



5 CHAPTER 5

A MEANINGFUL WORKPLACE:

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Chapter is to offer a closing and concluding perspective based on the research results as provided in the previous two Chapters.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to chronicle the conclusions of the study and recommendations for further research. This is done by (a) assessing whether the purpose of the study has been achieved, (b) whether the objectives have been achieved and (c) whether the research questions have been adequately answered. This represents the first level of assessment. The second level of assessment is to determine whether the research methodology as described in chapter 2 was adequate for the purpose of this research and to indicate the lessons learnt. A third requirement is to indicate the shortcomings of the study, and to formulate recommendations for further research. Lastly the requirement to describe the researcher's experience and learning during the process also requires some attention.

The process unfolds logically from the one to the following perspective as indicated in the process flow (Figure 5.1).

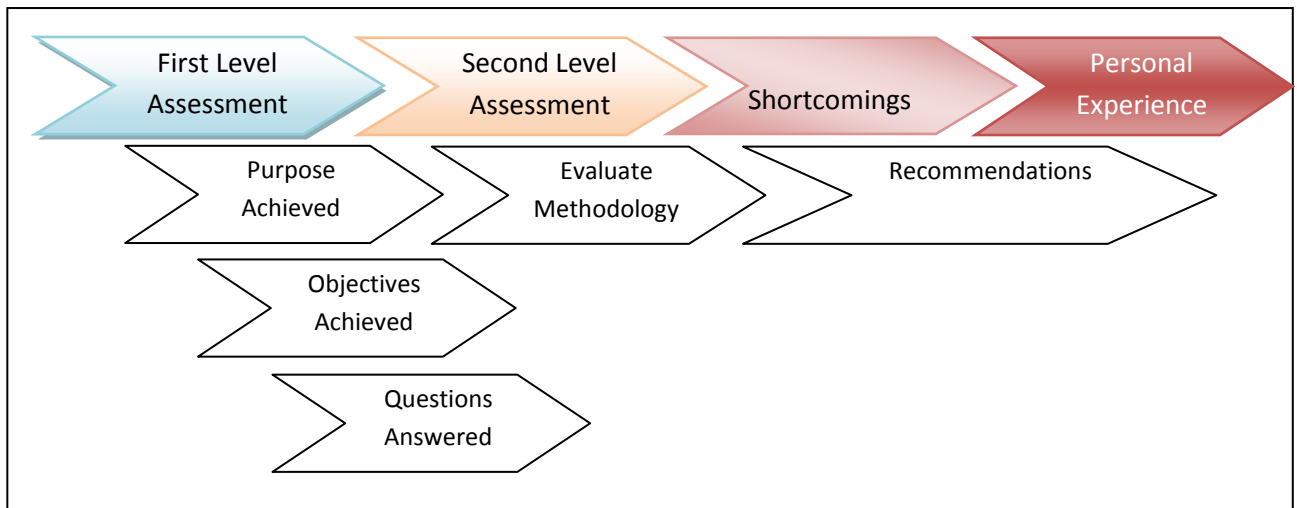


Figure 5.1: Chapter 5: Process flow

5.2 ASSESSMENT ON THE FIRST LEVEL

The following paragraphs embark on the first level assessment.

5.2.1 First level assessment

In the first instance it is necessary to determine whether the purpose of the study has been achieved.

5.2.1.1 Purpose achieved?

*To (a) define a **meaningful workplace** Model through the (b) identification and description of the constitutive elements or dimensions in terms that can be(c) related to Organizational Behaviour and (d) applied as Management and Leadership practice in organizational settings, based on the (e) emergence of the construct: A **meaningful workplace** in literature and organizational practice, thereby (f) expanding on the emerging theoretical discussion in this regard.*

The original purpose as indicated contains at least six dimensions that had to be satisfied.

To progress further than the descriptions provided in Chapters 3 and 4 the following definition is proposed:

- A **meaningful workplace** is a dynamic space where employees experience psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability and psychological safety while performing work related activities; or work roles, as a result of the simultaneous presence of those constitutive dimensions as described and characterised by means of the *Meaningfulness at Work Model* and *Meaning of Work Model* as facilitating or enabling characteristics for the experience of

meaning by employees as individuals or in work groups, whilst performing work in work-space.

This definition is inclusive of the major dimensions that have been discussed and can be described as a high level conceptual definition, thus satisfying the first dimension of the purpose.

- The second and third dimensions of the purpose as described in chapter 1, go hand in hand and serve as the theoretical foundation structure for the definition and the underlying descriptions (from a practice orientated perspective) as presented in chapters 3 and 4. Thus without complying with or satisfying the second and third dimensions neither the descriptions given nor the definition of a **meaningful workplace** would have been possible.
- The fourth dimension of the purpose refers to the practice of management and leadership in organizations. The requirement is thus to satisfy a practical need. Although the different constituent dimensions of a **meaningful workplace** have initially been researched from academic research and description, it has been indicated via the alignment of and with the empirical dimensions (Chapter 4), that these dimensions also belong in the domain of practical management practice and leadership behaviour. This clearly indicates the domain of organization management and leadership practice. Whether these dimensions are operationalised in organizational life is quite another matter. This much is clear from the exit interviews and Repertory Grid data sets: Employees expect the practice and management to integrate the dimensions that constitute a **meaningful workplace** in the day to day steering of organizations.
- Without indicating the “footprint” of the construct: **Meaningful workplace**, none of the above would have been possible. It can thus safely be stated that the fifth dimension of the initial purpose was achieved.
- This study has without doubt expanded on the construct, which is the sixth dimension of the initial purpose. The inputs in respect of expanding the Meaning of Work Model as proposed by Chalofsky (2010) represent an expansion as does the establishment of the Meaningfulness at Work model (if it can be called such). The indication of additional dimensions that could,

according to the current researcher, be integrated in the theory on a **meaningful workplace** expands on the current thinking. It was stated that the current study is in search of a footprint so as to expand and build on the current thinking. It should thus be viewed as an evolutionary step in the process of development.

5.2.1.2 Objectives achieved

The specific objectives of the study were indicated as:

- **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.*

Objectives 1 and 2 have been discussed by implication and do therefore not need any additional discussion.

- Objective three does however need explanation. It was stated on numerous occasions that there is no specific chronological order for the implementation of any of the different “cycles”. Nor is there a ranked order of importance as all of the cycles stand in a reciprocal relationship to one another and that they are so integrated that it is difficult to draw fixed boundaries between them. The only possible criterion at this point in time to determine a chronological intervention design and resulting implementation is most probably to select the most voluminous cycle as a starting point, in which case the “Culture Cycle” would be selected. This however was never the intent. The intention was to present a “*Model*” that could be implemented by choice and based on need and priority by

and in an organization. This has been done and therefore the third objective can also be seen to be achieved.

5.2.1.3 Questions Answered?

The research questions that were posed at the commencement of the study will be responded to one-by-one.

- *Is the construct A **meaningful workplace** an emerging construct in the literature on Organizational Theory, and – Management, and Organizational Behaviour?*

The construct: **A meaningful workplace** is an emerging construct in the literature on Organizational theory, Management theory and Organizational Behaviour. As a matter of fact the construct seems to be emerging in the literature on sociology, psychology, and in Journals aiming at the health professions such as nursing, as well as education and the field of learning. It is thus not limited to thoughts or thinkers within the traditional management sciences. This cross-border interest is important as it contributes to the depth of an understanding of the concept meaning and meaningfulness. .

- *If so, what is meant by the construct: A **meaningful workplace**?*

The description in the two primary chapters of the study (3 & 4) provides an extended answer on this question as do the descriptions at the end of the mentioned chapters and the definition above.

- *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?*

The answer to this particular question is a qualified “yes”. It is “qualified”, because it is not possible to accommodate the wealth of possible or probable information into a

single study of this nature. However this study has gathered a mass of complex and even complicated matter that deserve to be analysed further.

- *If the above 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?*

This question was posed and deserves to be answered. In retrospect it seems a very ambitious question because it touches on the development of knowledge. Can this study lay claim to such an expansive ideal? Once again it must be qualified. When data is transformed and some insight emanates from such a transformation process, is it new or is it simply a repackaging of “old” information? Thus what makes knowledge “new”? This question falls squarely into the epistemological discussion which will not be entered into at this stage as it had been addressed in Chapter 2. Perhaps two additional questions could clarify the intent of the research question. The first question pertains to constructivism. Do a constructivist approach, assumptions and methodology create or expose reality? Constructivism construes realities (potentialities in post modernism). The approach is different from positivism that “discovers reality”. The realities that are construed through a constructivist approach pose as realities in their own right and can be accepted or rejected. In this case the construed reality of a **meaningful workplace** that also exists in the consciousness of employees is accepted as “reality” without elevating this reality to the status of the “only reality”. The second question pertains to the question of causality or response. Causality is rejected and in the place thereof the complexity of context, creates the opportunities for the behaviour of choice by individual employees is accepted. Will the implementation of a **meaningful workplace** model cause behaviour that is concomitant with meaningfulness. The answer is “no, not directly” because such an answer would imply a direct cause and effect relationship. A **meaningful workplace** creates conditions wherein which employees can consider the potentialities and perhaps choose cognitive, affective and behaviour patterns that reflect meaningfulness in all its complex dimensions. Does the study present “new” knowledge in the field of Organizational Behaviour? A qualified yes is once again presented. New in the sense that it posits new relationships and opens the field to new potentialities or theoretical and management options as well as

behavioural options. The element of coercion thus falls by the wayside as a method of force and is replaced by a context of preferred choice. Are the elements that constitute the **meaningfulness workplace** model new? No the elements are an integral part of the knowledge repertoire of OB specialists. The “neuron pathways” that link these elements are “new”.

*. 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?*

This question has undoubtedly been answered in the positive throughout the document

5.3 SECOND LEVEL ASSESSMENT: METHODOLOGY

To achieve the fulfilment of research as human endeavour in search of knowledge and the construction of reality, a research framework, following a qualitative paradigm, and utilising selected data gathering methods was established. The paradigm or the broadest possible framework for this research program was described as a qualitative paradigm. This was done because it was judged that the research theme had a strong phenomenological focus, thus the research focus is human experience, equated with being in the world of work. Thus the human phenomenon which was targeted for research was the organization and human experience of a specific type within the framework of this phenomenon. The data gathering techniques were chosen to support the purpose of the study and to provide a measure of cross corroboration between existing literature, which might be judged to be of a conceptual and theoretical nature, and empirical data which are more practically aligned and emanate from the lived experience of people. The framework and strategy for the understanding of data (which includes the act of interpretation) was phenomenology. Phenomenology as a system forces the researcher to maintain a focus on lived experience and the understanding and interpretation thereof. The method for representing data and interpreted information

was of a constructivist nature. As this study was not interested in creating theory from a nil hypothesis, it did not follow a grounded theory approach. The assumption was that the dimensions of the construct: A **meaningful workplace** already exists in lived experience of employees, but that this construct is either not acknowledged for what is or simply ignored to the advantage of the continuous quantification and measurement constructs. The current researcher does not reject quantitative research but had a strong inkling towards the current theme from a descriptive perspective to enhance the current thinking in respect of a **meaningful workplace** and to create neuron bindings between existing dimensions, but in different contexts. The chosen methodology served this purpose well, although it must also be stated that the particular methodological framework might not suit all qualitative researchers, nor would it necessarily be suitable for all qualitative research by the same researcher.

5.4 SHORTCOMINGS

The research program without any shortcomings is yet to be presented. This program suffers from certain shortcomings which are briefly discussed below.

5.4.1 Incomplete discussions

Self regulation for a study program such as this is viewed as positive because it limits the breadth of discussion and in some instances the depth as well. Aware of the fact that such self regulation was absolutely necessary, it did create a limit on the extent to which certain themes could be pursued. It does not claim to be, a once-and-for all research on the particular topic.

5.4.2 Measurement

Quantitatively inclined researchers would have expected some form measurement for certain statements that have been made. However it was stated in Chapter 2 that measurement and statistical data does not form part of a qualitative study. The current study is interpretive and focuses on understanding and not on descriptive measures as such. Explanation is preferred above description, the last which has a place in statistical-descriptive endeavours.

5.4.3 Uncertainty

Because qualitative studies rely on interpretation and subsequently language as representational medium, uncertainty whether the research can stand its ground when compared to quantitative studies will always be in the back of the readers mind. The purposeful nature of the current study was to comply with postmodern thinking and thus leave the result in the sphere of potentiality. Models of thinking and choice are (or have) shifted from certainty to uncertainty. If the current study does nothing else but to stimulate thinking and discussion, then it would already have achieved a covert type of agenda.

5.4.4 Implementation process of the model

It was never part of the initial purpose to design an implementation process after the development of a **Meaningful workplace** model. This does not imply that such a process is unnecessary or not required. If the design is to become practice in organizational life through the internalisation of the Model, then an implementation process is an absolute requirement. However for now such a process will have to be reserved for the recommendations and next steps as a result of this study.

5.5 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Relevance in my mind relates to the measure of overlap between the perceptions of belief and truth. The greater the measure of overlap, the greater the measure of relevance. Relevance thus lies in the thinking and belief system of the reader/observer and manifests itself in the acceptance of this overlap as an indication of “reality” to be achieved.

On a more sober level it could be stated that many of the dimensions that have been judged to form part of an integrated **meaningful workplace** model, have been researched in respect of their impact on the revenue margins, stakeholder perceptions and market analysts whose interpretation influence the market value and capitalisation of enterprises. As the relevance of the study was provided in Chapter 1, this theme will not be further explored here.

5.6 EXPERIENCE OF THE RESEARCHER

In Chapter 1 the initial interest in this topic was declared. At that stage it was acknowledged that personal experience played a role in the choice of the topic and the research program. Throughout the following thoughts occurred:

- The construct and the different dimensions that constitute the construct are achievable in organizational life to establish a better work-life experience and thus more meaningful life experience life for employees
- If these dimensions were actively sought and applied, many employees in whom companies heavily invest would not leave, thereby creating massive staffing accounts to replace those skills
- The experience was both an “aha” as well as an “I thought so” type of experience, alternating with “i did not know this”
- In addition to the above, it was a constructive and steep learning curve. Structured study and research is never a waste of time, but it does absorb time.

- The satisfaction of completing such an endeavour as this is like reaching the summit of a word-mountain. You struggled through the valleys, climbed 90 degree cliffs, hung on to narrow ledges, and eventually reached the summit. Does this imply that “you know everything?” On the contrary: “I wish I knew more than I currently do!”
- Grateful and satisfied but not in an arrogant manner. Humble because I was afforded the opportunity to embark and complete this ideal.

5.7 CLOSING COMMENT

May this work be received for what it is: A process and methodology, translated as a “Model”, contributing to some understanding of employee behaviour in an organizational context and a means to enhance the experience of meaningfulness of employees in the workplace; also as a parallel insight into Organizational behaviour as a Subject Field and field of practice in Organizations. .