects” of organizational behaviour (1978, p. 81).

To prevent any misconstruance at this stage of the discussion it must be very clearly stated that the problem area for the purpose of this study is not entrenched in the experience of the individual *in* working, but the experience of the individual *at* work. Standard operating procedures, work instructions, work guides, business processes, do *not*, as far as this study is concerned, present the observed problem. The root of the problem for a loss of meaning *at* work is searched for in the misalignment between employees and the features that influence the organizational landscape and therefore the dimensions of engagement and commitment towards the work environment. Superficially this can be construed as a lack of loyalty, however the experience of meaning at work is found beyond the boundaries of loyalty and engagement and even beyond the boundaries of motivation. Meaning and meaningful experience at work represents a deeper dimension than motivation and engagement and even a deeper dimension than loyalty for that matter (Sievers in Chalofsky and Griffin, 2005). The focus therefore is on the lack of meaningful experience at work as a result of the fragmentation and alienation of the individual at work. However, having stated this, it is not possible to investigate the experience of meaningfulness at work without also considering the meaning in work.

### 1.3.1.2 The fragmentation and alienation of the individual at work

Fundamentally this dimension of the problem revolves around the fragmentation of the individual in an organizational setting. The approach in literature whereby a rational-economic and mechanistic approach towards the functioning of the individual in the organisation is accepted as normative, without due cognisance of the intrapersonal and emotive experiences based on an open systems and constructivist position, has created a "knowledge chasm" whereby the former perspective is accepted as normative, whilst the emotive and irrational dimensions of OB have been "ignored". The tendency in the conventional literature (and wisdom) pertaining to OB is to dissolve the individual in a suspension of organisational processes, systems and structures within which an eclectic mix of interventions, to motivate the individual towards ever increasing achievements and productivity is designed. In addition the individual has been reduced to a "unit of analyses" in the true sense of the word and has become an object to be manipulated through job descriptions (thereby not taking cognisance of the implosion of jobs and the emergence of expanded roles), reward and recognition systems; and managed and led by managers and leaders that have been moulded into a contemporary mould utilising vision statements, mission statements, and collective value systems of which the most outstanding is: "we value our people", whilst at the same time subjecting valued employees to processes of re-engineering and resultant retrenchments.

This happens without necessarily calculating the human, organizational and societal costs of such interventions, specifically in the South African context, which is described (a) as a developing economy, (b) regulated by a legal framework that has resulted in a semi-closed labour market to correct past injustices, (c) with a new political dispensation that has been successfully established and seemingly has proven itself over the past ten to 15 years, (d) subject to continuous and fundamental structural change, (e) resulting in the alignment of corporate and organizational life towards the forces of transformation and globalism.

In practice the employee experiences a measure of alienation from the work and the organization itself. Cummings and Manring (1977, p. 167) conclude that “five dimensions of alienation” (i.e. “work-powerlessness, normlessness, meaningfulness, self-evaluative involvement, and instrumental work orientation”) are positively related to certain work behaviour patterns (i.e. “effort, performance, absenteeism, and tardiness”). It is furthermore also assumed that

...alienating work has negative behavioural consequences, e.g., work that provides for little self-control, meaning, and intrinsic satisfaction leads to reduced motivation in the work process and to various forms of withdrawal (1977, p. 168).

The five dimensions are described by Cummings and Manring (1977, p. 169)

1. Powerlessness-the feeling that an individual is an object, dominated and controlled by other people or a technical system of production. This dimension is similar to Rotter’s (1966) concept of “internal vs. external control,” and DeCharms et al. (1965) “origin vs. pawn.”
2. Meaninglessness--” the inability to understand the events in which one is engaged” (Shepard, 1971, p. 14). This form of alienation results when work roles are seen as lacking integration into other work roles as well as into the goals of the organization.
3. Normlessness-the feeling that the attainment of culturally prescribed goals demands illegitimate means. Here the primary concern is the extent to which a worker perceives that upward mobility in the organization requires illegitimate means as opposed to advancement on the basis of merit.
4. Instrumental work orientation-the feeling that work is “valued primarily as a means to nonwork ends rather than valued for its intrinsic rewards” (Shepard, 1971, p. 16). This dimension is similar to Seeman’s (1959) notion of self-estrangement in which work becomes an instrumentalized means rather than an end in itself.
5. Self-evaluative involvement -the degree to which a worker feels his role is a more important referent for evaluating self than his

nonwork activity. This variant of alienation is similar to Lodahl and Kejner's (1965) concept of "job involvement" or the extent to which the job situation is central to a person's identity, and Wilensky's (1964) "prized self-image."

See also Seeman (1959), who identifies the same dimensions and basically agrees on the descriptions/definitions. The question that arises is whether alienation and meaninglessness are the same?

Based on the discussion thus far it seems that meaninglessness is represented as a type of alienation, together with other types such as powerlessness, normlessness, and estrangement. In all of these types of alienation, there seems to be pointers towards a common type of denominator, which can be identified as a lack of control on the part of the individual over his environment, which produces in him a sense of frustration, powerlessness. Accordingly, the individual negates the environment and could possibly withdraw from such an environment. In the work environment, thus whilst *at work* the individual employee does not physically withdraw as he/she is overpowered by an over powering force, i.e. the need to work and thus to be self-sufficient. The employee thus succumbs but harbours a dislike and therefore disengages psychologically from the workplace, thereby leaving an emptiness or meaningless experience work. Eventually the employee can develop contempt towards his own self. His existence becomes meaningless.

Powerlessness according to Ashforth (1989, p. 208) involves a "three stage process of psychological adjustment". The first stage is described as "reactance, the individual attempts to gain the control initially expected or desired" (Ashforth, 1989, p. 208). The second stage is referred to as "helplessness", during which the individual "learns that such attempts are largely futile and abandons them".

In the third stage, 'work alienation', the individual comes to desire no more than the status quo affords. Work alienation is defined as a cognitive sense of separation of the individual from work **and the workplace** that is a lack of job involvement and organizational identification

This trend has major effects as far as issues of performance, satisfaction and organization self esteem is concerned, hence the loss of meaning at work, which inadvertently gave rise to the emerging conceptual construct of **Meaningful workplace**. (Chalofsky, 2010; Terez, 200)

Sendjaya and Sarros (2002, p. 285) examined the extent to which leadership behaviour and aspects of organizational structure, influences, or relates to elements of “work alienation such as powerlessness, self-estrangement and meaninglessness”, and conclude that:

Results show that transformational leadership was associated with lower work alienation, whereas transactional leadership was associated with higher work alienation. Organizational structure was not significantly predictive of work alienation, but was negatively associated with transformational leadership and positively associated with transactional leadership. The significant indirect effects between organizational structure and work alienation, and between organizational structure and transformational leadership, provide further evidence that the leadership style of the organization has a more significant impact on feelings of work alienation than antecedent conditions such as organization rigidity.

### 1.3.1.3 Legitimized domination

"Strategic Management" as the mechanism towards these changes, still contains the principle of legitimised domination that originated in Bureaucratic Philosophy, although now much more refined and sophisticated. The individual thus remains trapped in a vacuum of powerlessness that is governed by systems, process, structures, procedures and prescriptive regulations. This not only leads to a fragmentation of the individual's existence (on an emotional level), but also lays down barriers that prevent the individual from fully fulfilling his/her potential life roles including his/her work role. Individuals are "forced" under the threat of being

"managed out" to perform to the highest possible level of output, without the conditions that contribute towards psychological fulfilment and meaningfulness.

Chalofsky and Griffin (2005) indicate that not only did the community become separated from work during the Industrial Era, but it created a situation whereby people did not own their work anymore. Work that is performed by the individual employee, either as an individual or within a group setting became the "property" of the organization. The result of the process of disowning work from the individual, also created a process of alienation through which the individual within the different contexts of life, missing out on real meaning making and connectedness which transcends the work environment and even encroaches upon the social life of the individual (Chalofsky, 2010).

Chalofsky and Griffin (2005) refer to Sievers, a German organizational development scholar, who ..."hypothesizes that it was only after meaning disappeared from work—when work separated from life and community—did motivation become an issue. Meaning always played an integral part of work when work was an integral part in the community".

Work behaviour does not rest on the conscious alone, but is rather more sub-conscious and unconscious; not mechanistic and linear but dynamic; not predictable but in the true sense of the word, unpredictable. An individual acts in a dynamic way to the impulses and variables that confronts him/her (Cilliers and Koortzen, 2000). Without balance and cohesive behaviour patterns resulting in a balance (not equilibrium) within him/her and without role fulfilment the individual cannot function optimally and effectively, thereby contributing to profitability and sustainability, within the organisation.

#### **1.3.1.4 Separation of Organizational Theory and Organizational Behaviour**

A second dimension related to the perceived problem emanates from the chasm between Organizational behaviour and Management Theory pertaining to the

management of Organizations.

Koontz (1980) typifies management theory as a jungle. Koontz originally identified 6 so-called schools of management theory, which were identified as “(1) the management process school, (2) the empirical or ‘case’ approach school, (3) the human behavior school, (4) the social system school, (5) the decision theory school, and (6) the mathematics school”. Twenty years after the initial study, the so-called schools of management theory proliferated to the extent that he identified 11 schools of thought, some of which were new schools, whilst others built on the original foundations. Without embarking into the depths of this discussion, it is sufficient for the purpose of this study to refer to the origins of the confusion between the different schools, which, in its ramifications, leads to confusion in the minds of practicing managers.

These varying schools, or approaches (as they are better called), led to a jungle of confusing thought, theory, and advice to practicing managers. The major sources of entanglement in the jungle were often due to varying meanings given common words like “organization”, to differences in defining management as a body of knowledge, to widespread casting aside of the findings of early practicing managers as “armchair” rather than what they were – the distilled experience and thought of perceptive men and women, to misunderstanding the nature and role of principles and theory, and to an inability or unwillingness of many “experts” to understand each other (Koontz, 1980, p. 175).

#### **1.3.1.5 The straitjacket of Organization Science and Organizational Behaviour**

Daft and Lewin (1990, p. 2), conclude that organization science has been strait-jacketed because of the phenomenon that a so-called “publication barrier”, based on the perception that only publications anchored in established theories or



“legitimate” methods may be published. The implication is that only certain theoretical concepts and themes are put forward as acceptable pointers for study and practice, in organisational settings, resulting in a limited set of topics”. The background to this particular set of circumstances is the result of the establishment, or the growth, of a paradigm with a defined set of problems for a community of scholars. This is defined as the problem of “normal science” (Daft and Lewin, 1990). The particular scholarly community draws its conceptual and theoretical boundaries through the “creation of a common language and “accepted modes and protocols of” (Daft and Lewin, 1990, p. 2)

The normal science concept forces the field of study into methodological boxes. New entrants are forced into the assumptions of the paradigm and thus perpetuate the tradition. As a result, conclude Daft and Lewin (1990, p. 2): “The boundaries of the paradigm can put the field in an intellectual strait jacket.”

As classical management theory was gaining momentum, other academic approaches also emerged. The Foundation of organizational behavior was launched by the Hawthorne studies...and by the concept of organizations as cooperative systems. Bureaucratic sociologists such as Merton, Selznick began to appear in' the 1950's. The characterization of organizations as problem- noting, decision-making systems also appeared about the same time. During 1959 a shift towards systematic research and away from Common-sense prescriptive approaches to teaching occurred (1990, p. 4).

This “shift” as Daft and Lewin (1990), refers to it, was the first crack that started the separation of organizational science and organizational behavior. Consider the paradigmatic influence which created an assumed “stable field” for theoretical research, based on “normal science” assumptions and the momentum for the separation were initiated. The consequence of this “moving away” or separation resulted in organisational theory not transforming into an applied science. It further resulted in a chasm forming between the theory of organisations and the behaviour of people within organisations. The theoretical perspectives as mentioned earlier resulted in a boxed approach which restricted the thinking and research to the

paradigmatic topics or themes that were fixated.

Organizational Behaviour suffered as a result of this separation because it became a de-contextualised endeavour functioning under the premise that behaviour is predictable and manageable through the implementation of certain interventions that are mentioned elsewhere in this chapter.

A superficial survey of the field of OB provides sufficient information indicating a rather static treatment of the field. On the one hand, scholars and practitioners have wittingly (or unwittingly) created an ecology which, although interdependent, can still be distinguished in terms of its own language, purpose, and the products that is created by means of theoretical, experimental, experiential, empirical, and other means of research. How does such ecology come into being? In addition to the evolutionary process and the ever increasing ecology of OB, the tendency towards Management theory and behaviour has deposited its seeds in this ecological wonderland of OB, and has borne its own fruits with time.

Very little changes have come about by means of expanding this ecology. It has remained rather static in approach and discourse, mainly being influenced by modernism. The problem for McFillen (1985) (and which is supported), is the lack of a macro context within which the study of Organizational behaviour is studied, i.e. the organization. In this regard, McFillen (1985, p. 355) states that textbooks on Organizational Behaviour are as abundant as the ways to

...interpret and assemble the variety of knowledge, facts, and educated guesses that make up the field. A glance at the available textbooks in organizational behavior indicates at least three things. First, an established core of OB knowledge has developed to which almost every business student in America is exposed. Although one may quarrel with a topic's treatment in some text, a fairly standardized set of topics has emerged, even to the point of some "must" references. Second, the material is assembled and packaged in a multitude of ways. Any faculty member should find a text or combination of texts that serve her/his purpose. Third, too many

organizational behavior texts currently are available for any reviewer to examine them all.

In spite of the multitude, McFillen nevertheless reports on a survey of 10 Organizational Behaviour Textbooks and eventually concludes that (1985, p. 364)

Somewhere along the road to respectability, OB lost management. In the field's apparent quest to right the previous wrongs of prescriptiveness without theory or data, organizational behavior books turned to theories and research without much attempt to apply those critical elements to the process of managing...the role of applied scientists does require prescription...customers demand it...Another observation about organizational behavior texts past and present is how poorly they cover the more macro-oriented issues...an OB textbook that provides any semblance of significant coverage of OT is hard to find.

As far as the coverage of the individual in the organization is concerned, McFillen continues to state that (1985, p. 364)

Most OB textbooks provide twice the coverage for groups than for organization theory and two to three times the coverage for individual behavior than for groups. On the other hand, maybe the reason the textbooks do not cover OT well is because the authors are uncomfortable with OT. This would be an equally damaging indictment of the profession. A review of most OT chapters gives the impression that the study of organizations at the macro level stopped with Woodward, Lawrence and Lorsch, and Burns and Stalker.

#### **1.3.1.6 Modernism: Organizational Science and OB**

OB as an *interdependent* field of study and scientific endeavour has unfortunately become bound by convention in respect of the units of analysis that constitute the

structure and content of definition and description of human behaviour at work. These units are conventionally indicated as the *individual*, the *team/group*, and the *organization*. This convention has its roots in the development of rigorous scientific thought and the development of scientific method based on quantitative methods, which ultimately resulted in a fragmentation and silo-typology of reality. This tendency can be traced back in time to the evolvement of scientific and systematic thought as applied to management and organizational theory, specifically through experimental and other controlled and controllable methods; in short – quantitative methods.

Chalofsky and Griffin (2005, p. 1) comment that as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century an intimate relationship existed between work and (the) community. Whatever your occupation or trade, you would socialise with every other member of society. At about 1860 approximately half of the population was self-employed and followed some sort occupational stream, mostly based on inheritance. This situation gradually changed. By the 1900's "two thirds were wage earners and the clock, uniform standards, and supervisors came to govern the workplace" and "workers subordinated their own experiences to the logic of efficiency and productivity". The advent of enlightenment modernism (advent about 1890) with its emphasis on rationality made a significant contribution towards this subordination of the individual worker to the logic of efficiency and productivity under the imperative of performance. The era of enlightenment is often closely linked with the Scientific Revolution, for both movements emphasized reason as the source for the truth about reality. The age of enlightenment, although a commencement date of roughly the 16<sup>th</sup> century is set, had a sustainable effect and influence throughout the scientific era and the formulations of modernistic thought.

Although organizations are an integrated part of society, people (since then to date) work in demarcated areas and are effectively detached from and separated from the larger community or society. It was the advent of the Industrial Era (late 18th century and early 19th century) that separated work from community and created an environment or an experiential state in which people do not "own" their work (Chalofsky and Griffin, 2005). Hierarchies separate management from workers whilst internal competition to progress, position employees against each other as

adversaries. The impact of the separation of work from life and society or community resulted in a loss of meaning (Sievers, in Chalofsky et al., 2005), thus the flash point pertaining to interest in motivation, with specific reference to work motivation, was ignited. "Meaning" according to Chalofsky and Griffin (2005, p. 2) "always played an integral part of work when work was an integral part in the community". This type of scenario could well explain the current interest, research, theorising and discussion regarding "meaningful work and **Meaningful workplaces**" by authors such as (Chalofsky 2003, a, b), Levering (Co-founder of the Great Place to Work Institute, date unknown), May, Gilson and Harter (2004), Mostert (2004), Terez (2000), Weisbord (1987), Wiese and Freund (2005), amongst others. Man's search for meaning (Frankl 2004) still holds true in the twenty first century as in the twentieth century.

The statement has been made that the study of OB is bound by convention that has its formal roots (although its primal origins date back many millennia) in the Industrial Era and the attempts at organizing and systemising work behaviour into patterns of coherence. This gave rise to a view of the individual as a "unit of analysis" patterned according to fixed rules of investigation (influenced by positivism and empiricism as practised in the natural or physical sciences). A perusal of any standard Handbook on OB reveals, not only the pattern of investigation, but also certain labels according to which this "unit of analysis" should be managed to elicit productive behaviour in the service of organizational efficiency. Table 1.1 provides an overview of not only the subject matter that is discussed using the individual as a unit of analysis, but also the flow of content.

The Table below provides an indication of the way in which Organizational Behaviour is treated in literature.

**Table 1.1: Overview of the framework within which the individual is framed  
in organizational settings**

<b>THE INDIVIDUAL AS UNIT OF ANALYSIS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF OB LITERATURE</b>	
<b>Content headings</b>	<b>Author and date of publication</b>
Foundations of OB Perception and individual decision making Values, attitudes and job satisfaction Basic motivational concepts Motivation: From concepts to application	Robbins (1989)
Personality Perception Attitudes and job satisfaction Job stress	Luthans 1989
Individual behaviour and differences Motivation – discussion of content theories Motivation – discussion of process theories Evaluating, rewarding and punishing behaviour Stress and the individual	Gibson et al (1991)
Personality, perception and attribution Attitudes, values and ethics Learning and reinforcement Stress and wellbeing at work	Nelson et al. Quick (2000)
Personality and attitudes Perception and attribution Learning and reinforcement Motivation in the work setting Motivating performance: Goal setting and reward systems	Hellregel et al (2001)
Individual processes Individual differences and personality Perception Motivation, learning and rewards	Weiss (2001)
Individual differences: Personality, Attitudes, Abilities, and Emotions Social Perceptions and Attributions Motivation through Needs, Job Design, and Satisfaction Motivation through Equity, Expectancy, and Goal Setting Improving Job Performance with Feedback and Rewards	Kreitner et al. Kinicki (2001)

THE INDIVIDUAL AS UNIT OF ANALYSIS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF OB LITERATURE	
Content headings	Author and date of publication
Behaviour modification and Self Management	

Table 1.1 represents a typical and conventional approach towards a description of the individual as a unit of analysis within an organizational setting, based on conventional theory. The "labels" according to which the work behaviour of the individual is analysed, regulated and described (as a unit of analysis) does not reveal a paradigmatic progression line in respect of the changing philosophical, socio political, socio cultural and socio economic settings with time. This is a typical fixated pattern with its origins in the era of Scientific Management. The individual as a *unit of analysis* typically framed in this fashion gives rise to management practices regulated by linear and causal mental models. Deviations from the expected behaviour patterns are treated as pathological and result in further labelling of the individual as incompatible (or even incapacitated) in the organisation.

A conventional approach dissolves the individual in a suspension of the two "bigger" units of analysis, i.e. the team/group and the organization as a whole. The paradigmatic context remains that of *Scientific Management* with its antecedents in the world- and life-view that can be traced to the turn of the 20th century and even earlier.

It could be argued that the foregoing statement is an unfair representation of the *content* that is represented in the different publications, and furthermore that it does not do justice to effort and energy of the scientific community in the field of OB. But, a progression line in respect of the labels and content such as these represented in Table 1.1, from a typical *scientific approach to management* towards a *dynamic and individually based expose*, within the framework of a changing or a new and ever-developing paradigm has yet to be discovered. There are however traces of such approaches in the School of Scientific Management, more notably, in the work and thought of Mary Parker Follet, who is well known for the pioneering role she fulfilled in the management science. She approached the organizations as group networks rather than as hierarchical structures, and attended to the influence of human

relations within the group. Such an approach fell outside of the mainstream of her times and could be labelled as radical and a softer orientation. However a better label would be to place her within the field of a psychodynamic approach, although there is no acknowledgement for such terminology applied to her. The problem is that Mary Parker Follet was forgotten and the perspective she advocated is rarely acknowledged in contemporary literature. Had this been the case, the topography of the body of knowledge of OB might have looked totally different.

McFillen (1985) embarked on the same exercise and after evaluating 10 standard Organizational Behaviour textbooks used in American universities, concludes that:

These textbooks share some unfortunate characteristics with those books that have preceded them. Somewhere along the road to respectability, OB lost management...Another observation about organizational behavior texts past and present is how poorly they cover the more macro-oriented issues. Other than textbooks devoted principally to organizational theory, an OB textbook that provides any semblance of significant coverage of OT is hard to find. (McFillen, 1985, p. 364).

It therefore is deemed a necessary exercise to follow the trail, however briefly, of the development of Management Theory and Organization Theory in order to create ecology for the understanding of what is to follow later in the current text.

### **1.3.1.7 Ontological diversity**

It is insightful to establish the distinctive ontological perspectives between the conventional approach and the psychodynamic approach towards the behaviour of the individual in the organisation. A superficial comparison of the different approaches towards the study and eventual understanding of OB, comparing a typical conventional approach as indicated in Table 1.1 with a more psychodynamic approach as represented by Cilliers and Koortzen raises a fundamental question in



respect of the ontological assumptions and presuppositions with which the two approaches operationalised the description of the same subject matter.

The ontological dimension in research refers to the study of or approach to reality (Mouton and Marais, 1992). Fundamentally the question of ontology is to discover, describe and define the nature of reality. As the study of reality it inevitably touches upon the conceptions of reality it thus also refers to the study of being or the study of existence. Philosophically speaking ontology deals with the precise utilization of words as descriptors for the state of being or reality.

In the social sciences, at least so it seems, certain main-stream ontological approaches can be identified, (which account for the differences in outcome or description of reality when approached from different perspectives) each with its own metaphysical bias. Realism as an approach assumes that facts (reality) are objectively and independently available and waiting to be discovered; Empiricism in its turn, approaches the study of reality from the perspective that it can be known through observation and as a result it can be related to facts; Positivism focuses on the observations themselves and is referentially more attentive to factual claims than to the facts themselves; Postmodernism approaches reality from the premise that facts and reality are elusive and fluid as a result of which the focus must shift to claims about observation.

Seen from this perspective it is at once understandable why the conventional approach to the individual (as a unit of analysis) and a more dynamic approach differ in respect of their terms of reference as well as the dimensions that are selected as the labels in which the research and discussion are packaged.

Scholars seemingly confront the same reality whilst in actual fact the differences serve as examples of the ontological diversity within the field of study. Both the conventional and dynamic (psychodynamic approach) research domains represent the individual within an organizational setting. Both research human behaviour within the work setting, as the fundamental content matter or reality. Yet there are differences. The difference however is subtle in as much as the conventional theorists position the individual in an economic and rational frame, where the function of the organization dictates the research, whilst the dynamic or

psychodynamic theorists frame the intrapersonal and psychological functioning of the individual, and view him/her as a living entity in an encompassing (bigger) open or Living system (organism), i.e. the organization.

These approaches each have a distinct "life of their own", yet both of these approaches towards a specific reality have their own merit. The individual does function within an organization that has its own purpose, which must be achieved. However there are distinguishable dimensions that are assumed from an ontological basis. Thus the insight dawns that the different approaches are actually complementary and together they represent a more holistic body of knowledge that can contribute to an understanding of the dynamics of organisational life, with specific reference to the individual's work behaviour.

The problem does not revolve around the approach as such but centres on the fact that the individual has become a fragmented and alienated "piece of organizational equipment" without due regard for the meaning that is derived from work.

Following the development of Organizational Theory and its derivatives, including OB, organizational analysis and the resultant intervention strategies have become trapped in a managerialist-structural-functionalism based on instrumental-rationalism. This trend has continued throughout the different epochs of the reflection on, and theorizing about organizations that has eventually also enabled the "micro-psychologism of the Organizational Behaviourists to be systematically accommodated" (Casey 2002:83). An added and valid addition to this statement is that a linear thought process has captivated managers and top-level executive leaders into a cause-and-effect thought process and mental model for the motivation and management of employees.

The critique against the view on people (and management practice) by managers in organizations (specifically from a conventional standpoint) is that it amounts to an isolationist and de-contextualised approach towards human behaviour in the workplace. Should de-contextualization become the norm the resultant contribution towards understanding human behaviour at work, will bear the marks of an a-historical thought process, guided by linear functionalism - the exact same trap that the field of Organizational Theory and OB has fallen into since the advent of the

Newtonian epoch (Casey 2002).

De-contextualisation does not only refer to the observable or definable boundaries within which an individual functions but also the emotional and the psychological context or ecosystem of his/her existence. The de-contextualisation of the individual in the work setting thus also results in a process of alienation from the self, whilst the force of coercion transplants the individual into a setting of forced coalition and regulation within which there is nothing else left but to comply for the sake of survival - physically, emotionally and psychologically.

This illuminates one question pertaining to the work life and experience of humans in organizations - i.e. the concept: "Meaning". Does the individual experience meaning within such boundaries as being managed within organizations and furthermore: Do humans experience meaning in such an environment that is regulated by linear and causal measures to regulate their work place, their behaviours and their experiences? Therefore *are* our organizations **Meaningful workplaces**?

#### **1.4 ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR AS FOUNDATION FOR THE RESEARCH PROGRAM**

In the proposed study, OB as subject field represents a broad framework for reflection and research pertaining to the factors that contribute towards the underlying motives that form and guide a persons' work related behaviour en route to experienced meaningfulness at work. This framework can however not be divorced from the historical setting within which any study of this nature is undertaken. Should de-contextualisation become the norm, the resultant contribution towards understanding human behaviour at work, will bear the mark of an a-historical thought process guided by linear functionalism - the exact same trap that the field of Organizational Theory and OB has fallen into since the advent of the Newtonian epoch (Casey 2002).

McFillen (1985) has sufficiently indicated that the problem pertaining to Organizational Behaviour as a subject field with its own body of knowledge has been divorced from Management Theory and more specifically Organizational Theory. The ecology for the study of Organizational behaviour has thus become contracted. In the same instance the field of Organizational Theory and Management Theory has also become contracted and thus the three fields of study have seemingly lost each other along the way, giving rise to an observable separation.

## **1.5 THE EVOLUTION OF MANAGEMENT THEORY AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR**

It is deemed necessary to embark on a short journey into the field of Management Theory in order to establish the evolution in thought and paradigm from earlier times to the present. This journey is not exhaustive of the field, but sufficient to add to the previous discussion in the sense that a trend towards a more dynamic approach seems to have evolved with the advent of post-modernism. The discussion therefore is very eclectic in nature.

### **1.5.1 Management: The ancient symbols**

Tracing the origins and development of OB as a field of study with its own subject matter, methodologies, approaches and objectives, unavoidably leads to the impression that it cannot be separated from some form of organization (the practice of management) and dates back to ancient civilizations.

The symbols of management and goal orientated behaviour stand out in history as beacons along the way of the development of management thought and practice, and for that matter, as contributions to the field of OB. These include the pyramids, the Great Wall of China, the Mesopotamian walled cities, the road network of the

Roman Empire, wars that have been fought, etc. History is littered with these symbols from which modern scholars can learn on our journey of discovery of the field of OB.

#### **1.5.1.1 Management: Documented earlier contributions the division of labour (Plato 427-347 BCE; Mencius 372-289 BCE)**

Two random examples illustrate that certain techniques were known and applied since the earliest times. These will suffice to prove the point that the notion of OB, although a modern concept, was certainly prevalent in the application in the minds of "*managers*" since the earliest times.

Plato (427-347 BC) dealt with the division of labour in his *Republic*, as did the Chinese Philosopher Mencius (372 – 289 BC). In more specific terms Mencius dealt with the advantages of the division of labour, indicating this as being *production management techniques*.

From the ancient Greeks we learn of the instruction to Greek soldiers to lay out their weapons and equipment for easy access in preparation for possible surprise attacks. This already indicates the adoption of uniform work methods.

#### **1.5.2 Management: Contributions during the 14th and 15th centuries: Work-study**

Contributions from the 14th and 15th centuries set the scene for further developments in the field of management and the study of OB.

Two inventions, (the mechanical clock, invented by Heinrich von Wych in Paris in 1370, and Guttenberg's printing press) provided impetus to future developments in management "science". The former permitted accurate work measurement and time and motion studies and the latter the ability to communicate through the medium of

the printed word.

A Spanish visitor to the Arsenal of Venice observed a functional logistical supply line (production line) and gave an account of what he saw in 1436, 500 years prior to Henri Ford's assembly line.

[A]s one enters the gate there is a great street on either hand with the sea in the middle,... on one side are windows opening out of the house of the arsenal, and the same on the other side, ... out came a galley towed by a boat, and from the windows they handed out to them, .... cordage,... the ballistics and mortars, and so from all sides everything which was required, ...when the galley had reached the end of the street all the men required were on board, together with the complement of oars, and she was equipped from end to end. In this manner there came out ten galleys, fully armed, between the hours of three and nine.

The Arsenal of Venice apparently also applied the principle of using standardized parts.

The bows of the warships had to accommodate all types of arrows; stern parts were standardized to accommodate all types of rudders and rigging. The deck parts had to be interchangeable. Wrecked vessels could be cannibalized to repair less damaged vessels or at least to keep them afloat. (See Davis, 2008 as well as: Kaon Consulting. "The Venetian Arsenal: The World's First Assembly Line." <http://www.kaon.com.au/index.php?page=venetian-arsenal>)

Even the monasteries contributed towards management knowledge and science. Fifteenth century monks recorded the overall times for the construction of monastery stonework. Such records suggest an attempt, even in those early times, to establish standards of quality, time and output.

Work was however viewed as demeaning and something to be avoided. It was the endeavour of slaves and tended to get in the way of other pursuits such as the arts,

military adventure and philosophy. The same attitude in respect of work was prevalent in Pre-Reformation Christian Europe, where work was seen as punishment for the sins of Adam and Eve. It is only with the Church Reformation that the so-called Protestant Work Ethic emerged, based on Luther's glorification of work and Calvin's consolidation of this perspective. In summary it could be said that up to the 15th century AD certain trends manifest themselves (although modern terminology is applied to describe these):

- Tendencies towards the *Division of Labour*;
- The establishment of *Uniform Work Methods*;
- The design of the first documented *Production Line Principle*;
- *Time and Motion Studies*.

### **1.5.3 Contributions from the Industrial Revolution**

Technological advances in the textile industry's manufacturing processes; increase in agricultural production, which had grown to the extent that surpluses were generated, which in turn were used for trading purposes; advances in living standards, improved hygiene and the lowering of the mortality rate; expanding trade and markets; and growing populations created opportunities for merchants and entrepreneurs to invest in factories characterised the Industrial Revolution.

Adam Smith advocated work efficiency by means of specialization during the eighteenth century and proposed a breakdown of work into simple tasks based on three advantages of the division of labour:

- Saving of time;
- Using specialized tools;
- Development of skills

In the United States, after the War of Independence a shortage of musket parts led Eli Whitney to propose the manufacturing of muskets by means of using interchangeable parts. The process was successful in producing large quantities of

interchangeable parts and thus was born the process of tooling up for production (Wilson 1954).

In 1832, Charles Babbage, an engineer, philosopher and researcher, examined the division of labour in his book "On the Economy of Machinery and Manufacturers", and raised important questions about production, organizations and economics. (Babbage, 1835). The first attempt at formally timing work was probably in 1760 when a Frenchman, Jean-Rodolphe Perronet, studied the manufacture of pins and attempted to establish standard times for various operations. Babbage expanded on his efforts by breaking down the manufacture of a pin into seven elements. Based on this, Babbage proposed, as an advantage of the division of labour, that the amount of skill needed to undertake a specialized task was only the skill necessary to complete that specific task. The important implication for employers was that they only had to pay for the amount of skill necessary to complete each individual task (Lee 1994). Babbage advocated breaking down jobs into elements and costing each element. In this way, potential savings from investments in training, process and methods could be quantified. (Lee, September 1994. <http://ei.cs.vt.edu/~history/Babbage.html>).

At the turn of the century Robert Owen studied the problems of layout and method. Owens's work at the New Lanark Mills was revolutionary at the time. Through experimentation, he succeeded in raising the living conditions of his workers whilst reorganizing his mills on commercial principles. Robert Owen is credited with being the first to recognize fatigue and the work environment as factors affecting the performance of factory workers. Owen focused on the changing of attitudes, (because an *idea* cannot be killed) and became convinced that the advancement of humankind could be furthered by the improvement of every individual's personal environment. He reasoned that since character was moulded by circumstances, improved circumstances would lead to goodness. The environment at New Lanark, where he applied his ideas, reflected this philosophy.

While at New Lanark, Robert Owen demonstrated management policies that are now widely recognised as precursors of modern theories relating to human resource management, as well as skilful and ethical business practice. His work inspired



infant education; humane working practices, Co-operation, trade unionism, and garden cities (See New Lanark Trust: <http://www.robert-owen.com/>)

Advances in the fields of agriculture, travel, and the textile industry (to name but three) gave rise to the following elements that can be traced as contributing factors towards the study of management and OB:

- Specialization
- Division of Labour
- Tooling for Production
- Work breakdown to work elements

#### **1.5.4 Scientific Management**

From an operational and academic perspective, Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, Henri Ford and others, as organizational specialists in their own right, stand in the frontline as the main exponents of Scientific Management and as exemplary organizers. Their legacy actually provides us with insights in respect of the way that people acted (and most probably still act) in the work place. Their main motive was simply as Luthans (1989, p. 27) states: the "...overall managerial organization of their companies to survive". A short overview, for the sake of continuity and a broad perspective is presented below.

##### **1.5.4.1 Frederick Winslow Taylor**

Frederick Taylor, accredited as the father of Scientific Management and acknowledged for the basic and fundamental correctness of his views in respect of the principles that he propagated, was not necessarily the originator of ideas, but a pragmatist with the ability to synthesize the work of others and to promote them effectively to a ready and eager audience of industrial managers who were striving to find new or improved ways to increase performance. By 1881 Taylor had

published a paper that turned the cutting of metal into a science. Later he turned his attention to shovelling coal and through experimentation was able to design shovels that permitted workers to shovel for the whole day. Thus he reduced the number of people shovelling at the Bethlehem Steel Works from 500 to 140. In 1895, he presented papers on incentive schemes, whilst in 1909 he published the book for which he is best known: “**Principles of Scientific Management.**”

He devised a system he called **scientific management**, a form of industrial engineering that established the organization of work as in Ford's assembly line. This discipline, along with the industrial psychology established by others at the Hawthorne Works in the 1920s, moved management theory from early time-and-motion studies to the latest total quality control idea... He introduced time-motion studies in 1881...Taylor's ideas, clearly enunciated in his writings, were widely misinterpreted. Employers used time and motion studies simply to extract more work from employees at less pay. Unions condemned speedups and the lack of voice in their work that "Taylorism" gave them. Quality and productivity declined when his principles were simplistically instituted. (Anonymous)

According to the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, (1995) January 26:B26, one of the popular current "re-engineering" gurus, G. Hamel, has this to say about Taylor's ideas today:

If you read Frederick Winslow Taylor from the beginning of the century, there are three fundamental things he taught:

- Find the best practice wherever it exists. Today we call it benchmarking;
- Decompose the task into its constituent elements. We call it business process re-design;
- Get rid of things that don't add value. Work out, we call it now;

- So we're doing these things one more time and we need to do them;
- But my argument is that simply getting better is usually not enough;
- Whether it involves cycle time, quality or whatever, most of re-engineering has been about catching up.

This continuous quality improvement process was originated by Taylor. It is fair to say, and we are still trying to catch up. (Author unknown, See: <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/fwt/taylor.html>. Publisher: Eldritch Press). A feature of Taylor's work was stopwatch timing. This served as the basis of observations. However, unlike the early activities of Perronet and others, he started to break time and work related activities down into elements and it was he who coined the term 'time study'. It is purported that he wrote the following words:

The old fashioned dictator does not exist under Scientific Management. The man at the head of the business under Scientific Management is governed by rules and laws which have been developed through hundreds of experiments, just as much as the workman is, and the standards developed are equitable (Anonymous)

#### **1.5.4.2 Frank and Lillian Gilbreth**

The Gilbreths were associates of Frederick Winslow Taylor. They, unlike Taylor, had experience in unionized industry, which presumably limited their enthusiasm for timing jobs. Frank Gilbreth (in his early career) was interested in standardization and method study. At construction sites where he worked, he noticed that no two bricklayers used exactly the same method or even the same set of motions when working and set about trying to find a standardized and improved method, which resulted in raising output from 1000 to 2700 bricks per day.

From their studies the Gilbreths developed the laws of human motion from which

evolved the principles of motion economy. They coined the term “motion study” to cover their field of research and to distinguish it from "time study".

The use of cameras in motion study stems from this time and the Gilbreths used micro-motion study in order to record and examine detailed short-cycled movements as well as inventing cyclographs and chronocycle-graphs to observe rhythm and movement.

#### **1.5.4.3 The production assembly line**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the internal combustion engine was invented, leading to the development of the motorcar, which in turn led towards streamlining production. (The first assembly line method of manufacturing from this time can probably be attributed to the mail order factory of Sears and Roebuck of America.)

However, it is Henry Ford's production assembly line in the Ford automobile factory that is by far the best-known example of the change to modern assembly line techniques. Before the 'line' was set up one man spent about twelve and a half hours to assemble a single car chassis; eight months later as a result of standardization and division of labour the total labour time was reduced to just ninety-three minutes per car.

#### **1.5.4.4 Charles Bedaux**

Another pioneering contributor to the field of scientific management was Charles Bedaux. Bedaux introduced the concept of rating assessment. He adhered to Gilbreths' introduction of a rest allowance to allow recovery from fatigue, and although crude and poorly received at first, his system has been of great consequence to the subsequent development of work-study.

#### 1.5.4.5 Henri Fayol

Fayol was a key figure in the turn-of-the-century Classical School of Management Theory and saw a manager's job as:

- Planning;
- Organizing;
- Commanding;
- Coordinating activities;
- Controlling performance (Narayanan & Nath Raghu, 1993),

It was Fayol's 14 principles of management that became the cornerstone in the development of management science. Of the 14 elements, the most important are specialization, unity of command, scalar chain, and, coordination by managers.

- **Specialization of labour.** Specialization encourages continuous improvement in skills and the development of improvements in methods;
- **Authority.** The right to give orders and the power to exact obedience;
- **Discipline.** No slacking, bending of rules;
- **Unity of command.** Each employee has one and only one boss;
- **Unity of direction.** A single mind generates a single plan and all play their part in that plan;
- **Subordination of individual Interests.** When at work, only work things should be pursued or thought about;
- **Remuneration.** Employees receive fair payment for services, not what the company can get away with;
- **Centralization.** Consolidation of management functions. Decisions are made from the top;
- **Scalar chain (line of authority).** Formal chain of command running from top to bottom of the organization, like the military;
- **Order.** All materials and personnel have a prescribed place, and they must remain there;

- **Equity.** Equality of treatment (but not necessarily identical treatment);
- **Personnel tenure.** Limited turnover of personnel. Lifetime employment for good workers;
- **Initiative.** Thinking out a plan and do what it takes to make it happen;
- **Esprit de corps.** Harmony, cohesion among personnel.

#### 1.5.4.6 In summary: A backward glance

Based on the discussion it is possible to deduce and summarise the drive or agenda of scientific management in the following four objectives:

- The *development of a science* for each element of a man's work to replace the old rule-of-thumb methods;
- *The scientific selection, training and development of workers* instead of allowing them to choose their own tasks and train themselves as best they could;
- *The development of a spirit of cooperation between workers and management* to ensure that work would be carried out in accordance with scientifically devised procedures;
- *The division of work between workers and management* in almost equal shares, each group taking over the work for which it is best fitted.

Self-evident in this philosophy is the assumption that organizations are arranged in a hierarchy and a system of abstract rules and impersonal relationships between staff. Of course this required a theory for organizing. Taylor created a framework for the movement which can be presented as following:

- A clear delineation of authority;
- Responsibility;
- Separation of planning from operations;
- Incentive schemes for workers;
- Management by exception;
- Task specialization;

In short: It is just not possible to explore the detail of the Scientific Management movement. However it is fair to state that certain traits emerge which can be summarised as follows:

- Time studies;
- Standardization;
- Study in work-method;
- Human motion and motion study;
- Streamlining of production (Production assembly line);
- Division of labour - workers and management rating assessments;
- Management principles;
- Structuring of organizations;

It is further interesting to note that these traits are not unique. A superficial observation of production, management and behavioural patterns are shared with earlier times – before the advent of Scientific Management. It is thus fair to state that little has been discovered – as a new discovery – for which the seeds had not already existed in society.

### **1.5.5 The practice of management: The Human Relations movement and the Hawthorne studies**

Although the exponents of Scientific Management acknowledged the behavioural side of management, it was the Human Relations Movement (Luthans, 1989, p. 27) that focused directly on the importance of human beings in action. This does not mean that the classical theories did not contribute favourably.

The lingering impact and contribution of classical thought on modern organizational societies include:

- Formal organizational chart;

- Job design and selection;
- Job element demarcation and formalized training;
- Incentives;

The criticism against the classical theorists, on the other hand, include the following:

- It was a science of things tangible and not of people, although it intended more productive work behaviour;
- Low morale resulted in organizations;
- Linear cause and effect, ignoring the complexity of context as space;

Scientific management could however not survive the forces that intruded into the organizational context, which are listed below (based on Perrow, 1973):

- Labour became a critical factor. Technological sophistication lengthened the training time of employees and eventually required more “specialised” skills. Turnover increased; recruitment became more costly and management began to tread the path of cooperation, a shift during which the machine model began to lose its relevancy (Perrow, 1973, p. 4) ;
- Market complexity, product and producer viability, technological advances and other rapid changes required an adaptive organization, something that scientific management was ill equipped for;
- Political, cultural and social changes created new expectations on how to treat people, especially employees in the workplace;
- The growth and life cycle dynamics of the firm no longer tolerated the image of the founder as the shadow of one single individual. The search for leadership in combination with management principles began.



### 1.5.5.1 Mary Follett

Mary Parker Follett emphasized the reciprocating reality of giving and taking orders between managers and subordinates, and argued for a form of participation that would ensure acceptance and the use of power that – in her words – was not coercive power but coactive power.

What is the central problem of social relations? It is the question of power... But our task is not to learn where to place power; it is how to develop power. We frequently hear nowadays of 'transferring power as the panacea for all our ills' Genuine power can only be grown, it will slip from every arbitrary hand that grasps it; for genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control. Coercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul (Follett, 1924, p. xii-xiii, in Smith, 2002).

(The rest of this paragraph on Mary Parker Follett is based on Smith 2002.)

From the publication of *Creative Experience* to her death in 1933 Mary Parker Follett was best known for her work around the administration and management of organizations. In 1925, she presented an influential paper, 'The Psychological Foundations of Business Administration' to executives at the annual conference of the Bureau of Personnel Administration in New York, wherein which she applied the concept social capital in the life of organizations. Organizations, like communities, could be approached as local social systems involving networks of groups. In this way Mary Parker Follett was able to advocate the fostering of a 'self-governing principle' that would facilitate 'the growth of individuals and of the groups to which they belonged'. By directly interacting with one another to achieve their common goals, the members of a group 'fulfilled themselves through the process of the group's development'.

Boje and Rosile (2001) in Smith (2002), suggest that Follett was seeking to temper scientific management with her own science of the situation; "one in which management and workers together cooperated to define not only productivity but

situations of social justice”. Exploring 'the science of the situation' involved both management and workers studying the situation at hand together. Boje and Rosile as quoted by Smith, argue that she was “the first advocate of situation-search models of leadership and cooperation”. This was not some surface activity: “the willingness to search for the real values involved on both sides and the ability to bring about an interpenetration of these values” (Follett, 1941, p. 181) in Smith (2002).

One of the key aspects of Mary Parker Follett's approach was the 'circular' theory of power she initially developed in *Creative Experience* (1924). Power begins... with the organization of reflex arcs. Then these are organized into a system - more power. Then the organization of these systems comprises the organism - more power. On the level of personality I gain more and more control over myself as I unite various tendencies. In social relations power is a centripetal self-developing. Power is the legitimate, the inevitable outcome of the life-process. We can always test the validity of power by asking whether it is integral to the process of outside the process (Follett 1924, p. 193). In terms of organizations this view of power involved managers, workers, and other stakeholders influencing each other. She distinguishes between power-over and power-with (or co-active power rather than coercive power). Follett suggests that 'power-over' is resorted to because 'people will not wait for the slower process of education' (1924, p. 190). 'Power-with', she argues, 'is what democracy should mean in politics or industry' (1924, p. 187) in Smith (2002).

#### **1.5.5.2 Chester Barnard**

Chester Barnard's importance relates to describing the organization as a social system and arguing that the effective executive must attend to both formal and

informal relationships within the corporation. This not only set the stage for a different basis for the dynamic of worker-manager authority, which was not too far removed from Mary Follett's perspective, but established the ground rules for a novel theory on organizations, referred to as cooperative systems (Perrow, 1973). More important however was his response to the question why organizations do not seem to be sustainable over a long period of time.

According to Barnard, this happens because organizations do not meet the two criteria necessary for survival: effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness is defined the usual way: as being able to accomplish the explicit goals. In contrast, his notion of organizational efficiency is substantially different from the conventional use of the word. He defines efficiency of an organization as the degree to which that organization is able to satisfy the motives of the individuals. If an organization satisfies the motives of its participants, and attains its explicit goals, cooperation among them will last (Barnard, 1938).

Two of Barnard's theories are particularly interesting: the theory of authority and the theory of incentives, both of which are positioned within the organizational communication system, for which there exist essential rules. Thus, what makes a communication authoritative rests on the subordinate rather than in the super ordinate because of the essential rules which include that everyone should know of the channels of communication, everyone should have access to the formal channels of communication and lines of communication should be as short and as direct as possible

His perspective was not only unusual at that time (close to that of Mary Parker Follett) but one that is not that usual even today. One might say that managers should treat workers respectfully and competently to obtain authority and establish accessible communication processes and patterns and not suffice with a one-way-top-down corporate communication channel.

In the theory of incentives, he sees two ways of convincing subordinates to cooperate: tangible incentives and persuasion. He gives great importance to

persuasion, much more than to economic incentives. In his “The Functions of the Executive” (first published in 1938) Barnard discusses the functions of the executive. He does not do this from a purely intuitive point of view, but deriving them from a conception of cooperative systems based on previous concepts. Barnard ends by summarizing the functions of the executive as being:

- The establishment and maintenance of the system of communication ;
- The securing of the essential services from individuals ;
- The formulation of the organizational purpose and objectives;

It might be possible to view Abraham Maslow's "satisfaction" theory of personal motivation and Douglas McGregor's premise about workers in organizations as extensions of Barnard's work. Similarly, "systems" writing of the 1960's and "effective schools" literature of the 1980's could arguably, also be traced to the Barnard premises.

### **1.5.5.3 The Hawthorne Studies**

The Hawthorne Studies can be viewed as a benchmark in the development of organization and management insight and organizational behaviour and deserves more attention than can be attributed in this study.

The Western Electric studies (ca 1924 - 1933) discovered the Hawthorne or "halo" effect of motivating workers, a result which it certainly did not intend from the outset. Elton Mayo intended to study the changes in the physical environment that would improve worker production of piecework in the bank wiring room. The unexpected results: Increased production - irrespective of physical intervention linked to perceptions of involvement and feelings of being special by workers, in spite of the physical features of where work took place fluctuating between optimal and poor.

These studies not only added to our knowledge of human behaviour in organizations, but also created pressure for management to change the traditional

ways of managing people.

The studies indicated the importance of mutual support within work groups as well as effective resistance to management induced schemes to increase output. The studies further indicated that workers did not respond to classical approaches and motivational theories as proposed by the classical school of thought, most notably Taylorism. Workers were also motivated by the rewards and punishment of their own work groups (Anonymous, [http://www.accel-team.com/motivation/hawthorne\\_02.htm](http://www.accel-team.com/motivation/hawthorne_02.htm)).

#### **1.5.5.4 Douglas McGregor**

Douglas McGregor endeavoured to come to terms with the concept of motivation and the relationship between the corporation and individual (Crainer, 1999) and stressed the function of “belief” (Crainer, 1999, p. 884) in management because everything stems from the beliefs and mental models held by managers, and subsequently pioneered two ways of management perspectives related to workers, i.e. Theory X and Theory Y.

To a certain extent McGregor (with his theory X and Theory Y premises) can probably be viewed as the biggest exponent of the Human Relations Movement. Table 1.2 represents the different assumptions in respect of Theory X and Theory Y assumptions. In his research he found that although many managers sprouted the right ideas, their actual management behaviour indicated a series of assumptions that McGregor called Theory X. However, research seemed to clearly suggest that these assumptions were not effective. A rather different series of notions about human behaviour seemed more valid. He called this Theory Y and urged managers to manage based on these more valid Theory Y notions.

**Table 1.2 Theory X and Theory Y management assumptions**

Theory X assumptions	Theory Y assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work is inherently distasteful to most people</li> <li>▪ Most people are not ambitious, have little desire for responsibility, and prefer to be directed</li> <li>▪ Most people have little capacity for creativity in solving organizational problems</li> <li>▪ Motivation occurs only at the physiological and security levels</li> <li>▪ Most people must be closely controlled and often coerced to achieve organizational objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work is as natural as play if the conditions are favourable Self-control is often indispensable in achieving organizational goals</li> <li>▪ The capacity for creativity is spread throughout organizations</li> <li>▪ Motivation occurs at affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization levels, not just security, physiological levels</li> <li>▪ People can be self-directed and creative at work if properly motivated</li> </ul>

Although the Scientific Management movement brought economic progress, the criticism against this paradigm of management and specifically the management of employees became evident in labour unrest and labour-management conflict, worker apathy, boredom, etc. These factors led researchers to delve into the motivational factors that predicate work behaviour. The legacy of the Human Relations Movement is the result of research that indicated the discrepancy between how an organization is supposed to work vis-à-vis how workers actually behave.

**Table 1.3 Scientific Management and Human Relations movement assumptions:  
Results of the Hawthorne studies (a summary of the foregoing discussion)**

Traditional assumptions (I.e. Scientific Management)	Assumptions based on the Human Relations movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People endeavour to satisfy only one type of need at work - economic needs</li> <li>▪ There is no conflict between individual and organizational needs</li> <li>▪ People act rationally to maximize rewards</li> <li>▪ People satisfy individual needs</li> <li>▪ Managers manage according to Theory X assumptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People are motivated by more than one need</li> <li>▪ The psychological needs of employees play a significant role in the satisfaction of needs</li> <li>▪ There is not necessarily a correlation between individual and organizational needs</li> <li>▪ People do not always act rationally</li> <li>▪ The informal workgroup acts as catalyst in determining attitudes and performance</li> <li>▪ Teamwork is essential for cooperation and sound decision making</li> <li>▪ Job satisfaction will lead to higher productivity</li> <li>▪ Job descriptions are more complex than written descriptions because people act in more ways in the work environment as suggested by their job description</li> <li>▪ Management and management style is an important variable (but not the only one) that affects work behaviour</li> <li>▪ Management requires effective social skills</li> <li>▪ Cooperation and collaboration between management and employees is a function of effective execution of power</li> <li>▪ Behaviour is shaped by the social context</li> <li>▪ Organizations are living social systems and not merely technical – economic systems</li> <li>▪ Motivation stems from different needs and social interaction and therefore workers should be managed according Theory Y assumptions</li> </ul>

## **1.6 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD OF OB: A SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

In addition to the above, a short summary based on Wertheim is produced below in respect of the different contributions to management theory, also regarding further contributions to the field of OB (see also Perrow, 1973; also refer Clarke, 2004).

### **1.6.1 Classical school (ca 1910):**

Listed the duties of a manager as planning, organizing, commanding employees, coordinating activities and controlling performance; basic principles called for specialization of work, unity of command, scalar chain of command, and coordination of activities;

### **1.6.2 The Group Dynamics movement of the 1940's:**

Encouraged individual participation in decision-making and furthermore noted the impact of work group on performance;

### **1.6.3 Bureaucracy 1940:**

Emphasized order, system, rationality, uniformity, and consistency in management that would lead to equitable treatment for all employees by management;



#### **1.6.4 The leadership drive of the 1950's:**

Stressed the importance of groups having both social task leaders as well task orientated leaders within the framework of differentiation between Theory X and Y management;

#### **1.6.5 The Socio-technical school during the '60's:**

Called for the consideration of technology and work groups when trying to understand understanding a work system. A further trend was the description of the existence of mechanistic and organic structures and stated their effectiveness within specific types of environmental conditions and technology types;

#### **1.6.6 Systems theory, (1970's):**

This paradigm represented organizations as open and living systems with inputs, throughputs, outputs and feedback and postulated that systems strive for equilibrium and equifinality;

#### **1.6.7 The Contingency theory of the 1980's:**

Emphasized the fit between organization processes and characteristics of the situation and called for fitting the organization's structure to various contingencies.

The common denominator in all of these contributions, although over-simplified, was the trend towards higher productivity and to stimulate work related behaviour that would not only lead to increased outputs, but that would sustain this drive.

## 1.7 MODERNISM AND POST-MODERNISM IN ORGANIZATION SCIENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

An appreciation of the potential of post-modernism in respect of Organizational Science and more specifically OB, can only be appreciated once the assumptions of modernism is understood. (As this is not a treatise on modernism vs. post-modernism, such a discussion can only claim to be superficial.)

Modernism is that moment when man invented himself; when he no longer saw himself as a reflection of God or Nature. Its historical source lies in the eighteenth-century philosophy of the Enlightenment which chose Reason as the highest of human attributes...Also at this time the expediencies of Reason were appropriated by social thinkers such as Saint-Simon and Comte whose concern was their application to the increasingly weighty problems of government, administration and planning brought about by the industrialization of society (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 94).

Modernism has its roots in what is described and identified as the age of enlightenment. This time frame refers to 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy which underpins a life and world view. It is however not only characterised by a philosophical insights but also by an intellectual drive that advocates and underscores rationality (rationalism) as a means to discover truth and reality. Rational and objective logic dictated the mental patterns which would eventually lead the world out of the bondage of doubtful traditions, irrationality, superstition and tyranny as practised by the state as well as the church. Prominent thinkers of this age include Descartes (1596 – 1650), Leibniz (1646 – 1716), Spinoza (1632 – 1677), and Locke (1632 – 1704). As pietism was juxtaposed with orthodoxy, so the “contrast-effect”... (The confluence of Locke and Wolffian philosophy)...showed itself in the great interest taken in empirical psychology. Instead of speculative metaphysics, psychology, grounded in experience, came more and more to be regarded as the fundamental science (Höfding, 1955, p. 5).

Enlightenment influenced modernism with the legacy of its emphasis on observation, reason, and logic. This placed the behavioural and social sciences on an equal footing with the natural sciences. To expand knowledge in a credible way, it had to be quantifiable and measurable. Quantifiable, observable, and statistical measures enjoy elevated status as a result of this legacy. The individual in this scheme of knowledge creation is reduced to an isolated subject of research and unit of investigation as is still the case in *modern OB*.

Modernism has, since the Enlightenment, provided scientific theories and methods. These theories and scientific insights permeated organizations and the literature in respect of management of organizations, which in turn led managers to believe that they could trust the results of scientific method as this provided *universal truths*.

Since the beginning of the Enlightenment, managers of industrial organisations have enjoyed a relatively healthy relationship with the social sciences, benefiting from a variety of modernist assumptions that gave them methods to find the 'truths' of how to better manage their workforce and become successful (Engholm, 2001).

Theories of motivation, needs, authority, control, (and the labels that have been identified in Table 1.1) were formulated on the results of empirical research following quantitative methods. The underlying motive was progress. The fundamental belief that provided the impetus for a modernist paradigm is the belief in the capacity of humanity to “perfect itself through the power of rational thought” and its main purpose was twofold: to develop a reasonably ‘true’ picture of the real world and to gain some measure of control over the course of events in that world” (Engholm 2001). The “modern” industrial society demanded better and more efficient ways of managing people and new technology, and all that was really required was the application of rational thought to an empirically accessible reality (Björkegren, 1993; Boje, Gephart and Thatchenkery, 1996; Carter and Jackson, 1993) in Engholm (2001).

Weber's bureaucracy as an organizational form is fundamental to the modernist structure of the industrial organisation; a structure and form that has endured tremendous critique yet lives to tell the tale of survival – and the easy way out. It is characterised by a hierarchy of authority, specialisation and delimitation of work

activities, rules and regulations, rational calculability of decision-making, concentration of the means of administration and separation of the individual agent or member from the institution (Gephart, 1996, Engholm 2001) all of which have their roots in the Scientific Management School and therefore represents an accumulation of the characteristics that have been identified. The application of scientific method would ensure the attainment of the modernist principle of 'progress' and benefit both the individual and society in the end.

The assumption that *universal truth* and *reality* can be achieved and discovered through the application of scientific method is the most robust critique of post-modernism against modernism. Post-modernism with its critique against empiricism, can and will eventually have far reaching consequences in respect of the development of management theories, which currently purport to be able to predict human behaviour in organizational settings (Youkins 2004).

However such an easy and one-sided description does not do justice to the schism that occurred within the context of the choice of reason

Showing that it too is subject to the displacements intrinsic to self reference: Reason is appropriated by an early form of systems thinking which subverts its critical edge to the demands of large systems based on which the followers of Saint-Simon developed a blueprint for the "*systeme de la Mediterranee*"; The Suez Canal, begun in 1854 and completed in 1869, represented part-realisation of this dream (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 95).

Fundamentally Cooper and Burrell (1988, p. 95) state that Modernism ( as a result of the internal schism) actually has two versions which they call *critical modernism* and *systemic modernism* of which "...systemic modernism is currently seen to be the dominant form of reason, now more usually expressed as instrumental rationality"

Casey (2003, p. 83), following the development of Organizational Theory and its derivatives, including OB, argues convincingly that Organizational Analysis and theory development has been trapped in a managerialist-structural-functionalism

based on instrumental-rationalism. This trend has developed throughout the different stages of theory and knowledge development and reflection and as a result enabled a "...micro-psychologism of the organization behaviourists to be systematic accommodated".

Post-modernism, on the other hand, developed out of a belief that the world is not accurately described and interpreted by the modernist paradigm. It specifically criticises the modernist's rather naïve view that there is a universal truth, and that this truth can be discovered by scientific methods and applied in all situations. It criticises modern assumptions about reason and rationality, about normality and deviance and about the best ways of dealing with practical issues of life and society (Hollinger, 1994; Boje, Gephart and Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 1), in Engholm (2001).

The observation that existing conceptions of social life and organizational life seem deficient and inappropriate, if not simply wrong, could be identified as the trigger mechanism for post-modernist thought and method, with a heavier emphasis on qualitative research methodology. Modernist ideas might have worked for the early and mid twentieth century social and industrial society, but we now see a change of attitudes, of culture, and of people's attitudes toward work and social life that necessitates another understanding - a new understanding - of the world we now live in, and not the world we know from history; a world dominated by information, commoditisation, commodity culture, consumerism, globalism, the portability of the individual in relation to work (on the one hand) and the portability of work to the individual (on the other hand), depending on the type of work that is referred to.

In a post-modernist paradigm an additional emphasis is introduced in addition to empirical observation and quantifiable techniques, to social construction and research. Language (as opposed to the perspective of a modernist paradigm) is the product of social interaction processes and does therefore not serve as an objective instrument to portray the *truth* of observed reality. What is the implication of said statement regarding the individual in an organizational setting?

Individual rationality is replaced by communal negotiating processes; the importance of social processes in the observed enterprise; the socio-practical function of language and the significance of pluralistic

cultural investments in the conceptions of true and good (Thatchenkery 2004, p. 239).

From a methodological perspective, post-modernism calls into question the assumption on which modernism bases its recounting of the “truth”. Post-modernism promotes alternative ways to understand the phenomena it is faced with and therefore favours a constructionist type perspective of research and to understand reality. Post-modernism, in an over simplified statement, recognises potentialities; a statement that is concomitant with the underlying epistemological approach of so-called Positive Organizational Scholarship (a branch of Positive Psychology).

Ours is a world of a social language game, where concepts represent neither things nor words reality. Language is merely the map upon which we rely to navigate through our world and the map changes.

The uniqueness of being human lies exclusively in a social structural coupling that occurs through languaging, generating (a) regularities proper to the human social dynamics, for example, individual identity and self-consciousness, and (b) the recursive social human dynamics that entails a reflection enabling us to see that as human beings we have only the world which we create with others – whether we like them or not (Maturana and Varela, 1998, p. 246).

Our world moves along an evolutionary track created by the interaction of people within the settings where they live and work. How else do we know the world, other than through the languaging process and the forms that our discourses create as we continue along our evolutionary path? We know our world through the forms that are created within the domain of linguistics and our mastery of language as the creative force of that domain. But as language is always in flux and can never be fully understood, we are faced with the challenge to grasp the elusiveness of language and to realize that the map (language) we use is not the landscape. This is especially true in organizations. Concepts and linguistic structure is loaded with denotative power. We can therefore not create a universal set of unchangeable

concepts or constructs to be used in an organizational setting, that will (a) represent universal truth and (b) remain constant over long periods of time.

Another way of describing this 'reality' is to see organisations as clustered *political* coalitions. Post-modernists argue that each organisation may develop its own commitments, interests, linguistic codes, and values and culture (Gephart, 1996). Individuals in these organisations therefore become part of communities (or sub-cultures) that are distinct from the world, learning the 'language' and codes specifically developed for these communities. Each organisation can consist of many of these communities of social interaction, where one can identify specific and different loci of knowledge and power, allowing each community to decide what is important and how to interpret reality as perceived by the members of that particular community. For post-modernists, power is also a kind of social production process through which collective meaning is created and maintained. It is created and maintained in knowledge, and knowledge, then, becomes an instrument of power that people use in making sense of the world without fully grasping its implications.

Post-modern organisations (and societies) are thus different from the traditional modernistic, bureaucratic tendencies where people were subject to rationally set rules of regulation and hierarchical control. The 'new' post-modern organisation is one in which highly qualified employees find themselves within culturally complex, but flexible, production structures which are held together by information technology networks, hence, the idea of a superior, objective standpoint is rejected with the emphasis being placed on the inherent instability of organisation. As argued by Hassard (1996, p. 55), "the discourses of organisation are no more than changing moves within a game that is never completed".

What the discussion has conveyed thus far is that organisations in post-modern societies are not static entities that follow universal modernist rules and notions of 'reality'. 'Reality' is constructed by each individual in the organisation in the interplay between the individual and the individual's local community (work-team) or culture (of the organization), between the (social) community and the organisation, and between the organisation and the rest of the world (i.e. the influence of globalism, similar industries, etc.). Thus, post-modernism is closely related to *relationalist*

*theory*, which uses a methodological strategy that aims at understanding conditions of possibility, rather than describing cause/effect relationships in organisations (Gephart, 1996).

Individuals in the post-modern society may have some common traits that can be identified by scientific research, but it is the continuous interaction with other individuals sharing a common understanding of the experienced reality, through their language that shapes desires, beliefs and actions within a particular organisational setting and the society to which they belong as individuals. Thus, relational theory has implications for managers as it suggests that managers do not control the fate of their decrees, but instead, power is a matter of social interdependence and decrees are controlled by adherence thereto by individuals or the rejection thereof.

What implication does this have for managers and management science? One conclusion that can be drawn from the post-modern perspective is that modernist assumptions about finding general, universal theories (or 'truths') of workforce management have failed to live up to their expectations: they have simply not understood that each individual is formed by a combination of interacting factors that continually changes, as it moves along an evolutionary continuum, the individual's perceptions and views of reality (and self). If this is true of the post-modern person, rationality and calculative reasoning cannot provide feasible and effective solutions for control of the workforce, nor accurately predict the trends, tendencies, behaviours, motivation impetus, etc. through the application of modernist methods for the management of work related behaviour.

We would see a shift from objective reality to subjective reality in which chaos is inevitable as indicated in Table 1.1 and must be understood from a local rather from a universal perspective. Hassard (1993) argues that the essence of theory is not its database but its intelligibility: we should feel free to draw from the entire repository of human potentials, and not only be concerned with, or limit ourselves to, the social relationships championed or discredited by particular theories, but also with the potential for theories to offer new possibilities for contemporary culture.



In spite however of what has been said regarding post-modernism and its approach towards Organizational Science and Behaviour, the individual is still subjected to the epistemology, ontology and methodology of modernism. The individual is atomized into a culture of managerialism which is solely influenced by a paradigm of achievement and performance imperatives. Everyday life is filled with responsibility for “securing our sense of self through performance rather than critical reflection. The *invested self* becomes a marker of distinction” (Hancock and Tyler in Rhodes, 2003). In everyday life the individual is forced into a process, where the sense of self is construed and acknowledged through performance and where such an individual eventually becomes a marker of distinction and apparently self-actualised. People who search for meaning in their daily life and organizational settings, become achievers by choice, based on the meaningfulness of their actions and behaviour, by becoming “who you are or supposed to be” (Kierkegaard loosely quoted from memory). In a managerialist paradigm dictated by modernistic evaluative markers, a life of unmanaged and spontaneous experience is not recognized as part of living and definitely not worth the investigative efforts within a work setting. Managerialism has become something of a social trend, imbedded in the fabric of society and social relationships – it might even have the status of a socio-cultural ideology. The individual has thus become the object of formal management theory in organizational life as well as in everyday life, with no or very little room for the intra- and interpersonal construction of his/her reality as a human being at work, at home, on the sports field or in the social contact with others. Have the work environment and the environment outside of work become more meaningful as a result of managerialist control?

### **1.7.1 Addressing the Problem of Modernism in OB**

Other approaches, from a more post-modernist paradigm, in an attempt to address the rigorist and linear legacy of modernism have been presented as contributions to OB. These contributions will be briefly touched upon below.

### 1.7.1.1 Hersey and Blanchard

The work of Hersey and Blanchard (1988) represents a different approach towards the field of OB. Their focus is narrowed down to

[B]ehaviour within organizations and not between organizations...An organization is a unique living organism whose basic component is the individual and this individual is (our) fundamental unit of study. Thus, (our) concentration is on the interaction of people, *motivation and leadership*.

This deviation (from the conventions indicated in Table 1.3) represents an attempt to acknowledge the fact that organizations are made up of individuals, and therefore it represents an attempt to place the emphasis on the individual as the most important building block of organizational life and structure. Their approach also differs in another important aspect i.e. the *dynamics* (my emphasis) of the individual's functioning. Whereas in the conventional approach towards the individual the focus is on the so-called hard organizational issues (job descriptions, systems and structures, ergonomics, motivation, etc.) as mechanisms to increase productivity and work related effectiveness, Hersey and Blanchard take cognisance of the dynamic nature of organizational and work related behaviour from dynamic systems perspective.

### 1.7.1.2 A Psychodynamic approach to OB

Yet another approach towards an understanding of OB, which deviates from conventional labelling when analysing the work behaviour of the individual within organizational contexts, is represented by Obholzer and Roberts (2002), Hirschhorn (2000), Thomson (2000), Cilliers and Koortzen (2000).

Cilliers and Koortzen (2000) describe the differences in approach between the

conventional and the psychodynamic metaphor in the following manner:

In the traditional training of IO (Industrial Organizational) psychologists it has been the experience that students learn a lot about the mechanical aspects of psychology in the workplace. Maybe this is because IO psychology traditionally functions from a rational and economical view towards work, with its assumption that a person works to earn money and to satisfy the need for material possessions.

IO psychology has developed many organizational and behavioural theories based on behaviourist thinking (applied to the training of employees), as well as the humanistic paradigm, in order to understand concepts such as motivation, leadership, organizational structures, and development (Robbins, 1989). This creates the impression that OB is only conscious, mechanistic, predictable, uncomplicated, and easy to understand. The psychodynamic view rejects the rational and economic views on work and believes that statistical analysis tells nothing useful about OB or the people working in the system. It also rejects the notion of a grand theory of organization. Instead, it views work as both a painful burden (e.g., in the task that needs to be performed) and a pleasurable activity (e.g., in the outcome) (De Vries, 1991, in Cilliers and Koortzen 2000). The basic question in understanding work is, why is it experienced as painful and to be avoided on the one hand, and why is pleasure obtained from it on the other hand," and continue to assert that

The organization as a system has its own life which is conscious and unconscious, with subsystems relating to and mirroring one another. It is the belief that the study of this unconscious behaviour and dynamics leads to a deeper (than, for example, the humanistic approach) understanding of OB (Cilliers and Koortzen 2000).

To merely state that the pleasure of working is encapsulated in remuneration on a regular basis, whilst the pain of work is to be found in the effort exerted, is probably true in a limited sense but it does not consider the meaning of work and the match between values of the individual and the type of work that he/she chooses to do.

### 1.7.1.3 Positive Organization Scholarship

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) is an attempt at establishing a different approach towards Organizational Analysis and research. As a theoretical framework it moves away from the tendency in Psychology to identify problems and to develop interventions for the perceived problems of the organization. When perusing organizational literature and all the interventions that abound in the field of OB, it is immediately clear that the majority function from a *deficit* assumption.

One of the most influential fields that have a bearing on the creation of knowledge regarding the behaviour of employees is psychology. Since World War 2 (and prior to that event) pathology has been the focus of psychology. This has led to investigation regarding the deficit in human behaviour and attempts at resolving these deficits. The fundamental assumption in this regard is that humans are "flawed and fragile". (Notice the Theory X assumption and bias.) With the establishment of positive psychology as a diametrically opposed view to the deficit assumption, the focus falls on three specific domains, i.e. positive experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions (Cameron, Dutton and Quinn, 2003, p. 2).

This change of course inevitably also questions the current bias in the study of OB and Organizational/Management science. In (what seems to be) ground breaking work, Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (Eds.) (2003) collated and edited numerous inputs on the topic of Positive Organizational Scholarship.

Positive Organizational Scholarship is more an approach towards organization studies than a coherent theory or system of knowledge. Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (2003, p. 1) describe Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) as an approach that is primarily concerned with "positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and their members". It represents a focus on dynamics that is described with positive language markers such as excellence (although it

does not fall within the category of the quality movement), thriving, etc. "It encompasses attention to *the enablers, the motivations, and the outcomes or effects* associated with positive phenomena" (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 4). *Enablers* encompass processes, capabilities, structures and methods, whilst *motivations* encompass unselfishness, altruism and contribution without regard to self, and *outcomes or effect embodies* vitality, meaningfulness, exhilaration, high-quality relationships".

As an approach it is overtly based on certain biases which include: the understanding of positive states, (e.g. resilience and meaningfulness) and the dynamics associated with such states (e.g. gratitude, positive connection). The primary interest is in non-linear positive dynamics, or what can also be called *positive spirals*. The approach is also biased towards "positive processes and states that occur in association with organizational contexts" (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 5). It thus studies (and as a consequence builds appropriate theory about) positive phenomena within organizational space as well as positive organizational contexts. This does not imply that POS will not, or does not note the problematic focus of traditional organizational science, or, it does not serve itself with the language markers that act as common denominators, but it does however demonstrate a bias towards the 'positives' and the consequences thereof. POS further demonstrates a bias towards theory formation beyond the boundaries of the DIY organizational theorists. To be credible, it must develop theory and must also be able to validate its theory. This last bias is however still 'music in the mind of the composer'. (The book that has an apt subtitle: "*Foundations of a new discipline*")

The correlates of Positive Organizational Scholarship include such fields as *positive psychology, community psychology, organizational development and appreciative inquiry, pro-social and citizenship behaviour, and corporate social responsibility* (Cameron et al., 2003, p. 5-9).

#### 1.7.1.4 Organizational dynamics

The individual enters organizational life with a complex of established experiences and perceptions that have been formed as a result of his/her development from childhood; influenced by factors such as upbringing, education (or the lack thereof), interpersonal experiences, the psychological uniqueness of this individual, etc. Not only were these experiences formed as a result of the abovementioned exposure, but also as a result of the societal factors that have an influence on the formation of and the social positioning of the individual within the framework of shared societal conscience and awareness.

Upon entering the organisation, the individual is confronted with another set of complex factors that specifically pertain to the world of work. Organisational life is co-determined by the processes and structures that are purported to contribute to a productive and effective work environment for the individual (but not necessarily a **Meaningful workplace**). The individual is integrated into a work group such as a team, or division, which is not only foreign but in many instances threatening, and in all cases constituted by a number of separate individuals who have their own complex of experiences and biases. Not only is the individual positioned within a division or section; he/she may also be required to function in cross-divisional/cross-functional project teams or work teams. These and other factors (processes and structures) including the psychological contract, job descriptions, reward and recognition processes, management style -of which power and control seem to form the basis, regulate the work behaviour of the individual. The organisation is in its turn dictated to by the legal requirements within which it functions, as well as the expectations of a multitude of stakeholders in the immediate societal environment, not forgetting the industry. These requirements to a large extent dictate structure, internal processes, the composition of the work force, etc. The organization aligns itself with the analysts who predict share price and project productivity and revenue increases (or stagnation) based on the financial factors and ratios.

In addition, the organisational world is also influenced by global factors that have an influence on the positioning, competitiveness, and survival strategies of the organisation. The movement of organisational boundaries across international boundaries and the establishment of (literally) all forms and types of economic endeavour see to it that local industries are "*threatened*" by new technologies and entrants to local markets. This exacerbates the drive for survival by local entities that eventually drive targets of competitiveness that result in the adoption of various interventions such as "*downsizing, rightsizing, re-engineering, enhanced efficiencies*", and many more.

The impact on the individual can be understood from the perspective of insecurity, uncertainty and instability resulting from these changes as well as from a differentiated view pertaining to the different (but often ignored) dimensions of organizational life.

#### **1.7.1.5 The rational, the irrational, and the spiritual side of organization**

Allcorn (2003, p. 2-7) describes three sides to organisational life, viz. the "rational side of organisational life", the "irrational side", and the "spiritual side". Interestingly, all three these "sides" can be traced back to one or more of the exponents of the "scientific management" movement, which immediately poses the question: "Why has academic research, theory formation and management practice been eclectic enough so as to ignore the last two dimensions?"

The "rational side of organisational life" can be traced to the work of Frederick Taylor. This "stream of thought is in pursuit of a well-oiled organisational machine that runs like clockwork and is described as the holy grail of executives, managers and management thinkers... for millennia" (Allcorn, 2003, p. 3).

Elton Mayo introduced the "irrational side of organisational life". Mayo postulated the "confounding variable of human nature" (Allcorn, 2003, p. 4). The consequence of Mayo's work is that the "comforting aspects of the rather more concrete aspects

of the rational workplace must yield to the uncomfortable and even distressing nature of individual, interpersonal, group and organizational dynamics that introduce extraordinary difficult to grasp nuances and complexity" (Allcorn, 2003, p. 5). This state of affairs can be traced back to the work of Hammer and Champy (1993; In Allcorn, 2003, p. 5), who, along the lines of reasoning that Taylor advocated in respect of the re-engineering of work, argued that organisations can be re-engineered in the same way, leading to the eventual diminishment of organisational life reflected in a diminishment and alienation of the individual "from oneself, one's work and the workplace" (Allcorn, 2003, p. 5). The trend that emanated from the "re-engineering" line of thought ripped the social fabric of organisational life apart. "Organizations that ignore this deeper side of the organisation and their members do so at great peril. An organization with a downtrodden spirit is not unlike an individual in the same situation...listless, depressed, alienated from self and others and de-energised" (Allcorn 2003, p. 7). It can be deduced that Mary Follett, although not in specific terms, laid the groundwork for the development of the theory of spirituality in organizations. Her occupation with the dynamics of leaders and subordinates will inevitably also touch upon values of which spirituality from an integral part. Current literature on organizational spirituality seems to be fragmented and is characterized by diverse approaches towards the concept and a selective choice of organizational dimensions.

A study of the different dimensions seems to present at least three important dimensions of organizational spirituality: "value alignment, personal spirituality, and relationship-based organizing" (James 2005, p.1). Organizational spirituality seems to be facilitated by the uncertainty that permeates organizations. Restructuring, re-engineering, downsizing and similar exercises which relate to the survival of organizations, all affect individual employees on an affective level. New policies and rules, governance structures and processes, seem to be the catalysts for employees' search for a "deeper meaning" i.e. "spirituality in organizational life" (Gialcalone and Jurkiewicz, 2005). Spirituality in organizations is a domain *where angels would fear to tread*, and therefore caution must prevail. When spirituality becomes another tool in the toolbox of managers, the sense of self and the consciousness of higher values than the material world will fall into the categories of



just another intervention in the already existing one of manipulating employees to the whim of managers.

Nevertheless, the result of the confluence of the mentioned factors impact on the level of satisfaction of the individual in his/her work setting, resulting in frustration, anger, disenchantment, or purely just dissatisfaction, with the Quality of Work Life. It is most probably the loss of individual dignity and individualism that acts as a catalyst for the dissatisfaction and the loss of meaning that individuals experience in their work life.

It could be argued that that the negative assessment that has been presented can be dissipated by the culture of the organization. "Strong culture refers to a situation in which meaning is shared among organization members to the extent that nearly everyone agrees and even takes for granted the way things are" (Karathanos, Pettypool and Trout, 1994, p. 15). "Among the many possible shared meanings, beliefs or values which are an organization's culture, some are surely more important than others...When hopes are dashed or trust broken concerning shared meaning with regard to the performance/reward issue or the issue of perceived justice, one might expect a spill over with regard to shared meanings" (Karathanos et al 1994, p. 17). How does this come about and how is it related to the complexity of organizational life?

Change is most probably the one variable that contributes significantly to the loss of meaning resulting from a loss of hope and trust by an individual employee. Yet the individual is more often than not a "captive" of the circumstances and the organizational benefits from this captivity. What remains is disillusionment with the organization and a loss of motivation - and for that matter: The loss of meaning.

#### **1.7.1.6 The implosion of the job**

A further factor that exacerbates the dynamics of organizational life is what Hirschhorn terms "the implosion of the job". Jobs, according to Hirschhorn (2000, p.

6, 7) have become particularly stressful in the post industrial milieu, "because it progressively integrates a once fragmented division of labour, forcing workers to take account of many more facts, people, and claims. It becomes harder to ritualise work and reduce it to a set of regular formulas and procedures". This milieu according to Hirschhorn, poses two complementary challenges: "Work becomes more situational and less routine, and people must integrate an increasingly diverse sets of facts, interests, and claims". The conclusion is drawn that the world of work is imploding and therefore "the post industrial milieu *challenges the social defences*" (italics added) of workers. This in itself is already an indication that there seem to be discrepancies between an evolving perspective regarding the world of work and the way in which Organizations are managed, based on Organizational Theory and OB paradigms that seem to be diverging from the life and world view of society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### 1.7.1.7 The Meaningful workplace

Chalofsky (2010, p. xiii) states that although there are many publications that relate to meaningful work and **Meaningful workplaces**,

...none of them offer a substantive account of what constitutes meaningful work and a meaningful workplace, so that individuals can be educated as to what goes into finding or creating fulfilling work, and managers and consultants can understand what it takes to create and sustain a meaningful workplace.

In discussing the way in which to build the **Meaningful workplace**, which at the same time can possibly also serve as a summarised version of a definition of the **Meaningful workplace**, Chalofsky (2010, p. 158), identifies the critical dimensions of the meaning workplace as:

- It's not about the perks; it's about the culture;

- The organization supports the whole person and the whole person is engaged in the organization;
- The organization is truly a community;

Chalofsky (2010) integrates the concepts meaning in work and meaning at work to such an extent that the two “sides”, i.e. the individual and his/her frame of mind, and the organization and its characteristics integrate to form the construct: **Meaningful workplace**.

Terez (2000), in his book “22 Keys to creating a **Meaningful workplace**” Terez (2000), embarks on a quest to describe the results of a Project (“The meaning of work project”) to discover ultimate purpose of workplace management: to create the **Meaningful workplace**, and defines a **Meaningful workplace** as one where the following categories of “meaning keys” prevail. These keys include:

- Mission keys; related to the creation of a future along the lines of purpose, direction, relevance and validation.
- People keys; related to valuing who does the future within a framework of respect, equality, informality, flexibility, and ownership.
- Development keys; related to the growth the business and of the people who make it happen. The development keys are constituted by challenge, invention, support, and personal development.
- Community keys; affirm the importance of togetherness and collective effort, within a framework of dialogue, relationship building, service, acknowledgement, and oneness.
- ‘Me keys’; are the keys that value the individual and enable the individual to be “himself”. This category is made up of self-identity, fit, balance and worth.

## 1.8 SUMMARY

The reasoning thus far points in the direction of the loss of meaning at work. Various concepts are used to describe the loss of or a lack of meaning or meaninglessness at work.

Meaning in work is considered an intra-psychological phenomenon that emerges in the individual's interaction with his or her working environment. Meaning in work concerns the reasons an individual has for working, what he or she seeks to accomplish by working and the continuity that he or she experiences in work. These reasons and purposes may be explicit or embedded in actions at the workplace, and they can both be prospective and retrospective. Sometimes the purposes are explicit and give a clear path to follow. Other times, the individual has only a vague physical sense of what feels good or bad and of how to act in any given situation. Meaning can also come after a series of events and is then retrospectively constructed to be congruent with what the subject is doing (Isaksen, 2000, p. 89).

This definition is in line with Frankl (1985), Yalom (1980), Bruner, (1990), and Csikszentmihalyi (1989), (in Isaksen, 2000) who, although they might focus on different aspects of *meaning*, at least agree that meaning and purposefulness makes life in general more comprehensible.

Yalom (1980, p. 400 and following pages) distinguishes between two different aspects of meaning.

He defines "cosmic meaning" as the answer to "what is the meaning of life?" and "terrestrial meaning" (or life-meaning) as the answer to "what is the meaning of my life?" A similar distinction must be made between three aspects of meaning in work. One aspect concerns the general evaluation of the meaningfulness of working (e.g., "What is the meaning of working?"). This level is the abstract meaning in work... A second aspect of meaning in work is the evaluation of the meaningfulness of a specific type of work, regardless of one's own specific experiences (e.g., "What is the meaning of being a physician?"). This aspect is referred to as the general meaning in work. A third aspect is the evaluation of one's own specific job, including all the many different obligations and experiences that it

involves (e.g. “Do you as a physician find your own job meaningful?”). This level is referred to as personal meaning in work.

A possible fourth level of work can be added which relates to the experience or lack thereof within the specific context where the work is performed, thus meaning at work (Chalofsky, 2010). This dimension addresses the aggregate of the total work experience which includes the abstract, the meaning of the individual’s specific vocation or specialty, and the experience of doing the job. All of these dimensions include the meaning in working as well as the meaning at working. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1989) the integrated and consistent purpose, whatever the content and wherever it comes from, provides life including the work life of the individual employee, with meaning. An overarching sense and experience of meaning is construed through the integrated and interactive meaning that is derived from or through the attachment of the employee to the workplace and its procedures; through the engagement in social relations; and through regarding work as a necessary part of a larger meaningful context.

## **1.9 THE PROBLEM DEFINED: LOSS OF MEANING AT WORK**

Based on the reasoning thus far one dimension that presents itself for the purpose of the study is the loss of meaning as a result of various factors. At this juncture it seems valid to state that the observed problem does not appear to be a singular problem which can be discussed in isolation, but rather tends towards a problem-complex. In summarised format the problem complex that seems to present itself can be segmented along the following dimensions:

- Firstly the problem seems to be related to negative work-life-experiences, emanating from a managerialist structural-functionalism based on instrumental rationalism and linear organizational processes, which includes the alienation of the individual from the self, the work, the organization as well as the other. Employees have lost their sense of meaning in the modern workplace, which is still being governed and managed through modernistic rules and theories,

whilst the society and even the organization's operating environment has become post-modern in its fibre: The workplace has lost its sense of meaning

- A second dimension of the problem pertains to the alienation of the individual as discussed, and is closely related to meaningless experiences at work and in working as a result of various factors
- The problem most probably emanates from a linear thinking pattern in terms of which it is perceived that through the implementation of certain interventions the work behaviour and the behaviour of the individual in the work environment can be manipulated

The reasoning up to this juncture has been presented from various angles. The deployment of the rest of this study will provide sufficient information to further substantiate the problem of a meaningless workplace. The concepts alienation and meaninglessness have been presented and discussed from various perspectives, as has the indication that humans experience meaning, or better still, construe meaning based on certain experiences and contextual stimuli. It has also been noted that at least two publications in book format (Chalofsky, 2010; Terez, 2000) address the issue of a loss of meaning at work though the positive statements and in search of the **Meaningful workplace**.

The current study will attach itself to the construct: **Meaningful workplace**, as introduced by Chalofsky and Terez. It is pre-empted that a construct such as this one and the underlying theoretical and conceptual build, could become a valuable contributor to Management/Organization Theory, leadership practice, and OB, thereby creating workspaces where employees not only find and construe meaning, but where the collective efforts could lead to the fourth dimension of organizational and shareholder value, over and above the dimensions that are normally analysed such as the financials, governance and structural alignment. Sustainability of productive effort, revenue generation, and shareholder value, cannot, in the current time frame, be separated from employee value and social responsibility in terms of people management and workforce sustainability.

## 1.10 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study bearing in mind the title: A meaningful workplace: from theory development to applicability is:

To define a **Meaningful workplace** model through the identification and description of the constitutive elements or dimensions in terms that can be related to Organizational Behaviour and applied as management and leadership practice in organizational settings. This purpose will be pursued based on the emergence of the construct in literature and organizational practice, thereby expanding on the emerging theoretical discussion in this regard (thus theory development). This purpose will be fulfilled through the interrogation of literature as well as the presentation of evidence gleaned from an organization (based on exit interview information) as well as insights from participating respondents, gathered by means of Repertory Grid Technique, and the research data from the CRF institute on the “Best Employer to Work for”.

The broad framework as presented by Terez and Chalofsky in the discussion of the **Meaningful workplace** will be followed as it is the opinion of the current researcher that the heart of organizational life must be rediscovered in order to reinstitute humaneness of the employee in practice; not only as a statement on paper to which lip service is given without the tangible but through the way in which people are led and managed. It is the considered opinion of the writer that the dimensions of profitability, governance, social responsibility and added value can only be gained in a sustainable manner if the practices that guide the leadership behaviour and management practices in organizations are based on the tenets that enhance and facilitate meaning and fulfilment in working and at work. Thus: whilst performing the work in the work environment.

### 1.11 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Although the possibility exists to present an extended list of specific objectives, such a practice would only result in the majority of these not being achieved. The specific objectives as listed below pertain specifically to the purpose of the study and serve as markers along the way to achieve the purpose.

- **Objective 1:** To conceptualise the constitutive elements of the construct: **A Meaningful workplace;**
- **Objective 2:** To expand the theoretical base of the construct **Meaningful workplace**, as presented in literature thereby contributing to the field of Organizational Behaviour;
- **Objective 3:** To present a practical implementable **Meaningful workplace** model based on the research process and as a result of the previous two objectives.

### 1.12 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Emanating from these objectives, certain questions seem to present themselves as pertinent in the approach towards meeting the purpose and objectives of the study programme. Although logic in their formulation and content, research questions in a qualitative programme (as discussed in Chapter 2) guide the mental processes of the researcher towards goal attainment.

The following research questions emanate from this overview:

- Is the construct an emerging construct in the literature on Organizational theory, and Management theory and Organizational Behaviour?
- If so, what is meant by the construct?



- Having determined whether the construct is an emerging construct, and having investigated the content and intent of the construct, would it be possible to expand on the theoretical base (as initially presented by Terez (2000) and Chalofsky (2010)) thus contributing to establishing a knowledge repository for the construct?
- If these questions were to be answered, would such a conceptual description and the accompanying model and implementation guidelines constitute “new knowledge” in the field of Organizational Behaviour?
- If it were possible, on a theoretical and conceptual level, to construe a **Meaningful workplace** theory, would it also be possible, by means of direct transference, to identify and define the constitutive elements and relate these to organizational practice and managerial and supervisory practice?

### 1.13 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

How significant is a study of this nature? The answer to this question can be approached from different perspectives depending on the bias that dictates a persons’ approach to reality.

In more specific terms the significance of the study programme can be described in the following few paragraphs.

- From a theoretical and philosophical perspective the significance can be derived from an understanding that job satisfaction and other expressions such as for instance involvement, loyalty, and commitment and motivation are not the same as the experience of meaning at work and the workplace. The differentiation lies in the sphere of the subjective experiences that employees have within the work setting, or stated differently, job satisfaction, depending on the orientation an individual has towards work, is not necessarily the same as the experience of the *workplace* as meaningful space. (Terez 2002 - <http://www.betterworkplacenow.com/summarv.html>).

- Seen from an academic perspective the significance is to be found in the integrated approach that will be followed as both the rational economic (so-called hard interventions) related to the management of behaviour at work and a psychodynamic approach (the subjective experiences), that do not emanate from the "hard approaches" but form the basis of purpose and meaning, complement each other. There is therefore something to be said about the fact that a one-sided approach in respect of the experience of meaning at work is not sufficient to comprehend the **Meaningful workplace** in its totality.
- A further point of significance can be derived from the perspective that subjective experiences in the workplace contribute significantly to effective work behaviour, the intent to stay on in the organization, etc. Terez (2002) states results emanating from focus group interviews in as much as that "the sense that what I'm doing as an individual, and what the organization is doing collectively, truly makes a difference" tops the list of meaningful experiences in the workplace, followed by "Ownership, Fit, Oneness, and Relationship Building. In the second tier: Service, Equality, Validation, Invention, and Personal Development". Organizations might have all the formal policies, procedures, job descriptions, structure, training and development programmes, in place, but that does not yet mean that employees experience the workplace as meaningful.
- In the final consequence it would have to be ascertained whether the construct **Meaningful workplace**, is meaningful in itself as a framework for further research an study albeit initially only in a conceptual sense of the word.

The **Meaningful workplace** is not a one-way street. It entails roles to be fulfilled by the organization as well as the individual, not only in objective terms, but in subjective terms as well, specifically referring to the psychological contract, and even more significantly, in the way that managers manage their staff.

It is however more than merely an understanding of the psychological contract as such. The construct **Meaningful workplace** encompasses various other dimensions that fall within the sphere of current initiatives to enhance work related behaviour, such as initiatives pertaining to employee engagement, initiatives that emanate from the purpose of being rated as the best company to work for, most

loved brand, etc.

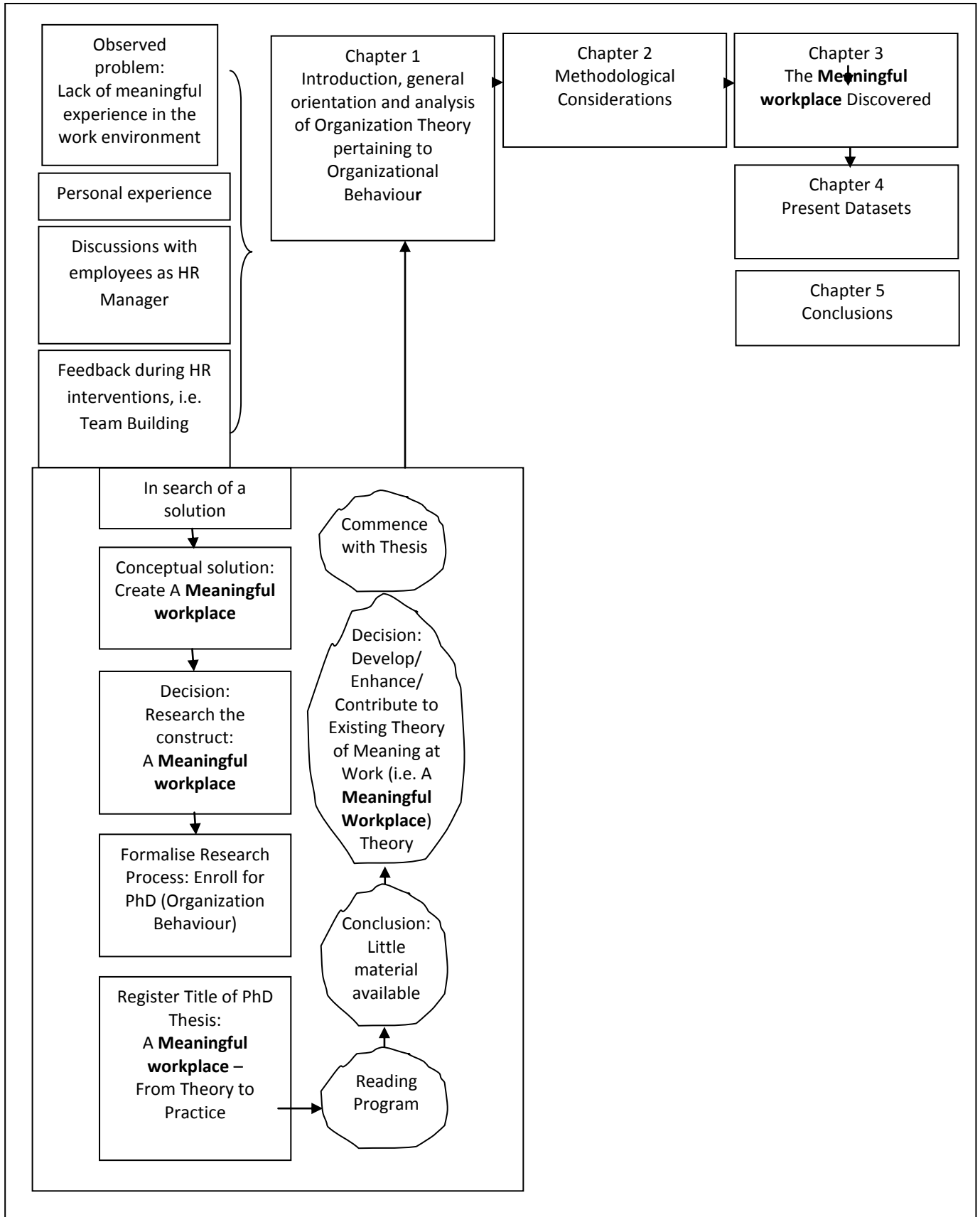
Does this then imply that the organizational objectives of being productive and profitable; of sustaining the business and revenue growth; of being a responsible corporate citizen; of serving the shareholders and establishing productive relationships with stakeholders; of improving product quality and harnessing customer satisfaction as a means to a better and improved bottom line harvest; are meaningless? Is it then only the subjective experience of the individual within the work environment that is important? The answer to these and other similar questions are an emphatic **no**. Organizations exist to serve a purpose in society. They address needs and satisfy these; they solve problems; create services and other value in and for society, whether they produce goods, function in the retail environment, and education; whether as profit sharing or non-profit organizations. To serve their purpose, product and service quality, employee commitment, productive behaviour, good governance, etc are all important. On the other hand, organizations function within society and therefore organizations 'belong' to the society within which they function. This has implications for the way in which the organization indirectly influences society through the way in which the workplace is perceived as meaningful workspace. Brief and Weis (2002:280) are correct in stating that the "... organizations in which people work affect their thoughts, feelings and actions in the workplace and away from it. Likewise, people's thoughts, feelings and actions affect the organizations in which they work", thereby also implying that organizations are not isolated islands with impenetrable boundaries. From a systems perspective; whether organizations are defined as open systems with permeable boundaries, or social systems, which integrate into society, the reciprocal affect between organization and society is undeniable.

#### **1.14 STRUCTURE**

- In the following chapter (Chapter 2) the methodological approach and research methodology will be provided. Broadly speaking, a qualitative approach will be followed. The discussion will be detailed enough in terms of

the underlying assumptions that guide qualitative studies. The approach in terms of which an understanding of meaning at work is to be reached will be discussed as will the methods in the gathering of relevant data. The broad strategy will be discussed and eventually also the methodology to develop the theoretical build and conceptual understanding of the **Meaningful workplace**. One of the primary assumptions is that organizations are open, living or social systems. The underlying bias is towards a phenomenological understanding and subsequent description of the construct, based on a constructivist approach. To a certain extent this chapter represents a theoretical exercise in methodology, which could if successful in the eventual execution; enrich the methodological literature in the field of OB. (If not successful, it would still provide a valuable lesson and insight in research practice.)

- Chapter 3 embarks on the quest to discover the current thinking regarding the construct utilising the publications of Terez and Chalofsky as a basic framework and points of departure. The understanding of what is meant and the broad outline will be discussed and presented and will be expanded upon through the integration of what can be termed as “the footprint of a **Meaningful workplace**” in literature and research.
- Chapter 4 represents the results of three data sets. The first data set is based on the research upon which the certification of “best employer to work for” by the CRF institute is based. Secondly, “exit interview” information that was collected electronically from employees who voluntarily left a company when provided the opportunity to do so is presented and interpreted. The third data set consists of information that was gathered by means of Repertory Grid (RG) interviews with selected employees in various organisations and on various levels within different organizations in an endeavour to capture the mindset of individuals regarding the **Meaningful workplace**.
- Chapter 5 presents the conclusions that can be drawn from the study as well as recommendations for future research.



**Figure 1.3: Structure of the Thesis.**