CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of the present research is to confirm the existence of a relationship between role identity and burnout and to explore the nature of this relationship among client service employees. The research also examines the mechanisms by virtue of which such a relationship exists. In addition, the research investigates the role of organisational client discourse in the development of employee role identities and provides recommendations as to how organisations can frame client discourse in order to facilitate the construction of empowering client service role identities. The research therefore has both theoretical value and practical significance.

In the sections that follow, the research problem and context will be sketched, providing a rationale for the study. Key concepts will be defined, the purpose of the research will be explored and the structure of the dissertation presented.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Burnout, characterised by feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment can prove detrimental to both the individual employee and the organisation. On the individual level, prolonged periods of burnout have been linked to anxiety (Richardsen, Burke & Leiter, 1992), depression (Glass & McKnight, 1996) and diminished levels of self-esteem (Rosse, Boss, Johnson & Crown, 1991). At the organisational level, burnout has been linked to job withdrawal behaviours such as turnover intention, absenteeism, reduced organisational commitment and a decrease in job performance (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001: 406). The negative effects of employee burnout can be particularly devastating in client service organisations, since burnout has been shown to significantly reduce the quality of interpersonal work-related relationships (Singh, Goolsby & Rhoads, 1994). Employees suffering from feelings of emotional exhaustion that characterise burnout are prone to treat clients, co-workers and supervisors with cynicism and negativity, resulting in challenging interpersonal and client relations (Yagil, 2006: 259).

Previous research on burnout in client service settings has shown how client service employees are particularly susceptible to the kinds of stressors that contribute to burnout (Griffith, 2001; Low, Cravens, Grant & Moncrief, 2001; Tsai & Huange, 2002). By virtue of their professions, client service employees are exposed to a considerable amount of role conflict due to the fact that they have to satisfy customer demands while simultaneously complying with organisational requirements and management expectations (Chung & Schneider, 2002; Rod & Ashill, 2009; Singh, 2000; Varca, 2009). Since the client service employees' company is largely dependent on the client for business, clients are often able to exert considerable influence over client serving employees through both formal and informal evaluations (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Client serving employees are often subject to abuse, harassment and aggressive behaviours from clients (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). This results largely from what has been referred to as an imbalance of interpersonal power between the employee and the client (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1999: 27; Grandey, Dickter & Sin, 2004; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Furthermore, Cordes and Dougherty (1993: 644) maintain that client service employees can find themselves in compromising and emotionally exhausting positions when they believe that the demands of their clients cannot be met by the organisation. Client service employees are often also required to engage in emotional labour, which has also been linked to the development of burnout (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003).

In an effort to curb the development of burnout among employees, burnout research has predominantly focused on the antecedents to the burnout syndrome. Situational variables, such as job and organisational characteristics, are possibly the most frequently cited antecedents of burnout. Job characteristics include stressors such as quantitative job demands (too much work for the available time), qualitative job demands such as role conflict and role ambiguity, and an absence of job resources such as social support, information and control that can be used to buffer the effects of job demands (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Low *et al.*, 2001 Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996; Singh *et al.,* 1994). Other research has focused on personality and dispositional factors as predictors of burnout and include a focus on variables such as conscientiousness (Witt, Andrews & Carlson, 2004), communal orientation (Truchot & Deregard, 2001) and sense of coherence (Rothmann, Jackson & Kruger, 2003). The nature of interpersonal relationships has also been the focus of research into the antecedents of burnout, and it has been shown that perceived reciprocity (Truchot & Deregard, 2001) and perceived inequity in interpersonal relationships (Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, Bosveld & Van Dierendonck, 2000) are associated with the development of burnout.

The role of subjective perceptions in the development of burnout has also been well documented. Such research has largely been conducted from an existential perspective (Pines, 2002) where the development of burnout has been linked to higher order needs such as meaning and self-actualisation. Work and performance-related expectations have also been linked to the development of burnout, most notably through the work of Stevens and O'Neil (1983) and Cherniss (1993).

Recent research into the antecedents of burnout has increasingly focused on subjective identity perceptions as possible correlates of burnout (e.g., Buunk, Peiro, Rodriguez & Bravo, 2007; Edwards & Dirette, 2010; Kang, Twigg & Hertzman, 2010, Kremer-Hayon, Faraj & Wubbels, 2002; Schaible, 2006; Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2004, 2005; Vanheule, Lievrouw & Verhaeghe, 2003). The majority of these studies have concentrated on the role that professional or occupational identification plays in the development of burnout (e.g., Edwards & Dirette, 2010; Kremer-Hayon *et al.,* 2002; Schaible, 2006), while others have focused on social identity factors as antecedents to burnout (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Kang *et al.,* 2010). Research by Vanheule *et al.* (2003) and Vanheule and Verhaeghe (2004, 2005) show how subjective identity perceptions of the relationship between client and client service employee potentially contribute to burnout. Their findings indicate that lower burnout individuals are able to create a psychological distance between themselves and the client, while higher burnout respondents experience a sense of powerlessness and defeat when dealing with the client. By employing a social rank perspective, Buunk *et al.* (2007) examined the relationship between status-related variables and burnout. Their investigation shows that status-related variables (such as subjective status, loss of status and a sense of defeat) explain more variance in burnout scores than the job and organisational variables that have traditionally been linked to burnout.

The present study expands this focus on the role of subjective identity perceptions in the development of burnout, by exploring the relationship between role identity and burnout amongst client service employees. While identity processes associated with occupational, professional and social identity have been linked to the development of burnout, no research exploring the relationship between role identity as conceptualised here and burnout could be found. Furthermore, most research on subjective identity perceptions and burnout has focused on the way in which identification with a specific occupational, professional or social identity contributes to the development of burnout. The present study departs from this focus on identification processes by exploring how specific role identities in the client service environment can contribute to the development of burnout.

According to Hogg, Terry and White (1995: 25) role identities are the self-descriptions that individuals use to interpret situations and subsequently construct role-related behavioural expectations. By employing a complex identity feedback loop where role-related outcomes are compared with role-related expectations, individuals construct role identities. Through this process, employees define the kinds of relationships that they are expected to maintain with others within the work context (Czander, 1993: 1169). These role identities subsequently inform role-related behaviours and subjective perceptions about interpersonal relationships at work.

In view of the fact that the relationship between burnout and role identity may be mediated by the kinds of role-related behaviour the individual engages in and the subjective perceptions that the individual holds, the research also explores these mechanisms. As indicated in **Figure 1**, the present research argues that burnout results from role-related behaviours and subjective perceptions which are informed by the kinds of role identities that client service employees adopt. The research further maintains that the process of role identity verification, where the individual endeavours to match his role-related behaviour with the role-related expectations contained in the role identity, also carries implications for the development of burnout. Individuals who are unable to match their role-related expectations with the outcomes of the situation, experience failed self-verification, resulting in feelings of defeat, diminished self-esteem, and possibly burnout.

The present research explores whether the postulated relationships presented in **Figure 1** exist, and what kinds of client service role identities may predispose the client service employee to burnout.

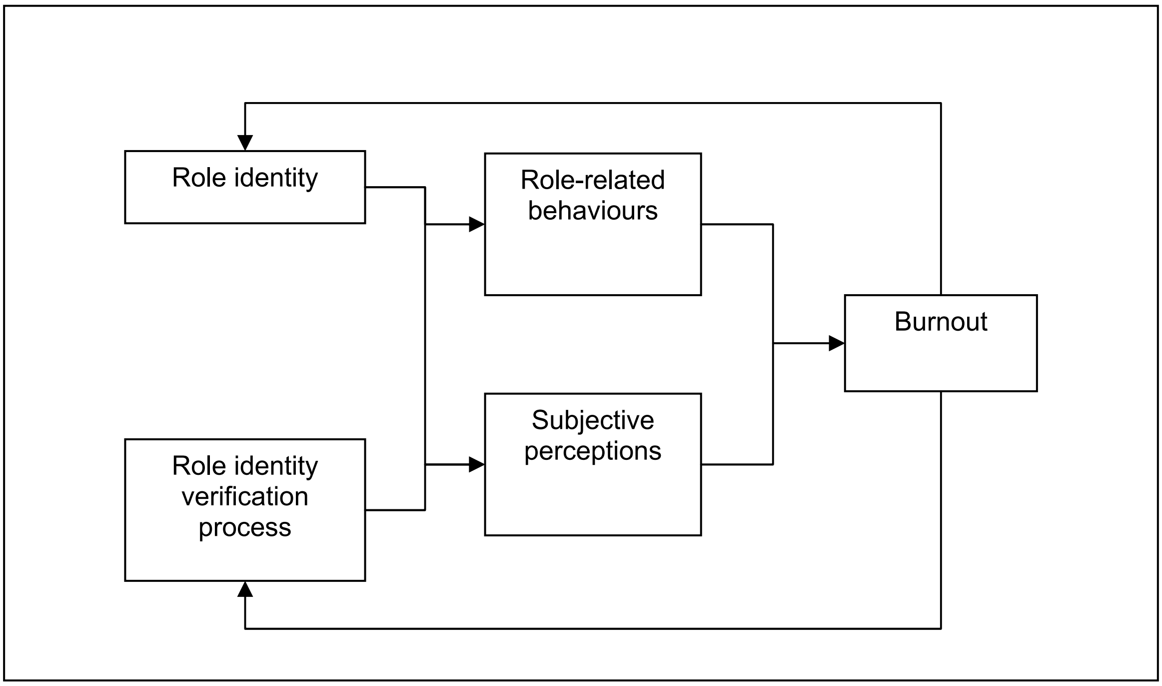

Figure 1: Postulated relationship between role identity and burnout

The causal paths indicated in the model are deduced from the theory pertaining to role identity and burnout which will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review (Chapter 2). It should be noted, however, that the present research is explorative and descriptive and is therefore not concerned with empirically testing the direction or strength of paths between variables presented in the model. Instead, the research explores the possibility of relationships among the concepts as deduced from the theory and indicated in **Figure 1**. The research argument and theoretical framework linking role identity and burnout will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The behavioural expectations underpinning the construction of employee role identities are communicated to the employee through the client discourse of the organisation. Through the process of identity construction, employees draw on this discourse and construct role identities that inform subsequent behaviours and subjective perceptions. This discourse is generally articulated by organisational management and communicated through formal organisational texts such as recruitment literature, appraisal documentation and marketing documents as well as more informal mechanisms including organisational rituals and conversations. Through this discourse, the employees' understanding of the client and how to behave towards them is shaped (Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson, 2000: 1162). The manner in which the organisation defines the client carries both implicit and explicit expectations as to how the employee should relate to the client and the kind of role that the employee should assume in relation to the client (Anderson–Gough *et al.*, 2000). Depending on the nature of the client discourse communicated by the organisation, and the extent to which the employee identifies with this discourse, the role identity constructed by the employee may imply subordination of his/her needs and the consequent elevation of the needs and demands of the client. In such scenarios, the employee could suffer emotional exhaustion due to constant striving to fulfil the (often) unreasonable demands of powerful clients.

While it is noted that client service organisations are by their very nature necessarily driven by a strong client orientation and, to some extent, require that the client is placed in a position of power relative to the employee; employees should be protected from extreme demands and unreasonable pressures resulting from such client discourse. The present research therefore also explores the manner in which client service employees perceive, internalise and interpret the organisational client discourse in the construction of their role identities. In so doing, the research makes a practical contribution through recommendations aimed at the cultivation of organisational client discourse that supports the empowerment of client service employees.

1.3 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In the paragraphs that follow, the key concepts employed during the current research will be defined. While the research is primarily focused on burnout, role identity and organisational client discourse, a number of additional concepts pertinent to the research argument will also be defined. These include "client service employee", "client", "self-verification" and "emotional labour".

1.3.1. Burnout

For the purpose of this study, burnout has been conceptualised as comprising three components, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. This definition conforms to the original definition of burnout developed by Maslach (1982) and corresponds to the three components as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). Emotional exhaustion manifests as both physical and psychological stress and is characterised by a loss of energy and feeling worn-out (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Depersonalisation refers to the interpersonal aspect of burnout and is characterised by attempts to distance oneself psychologically from service recipients. It is accompanied by a detached, emotionally callous attitude towards service recipients (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach *et al.,* 2001). Reduced personal accomplishment comprises an aspect of self-evaluation and is characterised by negative evaluations of the self and feelings associated with failure (Maslach *et al.,* 2001).

It should be noted that the MBI-HSS was developed for use in contexts were respondents provide a service, care or treatment to a recipient (Maslach, 1982). Later, the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS) was developed for use in situations where respondents do not necessarily interact with clients. As a result, the three components of burnout were more broadly conceptualised in relation to the job as emotional exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy. While the client service employees who form part of the present study do not necessarily deal with the physical or psychological problems of their clients, they do interact closely with their clients on a daily basis. It was therefore purposefully decided to use the MBI-HSS instead of the MBI-S to measure burnout in the present study.

1.3.2. Role identity

The concept of identity has been frequently applied in both the social and behavioural sciences (Ng & Feldman, 2007: 116). As a result, numerous theoretical traditions have explored the concept, resulting in as many conceptualisations of the term (Burke, 2003: 1). Social identity theory, for instance, assumes that one's identity is linked to the social category to which one belongs, while personal identity theory focuses on the individual's sense of self as constituting the core of his/her role identity (Burke, 2003).

Role identities act as a frame of reference that individuals use to interpret a variety of social situations, thereby influencing role-related behaviour by informing behavioural expectations (Burke & Tully, 1977: 84; Thoits, 1991: 103). According to Hogg *et al.,* (1995: 257), role identities are "self conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy, and through a process of labelling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category". In other words, role identities can be defined as the meanings that individuals attach to themselves within particular situations. These meanings encompass a set of expectations that prescribe appropriate behaviour within a specific role-related situation. This implies that in the client service arena, the role identities of client service employees may largely be informed by the client discourse of the organisation.

1.3.3. Organisational client discourse

According to Grant, Keenoy and Oswick (1998: 1) organisational discourse comprises the "languages and symbolic media we employ to describe, present, interpret and theorise what we take to be the facticity of organisational life". Traditionally, discourse was described only as spoken dialogue, and excluded reference to written texts. Contemporary theory on discourse, however, includes both written and spoken texts, cultural artefacts and modes of thinking such as ideologies and philosophies (Cooren, 2004: 373; Van Dijk, 1997: 2). As a combination of spoken words, written texts and artefacts, discourse arranges social reality into concepts, objects and subjects, thereby shaping the social practices in which we engage (Phillips & Hardy, 1997).

Discourse drives subjectivity, enables us to make sense of ourselves and the organisations in which we operate and frames the way we understand and engage with the realities around us (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000: 1130). Furthermore, discourse drives the articulation of norms and informs the attitudes that we assume in particular contexts (Grant *et al.*, 2001: 8). According to Heracleous and Marshak (2004: 1291) the discursive construction of identity takes place through social interaction. In the organisational context it occurs when managers "author" their experiences in the process of interacting with others. In so doing, a shared sense of identity is created in the organisation, framing appropriate ways to talk and act.

It should be noted, however that organisations are not mere collectivities of shared meanings, but that they are constituted through an array of different and often competing discourses (Van Dijk, 1997). While organisations generally function according to a dominant managerially defined discourse, cognisance should be taken of the fact that a number of competing discourses could function within a single organisation, and simultaneously impact on the formation of employee identity.

1.3.4 Client service employees

For the purposes of the present study, client service employees are defined as individuals in service positions who fulfil a boundary-spanning role. For inclusion in the present study, all respondents were required to engage with the client(s) on a daily basis. The type of engagement was not specified and could include telephonic, face-to-face or electronically-facilitated communication.

1.3.5 Clients

Clients are defined as either individuals representing a client company to which a service is rendered or private individuals to whom a service is rendered. In the context of the present study, the focus is on the role identity of the client service employee. Measurement and identification of this identity is done in accordance with the Burke and Tully (1977) definition of role identity, which asserts that role identities only exist insofar they can be distinguished from a relevant counter-role. In this instance, the meaning of the client service role identity is only significant in terms of similarities and differences it shares with the client role. The client is therefore also referred to as the "counter-role".

1.3.6 Self-verification

The concept "self-verification" is used in the context of role identity theory and refers to the process by which an individual evaluates his/her behaviours according to the role-related expectations contained within the role identity (Burke, 2004b: 5). When the individual's perception of the situation matches the expectations contained within the role identity, self-verification occurs. If, however, there is a mismatch between the individual's behaviour and role-related expectations, failed self-verification occurs (Burke, 2004b: 6).

1.3.7 Emotional labour

Emotional labour refers to the management of emotions to "create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983: 7) and occurs frequently in service roles. Service employees are often required by the organisations for which they work to regulate the display of emotion within the service context. Emotional labour is performed through either surface acting or deep acting (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting involves the display of emotions that are not actually felt. Deep acting, on the other hand, occurs when the employee actually attempts to feel or experience the emotion that he/she is required to display (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003).

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objective of the research is to explore the relationship between burnout and role identity amongst client service employees. It will also describe the mechanisms by virtue of which this relationship exists and examine the extent to which these role identities are constructed in response to the dominant organisational client discourse.

In order to investigate the relationship between role identity and burnout, a sequential mixed-methods design is used. First, quantitative research is conducted by means of a questionnaire measuring burnout and client service role identity. Burnout is measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI–HSS), while role identity is measured using a modified version of the Burke-Tully (1977) role identity measure. A number of biographic and demographic variables are included in the questionnaire, along with items measuring orientation towards work, life, the organisation and important stakeholders. Analysis of the quantitative data commences with the Maximum Likelihood Factor Analysis (MLFA) of the MBI−HSS items, followed by Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) and Correlation analyses. The quantitative phase of the research is followed by semi-structured qualitative interviews with a purposively selected sample of higher burnout and lower burnout client service employees. The qualitative data derived from the interviews is analysed using Atlas.ti™ qualitative data analysis software and proceeds using Miles and Huberman's (1994) model of open, axial and selective coding.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

In order to examine whether a relationship between role identity and burnout exists among client service employees, the study commences with a thorough literature review. Since the subject matter of the present research encompasses topics derived from a number of disciplines including organisational behaviour, sociology and social psychology, careful consideration has been given to the manner in which previous research on the topic is presented. The literature review therefore comprises two primary sections; the first dealing with burnout and the second with role identity and organisational discourse.

Due to the volume of previous literature covered in Chapter 2, a separate research argument chapter (Chapter 3) is devoted to a thorough synthesis and analysis of the literature as it pertains to the present study. In this chapter, the theory presented in the literature review is integrated through the construction of a conceptual model. This chapter will also present the research questions pertinent to the study.

The methodology chapter (Chapter 4) is presented next and includes a detailed explanation of the research instrumentation, sampling methodology and analysis procedures. The results of the factor analysis of the MBI−HSS are also presented here.

Next, the quantitative data are presented (Chapter 5), followed by the presentation of the qualitative data (Chapter 6). The dissertation concludes with a discussion chapter (Chapter 7) in which the results of the study are interpreted using the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 3. The significance and limitations of the present research are also presented, followed by recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 STRESS AND BURNOUT IN CLIENT SERVICE ENVIRONMENTS

A number of studies have examined the potential negative effect of stress-related variables and burnout in customer or client service environments (Griffiths, 2001; Low *et al.*, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002; Witt *et al.*, 2004). Through their front line interaction with clients, customer service representatives are highly susceptible to the kinds of role stress that contribute to burnout (Yagil, 2006: 259). According to Singh (2000: 15) client service employees are generally underpaid, overworked and suffer considerable stress due to the fact that their performance is measured through the satisfaction of both the client and management. Furthermore, client service employees often find themselves in precarious positions professionally, when they have to reconcile the needs of the organisation with the oftentimes conflicting needs of the client (Ashill, Rod, Thirkell & Carruthers, 2009; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Varca, 2009). Chung and Schneider (2002: 71) put this succinctly when they state that “in manufacturing firms, there is only one distinct authority or boss, whereas in service firms, there is another master to serve – the customer”.

Chung and Schneider (2002: 71) maintain that while the role of the boundary-spanning client service professional is probably one of the most complex from an organisational behaviour perspective, it has received comparatively little attention in the management literature:

“One would also naturally expect that there would be considerable attention from researchers regarding the complexity of the issues service employees face in their jobs. Unfortunately, to date, there has been both little management attention and little empirical research on service employees and human resource practices in service firms” (Chung & Schneider, 2002: 71).

In an attempt to address the gap, Chung and Schneider (2002: 71) examine the extent to which a discrepancy between management and client expectations of the service role results in role conflict. They found partial support for the hypothesis that role conflict emerges when there is a discrepancy between what employees think customers expect of them and what they report management rewards them for doing.

Cordes and Dougherty (1993) regard the client−employee relationship as the most important variable to consider in the development of burnout, since clients are often able to exert considerable influence over client serving employees through both formal and informal evaluations (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), due to the fact that the employee's company is dependent on the client for business (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Client service employees can therefore find themselves in compromising and emotionally exhausting positions when they believe that they are unable to meet the demands of their clients (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993: 644). This feeling of incompetence is strengthened when employees feel that they are not sufficiently empowered due to organisational policies or when they lack the necessary skills and aptitude to deal adequately with client requests (Varca, 2009).

As organisations become increasingly customer focused, clients are "treated as if they were managers" and have become the "moral centre of the enterprising universe" (Du Gay & Salaman, 1992: 622); exerting considerable control over client service employees. By positioning the client in such a way, the client discourse of the service organisation can place considerable pressure on client service employees to meet the needs of the client at all costs. Research by Anderson-Gough *et al.* (2000) demonstrates how the client ethic of a service organisation as communicated through its client discourse plays a role in shaping the behaviours and beliefs of employees within the organisation. The manner in which an organisation symbolically and abstractly refers to, presents and defines its clients through its client discourse carries implications for the way in which client service employees perceive the relationship with their clients. It also carries implications for the manner in which they define their roles within that relationship. Organisations with a strong service ethic may define the client in such a way as to suggest to employees that they subordinate their own needs in order to adequately meet the needs and desires of the client.

As already mentioned, limited research has examined the role subjective identity perceptions in the development of stress-related syndromes. The current research addressed this gap in the literature by focusing on burnout amongst employees within a client service setting. The research departs from the traditional focus on situational variables as the primary antecedent to burnout, and instead focuses on the relationship between role identity and burnout. The literature presented in this chapter therefore consists of two sections. The first section commences with a thorough review of the burnout literature, including a discussion of the historical development of the construct, its conceptualisation and measurement and antecedents to and consequences of the burnout syndrome. The second half of the chapter incorporates a thorough explication of the role identity literature, its measurement and the role of organisation discourse in the formation of employee role identity.

2.2 BURNOUT

2.2.1 The historical development of the burnout concept

Research into the concept of burnout has not always received the intellectual support and attention that it has received over the last two decades. The first empirical publication presenting the Maslach Burnout Inventory (probably the most widely applied instrument to measure burnout) was rejected by the publication to which it was submitted on the grounds that it fell within the ambit of "pop psychology" (Maslach *et al.*, 2001: 308). Despite this initial lack of confidence in the scientific validity of the construct, the concept of burnout has initiated numerous intellectual debates regarding its conceptualisation and application. Appropriately, Cordes, Dougherty and Blum (1997: 688) note that the research into burnout "has undergone an iterative metamorphosis, swinging between advances in conceptualisation and empirical study".

Prior to its introduction into the scientific literature in 1974, the concept of burnout enjoyed colloquial use across a number of settings (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993: 2). As far as could be established, the first documented use of the word was in 1953, when Schwartz published the now-famous case of Miss Jones, a psychiatric nurse who suffered from symptoms he referred to as burnout. In 1960, Green (1960), published *A Burnt Out Case,* which tells the story of a spiritually anguished architect who resigns from his job to live in the African jungle. Despite the colloquial use of the term for almost two decades, the term "burnout" was first introduced into the scientific literature by Freudenberger (1974), a psychiatrist working for an alternative health care agency. While working with volunteers at the agency, he noticed how many of these volunteers experienced gradual emotional exhaustion and applied the term "burnout" to their symptoms.

At roughly the same time, Christina Maslach, a social psychology researcher who was studying how physicians and nurses cope with emotional arousal on the job, observed how a number of these medical practitioners detached or disengaged psychologically from recipients (Maslach, 1978). Maslach observed that physicians and nurses often displayed a negative shift in terms of their feelings towards patients over time, and as a result, appeared to emotionally detach themselves from their patients. This detachment hampered their ability to perform their work according to initial expectations they had set for themselves and resulted in feelings of failure and hopelessness (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993: 3). Maslach referred to these symptoms as burnout and only later discovered that the term had been colloquially applied by poverty lawyers working with people in need. Once Maslach realised that the term had been applied in the legal profession, she began examining the concept across a range of occupations within the helping professions. Between 1977 and 1980 she embarked on a number of pilot studies with colleague Ayala Pines (Maslach & Pines, 1977; Pines & Maslach, 1978; Pines & Maslach, 1980) through which they uncovered the first two dimensions of the burnout syndrome, namely emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation (Maslach, 1993: 21-25).

Research into burnout during the 1970s was generally conducted by practitioners from the human service professions including education, social services, medicine, criminal justice and mental health. The concept was initially applied to a host of personal and job-related problems and research was generally non-empirical, descriptive and qualitative (Maslach & Leiter, 1997: 27), focusing almost exclusively on the relational aspects of people work (Maslach *et al.,* 2001: 400).

The 1980s were characterised by a host of empirical studies on burnout restricted predominantly to the United States. Through a number of subsequent studies (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; 1984) “reduced feelings of personal accomplishment” was added as a third component of the burnout syndrome. As a result, burnout was conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct comprising three components, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993: 27). Burnout could therefore no longer be purely defined as a stress reaction caused by personal relations on the job, but now also comprised a self-evaluatory component in the form of personal accomplishment. Maslach and Jackson (1981) went on to develop the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), while the Tedium Measure (later referred to as the Burnout Measure) was developed by Pines, Aronson and Kafry (1981). The development of burnout measures resulted in a proliferation of empirical studies during the 1980s and 1990s which primarily focused on the antecedents to and consequences of burnout. Since the MBI predominated as the burnout measure of choice, a number of studies examined the validity of the three factor conceptualisation of the construct and the relationship between these factors (Green, Walkey & Taylor, 1991; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter, 1990; 1991). In a number of cases, alternative conceptualisations have been proposed (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1981, 1984; 1988; Green *et al.*, 1991).

In 1996 the MBI was extended for application outside of the human services profession (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996) and resulted in the development of the MBI General Survey (MBI−GS). As a result, more recent research into burnout has been characterised by the extension of the concept to professions outside of the human services and the subsequent validation of the MBI−GS (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo & Schaufeli, 2000).

Maslach and Leiter (1997: 7) cite the changing nature of the workplace as one of the primary contributing factors to the prevalence of burnout, which, according to them, is reaching “epidemic proportions”. As the workplace becomes economically and psychologically more hostile and demanding, the negative psychological and behavioural effects of burnout will assume a central position on the research agendas of psychologists and organisational behaviourists alike (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). As mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation, research into the burnout syndrome is no longer restricted to human service professionals who are intensely involved with client's psychological, social or physical problems. Recent research suggests that the conditions that perpetuate the development of burnout are evident across a range of industries and occupations and result in a number of detrimental consequences for both the individual and the organisation (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009).

The development of the burnout concept has therefore enjoyed a rich and interesting history despite its early colloquial application. Commenting on the development of the phenomenon in one of her more recent publications, Maslach (2003: 189) had the following to say:

"Thus the trajectory of burnout research began with a real social problem rather than with derivations from scholarly theory. In other words, it followed a grass-roots, bottom up path rather than a top-down one" (Maslach, 2003: 189).

The more recent scientific developments pertaining to burnout are discussed in more detail in the relevant sections that follow.

2.2.2 Definitions of burnout

Research into burnout has been predominated by the conceptualisation proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1986), which defines burnout as comprising three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. Compared to other variables in the organisational behaviour literature, burnout has not been subject to many debates surrounding definition, resulting in the pervasiveness of the Maslach definition. The following section will provide an integrated summary of some of the few alternatives to the Maslach and Jackson (1986) definition proposed above.

Definitions of burnout can be categorised as “state” and “process” definitions (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 31). While state definitions focus on the overt characteristics of the burnout syndrome, process definitions are more concerned with the affective and behavioural consequences associated with burnout in the longer term.

2.2.2.1 State definitions of burnout

As mentioned previously, the most pervasive state definition of burnout is the one developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986: 1). Their definition conceptualises burnout as a syndrome comprising the three distinct, yet related, components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of both physical and emotional resources and associated feelings of dread and fatigue. Depersonalisation refers to a detached and cynical attitude towards work, clients and co-workers and is characterised by withdrawal behaviours, the use of negative or derogatory language towards people at work and intellectualisation of the work situation. Diminished personal accomplishment is characterised by lowered self-esteem and feelings of losing ground (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

A number of state definitions of burnout are presented in **Table 1**. The far right hand column of the table includes a short summary of some of the main components of each of the definitions presented.

Table 1: State definitions of burnout

Author	***Definition***	***Component***
Freudenberger & Richelson (1980: 13)	"… state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, a way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward."	1 Tied to unmet expectations 2 Exhaustion/frustration 3 Not necessarily work-related
Perlman & Hartman (1982)	Burnout is a response to extreme emotional stress characterised by emotional and physical exhaustion, declining productivity and over-depersonalisation.	1 Emotional and physical exhaustion 2 Depersonalisation
Brill (1984: 15)	"Burnout is an expectationally mediated, job-related, dysphoric and dysfunctional state in an individual without major psychopathology who has 1) functioned for a time at adequate performance and effective levels in the same job situations and who 2) will not recover to previous levels without outside help or environmental rearrangement."	1 Tied to unmet expectations 2 Work-related 3 Occurs in otherwise "normal" individuals 4 Leads to reduced levels of performance
Maslach & Jackson (1986: 1)	"Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals that do people work of some kind."	1 Exhaustion 2 Depersonalisation 3 Reduced l accomplishment 4 Multi-dimensional 5 Interpersonal 6 Work-related
Pines & Aronson (1988)	"A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, caused by emotionally demanding situations."	1 Physical, emotional and mental exhaustion 2 Not necessarily work-related

As can be deducted from **Table 1**, most burnout researchers are in agreement that the construct does include an aspect of exhaustion. The definitions do, however, diverge in terms of the kinds of exhaustion that manifest as a result of burnout. Pines and Aronson (1988) include both physical exhaustion (fatigue, weakness, low energy) and mental exhaustion (negative attitude towards self, others, work and life) alongside emotional exhaustion (feelings of helplessness and hopelessness). Perlman and Hartman (1982) refer only to physical and emotional exhaustion in their literature. Freudenberger and Richelson (1980: 13) and Pines and Aronson (1988) define the concept as uni-dimensional, while Maslach and Jackson's (1986: 1) definition is multi-dimensional, incorporating aspects of exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment.

A further point of divergence surrounding the state definitions of burnout is whether the phenomenon is work-related or whether it can occur across a range of situations outside of work. Maslach and Jackson (1986) originally conceptualised the burnout syndrome as originating from interpersonal contexts where employees engage with clients, patients or recipients on a daily basis, but this definition was eventually extended to include other occupations (Maslach *et al.*, 1996). Freudenberger and Richelson (1980) and Pines and Aronson (1988) however, never restricted burnout to employees doing people work and instead maintained that burnout could occur in any context that involved long-term exposure to emotionally demanding situations.

A number of researchers have examined the role of expectations in the development of burnout. Freudenberger and Richelson (1980) link burnout to the failed attainment of expected rewards. Brill (1984: 16) maintains that burnout is "expectationally mediated", suggesting that expectations are pivotal in the development of burnout. While the role of expectations is not central to the definition proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1986), a number of studies (discussed in subsequent sections) have examined the role of expectations in the development of burnout (Cherniss, 1980; 1983; Stevens & O'Neil, 1983).

2.2.2.2 Process definitions of burnout

Process definitions of burnout apply less focus to the overt characteristics of the burnout phenomenon, and instead focus on the long-term consequences for attitudes, values and behaviours. As can be deducted from the process definitions of burnout presented in **Table 2**, they differ from the state definitions in that they concentrate largely on the behavioural and affective implications of burnout, while the state definitions tend to focus on the causes of burnout.

Table 2: Process definitions of burnout

Author	***Definition***	***Components***
Cherniss (1980: 5)	"Burnout refers to a process in which the professional's attitudes and behaviour change in negative ways in response to job strain."	1 Results in negative attitudes and behaviours 2 Caused by job demands
Edelwich & Brodsky (1980)	"…progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work."	1 Results in negative attitudes towards work 2 Caused by work conditions 3 Develops over long term
Maslach & Leiter (1997: 17)	"Burnout represents an erosion of values, dignity, spirit and will – an erosion of the human soul. It is a malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people in a downward spiral from which it is hard to recover."	1 Develops over long term 2 Affects values, dignity and spirit 3 Difficult for the individual to recover

Common to the process definitions above is the fact that burnout is largely work-related, and results in negative attitudes. Cherniss (1980: 15) describes burnout as consisting of three stages, commencing with an imbalance between demands placed on an individual and resources to cope with these demands. This then results in emotional tension and fatigue, ultimately changing attitudes and behaviours. Maslach and Leiter (1997: 17) offer a vivid process definition of the phenomenon, as having a devastating impact on individual will, values and dignity. Similarly, Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) refer to burnout as affecting individual purpose, ideals and energy. As depicted in **Table 2**, process definitions place less focus on the exhaustion component of the burnout syndrome, and instead prioritise the fact that burnout affects attitudes, values and individual will over the longer term.

In an attempt to reconcile the state and process definitions of burnout, Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998: 36) describe burnout as:

"A persistent, negative, work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals that is primarily characterised by exhaustion, which is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work. This psychological condition develops gradually but may remain unnoticed for a long time by the individual involved" (Shaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 36).

Although varied in both depth and scope, the majority of burnout definitions do describe the phenomenon as job-related, occurring amongst individuals that would otherwise be classified as "normal". Burnout develops over time in response to conditions that place undue demands on the individual. These demands ultimately result in a number of adverse attitudinal and behavioural outcomes that carry direct consequences for performance at work.

Maslach and Schaufeli (1993: 15) list five elements common to a number of burnout definitions. These include:

- Burnout is predominantly characterised by "dysphoric symptoms" such as fatigue, depression, anxiety and mental and physical exhaustion.
- While physical symptoms are evident, the focus is on mental and behavioural symptoms.
- The symptoms and the causes of burnout are work-related.
- The symptoms of burnout manifest in otherwise healthy individuals that do not display elements of psychopathology.
- Burnout results in lowered levels of work performance, due primarily to negative attitudes and behaviours.

As mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation, the definition of burnout developed by Maslach and colleagues (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993) will be used in the context of the study. Since the focus of the current study is on burnout amongst client service employees, the burnout construct is treated as a work-related variable that has both behavioural and emotional/psychological symptoms.

2.2.3 The Maslach definition of burnout

Maslach and Jackson (1986) initially defined burnout as a psychological syndrome that develops in response to interpersonal job stressors. It was further conceptualised as including an individual stress dimension, an interpersonal dimension and a self-evaluation dimension (Maslach *et al.*, 1996; Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Emotional exhaustion refers to the individual stress component of the syndrome and occurs amongst individuals that are "over-extended" and depleted of both emotional and physical resources. Depersonalisation corresponds to the interpersonal component, and refers to the negative, detached feeling one develops towards others at work. Personal accomplishment includes the self-evaluation dimension and is characterised by feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement (Maslach *et al.*, 2001: 399). As originally proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1986), the burnout syndrome is precipitated by feelings of emotional exhaustion characterised by reduced physical and emotional energy. In order to conserve resources, the individual adopts a callous, detached attitude towards work, which impacts on his/her self-evaluation.

Schaufeli (2003: 2) has elaborated on this definition slightly by stating that emotional exhaustion signifies the energetic dimension of burnout, while depersonalisation and personal accomplishment denote the attitudinal and evaluative dimensions of the phenomenon respectively.

2.2.4 The burnout dimensions

A number of scholars have argued against the three-dimension conceptualisation, and have instead proposed conceptualisations comprising two (Green *et al.*, 1991;

Holland, Michael & Kim, 1994; Shirom, 1989) and even five dimensions (Densten, 2001). Green *et al.,* (1991) and Holland *et al.* (1994) have proposed a two-factor conceptualisation comprising emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. This two-factor conceptualisation was originally proposed by Shirom (1989) who maintained that reduced feelings of personal accomplishment may, in fact, be an outcome of burnout, rather than a distinct component of the syndrome. Little additional support has been found for this two-dimensional conceptualisation, although a number of scholars do concur that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation constitute the core dimensions of the burnout construct, with personal accomplishment is regarded as the weakest dimension (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001: 500). Numerous structural analyses of the MBI have found support for the central, although not exclusive role of emotional exhaustion (Lee & Ashforth, 1990; 1993a; Leiter, 1993). These analyses conclude that emotional exhaustion appears to be the dimension that is most affected by the organisational environment and mediates the relationship between the environment and depersonalisation (Maslach, *et al.*, 1996: 34).

Lee and Ashforth (1990: 713) tested the dimensions of burnout as measured by the MBI using confirmatory factor analysis on a sample of supervisors and managers in the human service professions. They found support for the three factors even though emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation displayed strong correlations. In 1996, Lee and Ashforth (1996: 128) embarked on a "meta-analytic" study of the three dimensions. Their research again found support for the three dimensions, although personal accomplishment developed largely independently from the other two dimensions.

Densten (2001) proposes a five-factor structure where emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation are split into two factors each. According to Densten (2001), emotional exhaustion comprises both psychological strain and somatic strain aspects, while personal accomplishment relates to both self views and the perception of external views from others. He originally also proposed that depersonalisation also comprise two independent factors relating to job depersonalisation and personal depersonalisation, although a test of the conceptual and psychometric properties of the MBI disconfirmed this hypothesis (Densten, 2001: 835).

2.2.5 Burnout as a process

2.2.5.1 The temporal sequence proposed by Maslach and colleagues

Maslach and Jackson (1986) originally proposed that the three dimensions discussed above are related through a temporal developmental process commencing with emotional exhaustion and culminating in a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. According to them, individuals suffering from emotional exhaustion attempt to cope with excessive job demands by trying to conserve resources. In so doing, the individual may withdraw both physically and psychologically from work, resulting in a cynical and detached attitude towards work, the client and/or co-workers. This withdrawal ultimately results in a discrepancy between the individual's current attitude towards work and his/her original expectations of performance, resulting in a sense of decreased personal accomplishment.

This temporal sequence of burnout dimensions (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) has been challenged by a number of scholars. While Leiter (Leiter & Maslach, 1988) originally concurred with Maslach and Jackson (1986) that emotional exhaustion develops first in response to a range of environmental conditions, followed by depersonalisation and then feelings of reduced personal accomplishment, he subsequently deviated from this position (Leiter, 1990, 1991). Instead he suggests that while depersonalisation follows from emotional exhaustion, feelings of reduced personal accomplishment develop separately in response to the work environment. Later, Leiter (1993) maintained that feelings of reduced personal accomplishment may occur as a consequence of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation or as a result of a shortage of relevant resources. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, on the other hand, occur as a result of work overload and/or social conflict.

2.2.5.2 The Golembiewski and Munzenrider eight-phase model

Maslach and colleagues (Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Maslach & Jackson, 1986) are not the only researchers that have proposed a temporal sequence for the burnout dimensions. A number of scholars maintain that while the burnout dimensions may develop in sequence, the order of this sequence differs from that proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1986). Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1981, 1984, 1988) suggest that depersonalisation occurs first, followed by feelings of reduced personal accomplishment and then emotional exhaustion. According to Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1981, 1984), a certain degree of detachment from work and recipients, which results in the development of depersonalisation, is necessary in some occupations such as the medical professions. Continued depersonalisation, however, begins to interfere with performance, thereby affecting perceptions of personal accomplishment. The chronic perpetuation of the conditions described above could eventually result in the development of emotional exhaustion. Using this sequential model, Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1988) generated an eight-phase model. Each phase in the eight-phase model is characterised by a combination of either high or low emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation or personal accomplishment.

The validity of the eight-phase model has, however, been questioned – most notably through the work of Cordes and Dougherty (1993) and Cordes *et al.* (1997). According to Cordes and Dougherty (1993: 621), while Golembiewski and Munzenreider (1988) made use of the MBI in development of the eight-phase model, items included in the measure were modified to refer to co-workers as opposed to service recipients. Two of the original MBI items were dropped and an additional three items were added. The measure also deviated from the frequency scale included in the original MBI and instead adopted a Likert scale ranging from 1 = very much unlike me to 7 = very much like me. While the resultant measure produced three clusters, resulting in a total of eight phases corresponding to high or low scores on each of the three dimensions, the research cannot refute the three cluster conceptualisation proposed by Maslach, since the instrument used to derive the eight phases differed from the MBI.

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, Cordes *et al*. (1997) tested the Maslach three-factor model and a set of predictor variables against the Golembiewski model and set of predictors. The research found support for the Maslach three-factor model but proposed that each of the three components is differentially related to a set of predictor variables.

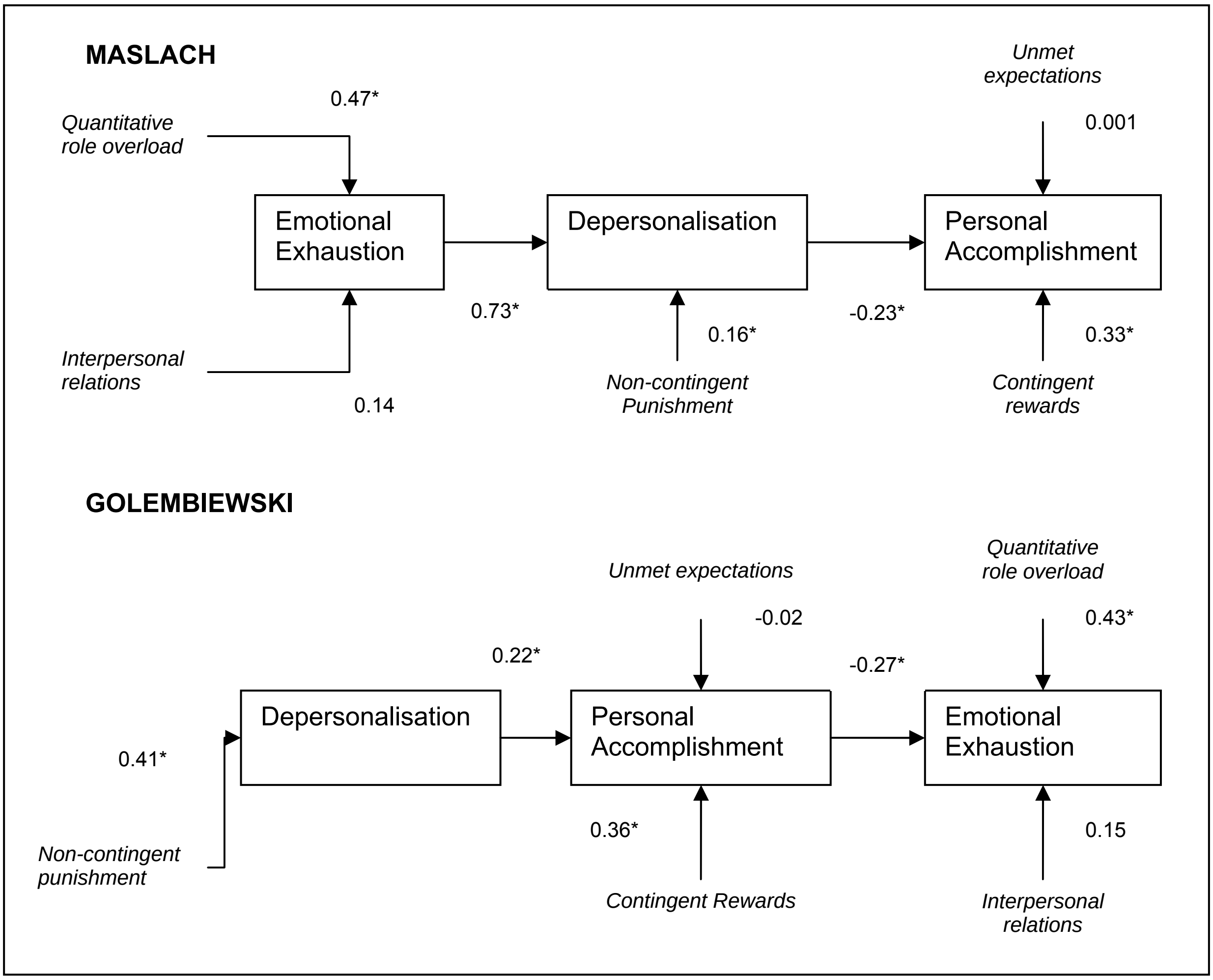

Figure 2: The Maslach and Golembiewski models of burnout compared (Cordes *et al*., 1997)

As shown in **Figure 2**, while significant paths were displayed between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, reduced feelings of personal accomplishment were also contingent upon the non-receipt of rewards and unmet expectations. Furthermore, while the development of depersonalisation was contingent upon feelings of emotional exhaustion, non-contingent punishment also affected the development of depersonalisation. For instance, when individuals find themselves in situations that they find uncontrollable or random, they may depersonalise their relationships with clients, co-workers, supervisors and subordinates. Emotional exhaustion was found to be contingent upon quantitative role overload and interpersonal interactions. The study is noteworthy because, with the exception of the study by Lee and Ashforth (1993a) it is the only piece of research found that tests the two competing models on the same set of respondents.

In response to the generally inconclusive research regarding the temporal sequence of the burnout components, Lewin & Sager (2007) maintain that sequencing of the three components may be dependent on aspects related to the specific occupational context of respondents. They subsequently proposed and tested a different progression of the burnout components among salespeople. Their results indicate that reduced personal accomplishment occurs first, followed by emotional exhaustion and finally, depersonalisation (Lewin & Sager, 2007).

While the present study will not empirically test or attempt to validate any of the proposed temporal sequences of burnout, it is important in the context of the current study to acknowledge that the burnout components may occur in a temporal sequence. Since the MBI measures each of the three components using a separate scale for each, individuals scoring high on one of the burnout components and possibly low on another, may still be progressing through the sequence that comprises the burnout experience.

2.2.6 The measurement of burnout

2.2.6.1 The Maslach Burnout Inventory

Although a detailed discussion of the MBI takes place in the next chapter on methodology, a brief discussion on the measurement of burnout is entertained here. It is intended that a brief analysis of the MBI and alternative measures of burnout is followed by a rationale for the use of the MBI in the present study as opposed to other measures.

As outlined in the opening sections of this chapter, the 1980s marked the beginning of a plethora of empirical work on the subject and the subsequent development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) − probably the most widely used instrument in the measurement of burnout.

The original MBI, developed in 1986, was primarily utilised within the human service professions. In 1996, the instrument was revised to include three separate surveys. The MBI – Human Services Survey (MBI−HSS) is applicable to employees working across the human service professions, where interaction with recipients is the primary work focus. The MBI – Educators Survey (MBI−ES) is relevant to the educational arena through the replacement of the word “recipients” with “students” (Schaufeli, 2003: 2), while the MBI – General Survey (MBI−GS) can be applied to any job situation (Schaufeli, 2003: 4).

In accordance with the Maslach and Jackson (1986) definition of burnout which states that burnout occurs amongst individuals that do people work of some kind, the original MBI (subsequently referred to as the MBI Human Services Survey or MBI−HSS) was developed for application in situations where the employee provides a service, care or treatment to a recipient. These occupations are generally accompanied by the development of strong emotional feelings towards the client or service recipient. The MBI−HSS was subsequently adapted for use amongst educators (Maslach, Jackson & Schwab, 1996) and became known as the MBI – Educators Survey (MBI−ES). The MBI−ES does not differ significantly from the MBI−HSS, only in that only the word “recipients” is replaced with the word “students”.

Although traditionally almost exclusively applied to assess burnout in the human service or helping professions, the concept of burnout has been successfully applied across a range of industries and occupational groupings. The concept has been investigated amongst teachers (Buunk *et al.*, 2007); hospitality workers (Kuruuzum, Anafarta & Irmak, 2008); HR managers and professionals (Cordes *et al.*, 1997; Rothmann, 2004), local government employees (Rothman *et al.*, 2003); pharmacists (Storm & Rothman, 2003), psychiatric nurses (Heyns, Venter, Esterhuyse, Bam & Odendaal, 2003; Levert, Lucas & Ortlepp, 2000;), higher education employees (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006; Rothmann & Essenko, 2007; Rothmann & Barkhuizen, 2008; Pretorius, 1992; 1994; Pienaar & Van Wyk, 2006), salespeople (Low *et al.*, 2001) and customer service representatives (Campbell & Rothmann, 2005).

A number of researchers have made use of the original MBI, albeit in a modified format when assessing burnout amongst employees who fall outside of the human service professions. Golembiewski, Boudreau, Munzenrider and Lou (1996) for instance, substituted the word “recipient” with “co-worker” within the depersonalisation and personal accomplishment scales. Lee and Ashforth (1993b) substituted the word "recipients" with "subordinates" when they studied burnout amongst a sample of managers. In a study of burnout and role stressors amongst marketing boundary-spanners, Singh *et al.* (1994) substituted "recipients" with "customers", "co-workers", "boss" and "top management". According to Demerouti *et al.* (2003: 13) the substitution of recipients with alternative subjects is questionable, since alternative terms are qualitatively different from recipients, and may render the depersonalisation and personal accomplishment scales unstable. Similarly, Maslach *et al.* (1996: 19) maintain that use of the MBI−HSS outside of the human service professions results in the collapse of the depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion scales into one factor.

The MBI−GS was therefore adapted for application among occupational groups that do not have direct personal contact with service recipients or that only maintain casual contact with people at work (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996). According to Demerouti *et al.* (2001: 500) since emotional exhaustion is largely the product of excessive job demands, then all jobs, and not only those in the human service professions, could be susceptible to burnout. While depersonalisation may manifest itself in terms of alienation from recipients in the human services professions, other professions may experience disengagement from the job or work role. As a result, the MBI−GS defines burnout as a "crisis in one's relationship with work, not necessarily as a crisis in one's relationship with people at work" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 1996: 20). While the MBI−GS has three subscales comprising 16 items that parallel those of the MBI−HSS, the subscales of the MBI−GS do not emphasise the service relationship and do not make reference to people as the source of one's feelings towards work. The items of the exhaustion subscale are generic, without an emphasis on emotions towards service recipients. Exhaustion is measured as fatigue without service recipients as the source of that fatigue. The cynicism subscale replaces the depersonalisation scale of the MBI−HSS and reflects a distanced attitude towards work as opposed to personal relationships at work. The professional efficacy subscale replaces the personal accomplishment items and encompasses both social and non-social aspects of accomplishments at work (Maslach *et al.*, 1996: 21; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004: 294).

Although the client service employees that form the unit of analysis for the present study cannot be described as traditional human service professionals as intended by Maslach and Jackson (1986), the MBI−HSS will be used to measure burnout amongst this group of employees. Slight adjustments were made to the questionnaire in order to align it to the client service setting. These adjustments and implications thereof are discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter.

Although the MBI is probably the most widely-applied measurement of burnout, a number of alternative measures exist. In a thorough review of burnout measurement, Schaufeli, Enzmann and Girault (1993: 200) examine the contribution of a number of these instruments. Emener, Luck and Gohs (1982) developed the Emener-Luck Burnout Scale, which consists of 30 items applicable to the human service professions. The instrument yielded four factors that were significantly related to a burnout self rating namely work-related feelings, work-environment provisions, dissonance between self-perceptions and other's perception of self and job alternatives. In 1983 Ford, Murphy and Edwards (1983) developed the Perceptual Job Burnout Inventory. The instrument was developed for use outside of the human service professions and included items relating to emotional exhaustion and cynicism, feelings of decreased efficiency and excessive demands on energy and resources. In 1984, Farber (1984) developed a 65 item instrument called the Teacher Attitude Scale (TAS) for application in educational settings. The scale included the 25 items of the original MBI along with an additional 40 items of relevance to the teaching profession. The study yielded three factors including emotional exhaustion, commitment to the teaching profession and gratification in working with students. Also in 1984, Meier (1984) developed the Meier Burnout Assessment (MBA), a 23 item true-false test. In a sample of 320 male and female faculty members, the MBA displayed a moderate correlation with the MBI (r = 0.61). In 1986, the Burnout Index was developed by Shirom and Oliver (1986) and panel tested amongst a sample of 404 Israeli teachers. The authors conceptualised burnout as comprising three types of exhaustion, namely physical, emotional and cognitive exhaustion. The most recently developed burnout instrument, the Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure (Shirom, 2003) measures burnout as comprising both physical and mental exhaustion.

The above-mentioned instruments have, however, not yielded the amount of academic support enjoyed by the MBI. Two alternative measures, namely the Burnout Measure (BM) (Pines & Aronson, 1988) and the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Demerouti, 1999) have been extensively used as a substitute for the MBI and will be discussed in the sections that follow.

2.2.6.2 The Burnout Measure (BM)

Arguably the second most widely applied burnout questionnaire, the Burnout Measure (BM) was developed by Pines and Aronson (1988). The developers of the BM conceptualise burnout as comprising three kinds of exhaustion: emotional, cognitive and physical exhaustion. The authors initially made a distinction between burnout and tedium. Burnout was largely characterised by emotional pressure and tedium characterised by mental, emotional and physical pressure, but they eventually abandoned this distinction and included the measurement of tedium in the BM. The BM is a one-dimensional measure of burnout and includes 21 items measured on a 7-point rating scale ranging from “never” to “always”. The instrument can be applied to occupations outside of the human service professions and displays internal consistency coefficients exceeding 0.9 and test-retest coefficients that vary between 0.89 and 0.66 across one and four-month intervals respectively. The construct validity of the BM is strong and scores have been related to a number of behavioural variables including work strain, turnover and work satisfaction. The BM has been used across a diverse range of occupations and been translated into French, German, Dutch, Japanese, Hungarian, Mexican, Polish and Israeli (Pines, 2002: 127-128).

According to Enzmann, Schaufeli, Janssen and Rozeman (1998: 331), while the strength of the BM lies in its applicability across a range of occupational settings, it is difficult to discriminate some of the BM items from similar constructs like depression and fatigue. Furthermore, few studies have assessed the psychodynamic properties of the BM. Using a Dutch sample of human service professionals and white collar workers, Enzmann *et al.* (1998: 331) report that the “BM captures only a particular aspect of burnout and is rather a measure of general well-being" (Enzmann *et al.*, 1998: 331).

2.2.6.3 The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI)

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) was developed in Germany for application across any job context in response to a number of criticisms levelled against the MBI (Demerouti, 1999). One such criticism is that the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation scales are all negatively phrased, while the personal accomplishment items are all positively phrased. According to the developers of the OLBI, this can result in artificial factor loadings and response sets. The OLBI includes only two factors, namely exhaustion and disengagement from work, and each of these factors includes both positively and negatively phrased items. Exhaustion is operationalised as including physical, affective and cognitive exhaustion, hence rendering it more applicable to occupations that engage in physical work compared to the MBI. Disengagement refers to the act of distancing oneself from work and "experiencing negative attitudes towards work object, work content and one's work in general". (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001: 501). The exhaustion subscale consists of seven items that refer to "general feelings of emptiness, overtaking from work, a strong need for rest, and a state of physical exhaustion" (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001: 503). The disengagement subscale includes eight items that refer to the distancing of the individual from the object and content of one's work and the development of negative attitudes towards work in general (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001: 503).

The OLBI has been validated across a sample of 293 German employees from various occupational categories, where factor analysis confirmed its two-factor structure. Furthermore, the factorial and convergent validity of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory has been tested alongside that of the MBI−GS amongst Greek employees from different occupational groupings (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou & Kantas, 2003: 12). Both the convergent and discriminant validity of the MBI and the OLBI were confirmed. According to Schaufeli (2003: 4), the OLBI is currently the only viable alternative to the MBI in general work settings. While these alternative measures of burnout provide further insight into how burnout can be conceptualised and measured, they are not considered as viable measurement instruments for the present study. The Burnout Measure (BM) is limiting in that it only measures the exhaustion component of burnout albeit in three forms, while the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory does not include aspects pertaining to the service employee – client relationship.

2.2.7 Antecedents to burnout

While much burnout research in the 1980s was concerned with the validation of the MBI and the development of alternative burnout measures, the 1990s were characterised by a plethora of research into the antecedents of burnout. Researchers have subsequently addressed this issue from a multitude of perspectives and disciplines resulting in often contrasting viewpoints. Recent research into the antecedents of the burnout syndrome has concluded that predictor variables are differentially related to each of the three burnout components (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Nonetheless, research into the antecedents of the burnout syndrome is pervasive and varied. While a fair number of scholars have examined the role of demographic variables in the development of burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 75), little empirical support for the importance of these variables in the development of burnout exists. Research has instead focused on the role of a range of situational and dispositional factors in the development of burnout.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) make a distinction between two primary categories of variables that could impact the development of burnout – situational predictors and individual antecedents. Since Maslach and Leiter (1997: 9-15) define burnout as a product of the social environment in which the individual finds him/herself, they place primary emphasis on the situational antecedents to burnout. According to Maslach and Leiter (2005), the situational factors that could affect the nature of fit between the job and the individual performing the job include:

- Work overload – when individuals have too much work to do with too little resources to perform the work according to organisational or own expectations
- Lack of control over work
- Insufficient reward resulting in devaluation of the self
- Breakdown of community or fragmenting personal relationships
- Absence of fairness resulting in a devaluation of self-worth
- Conflicting values – when the nature of a job clashes with personal values and principles

The determinants of burnout can be classified according to personality characteristics; work-related attitudes; work and organisational characteristics and biographical factors (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 75). Cordes and Dougherty (1993: 629) suggest the classification of burnout antecedents into job and role characteristics, of which the employee client relationship, role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict form components. Organisational characteristics include the job context and contingency of rewards and punishments.

Table 3 provides a summary of each of these antecedents and related research as derived from this literature review. For ease of presentation, the antecedents to burnout are categorised into seven antecedent categories. The variables related to each category are listed in the second column of the table. Each of these antecedent categories is discussed in detail in the sections that follow the table.

Table 3: Burnout antecedents: categories and variables

Antecedent Category	***Antecedent variables***

Work/job characteristics	Excessive job demands
	▪ Quantitative job demands
	    o Quantitative role overload (Cordes & Dougherty,1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1993, 1996)
	▪ Qualitative job demands (Maslach et al., 2001)
	    o Role ambiguity (Low et al., 2001; Singh et al., 1994)
	    o Role conflict (Low et al., 2001; Singh et al., 1994)
	
	Lack of job resources (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996)
	▪ Autonomy
	▪ Job control (Fernet, Guay & Senecal, 2004)

Organisational characteristics	▪ Unclear institutional goals, lack of leadership and supervisor support, social isolation and inadequate orientation (Cherniss, 1980)
	▪ Co-worker relationships (Leiter & Maslach, 1988)
	▪ Contact with supervisor (Leiter & Maslach, 1988)
	▪ Contingency and non-contingency of rewards and punishments (Cordes, Dougherty & Blum, 1997)
	▪ High performance work practices (Kroon, van der Voorde & van Veldhoven, 2009)
	▪ Perceived lack of reciprocity from organisation (Schaufeli, Van Dierendonck & Van Gorp, 1996)
	▪ Opportunities for advancement (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007)
	▪ Team structure, culture and types of leadership (Schultz, Greenley & Brown, 1995)
	▪ Lack of organisational job resources (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996)
	    o Autonomy (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007)
	    o Social support (Albar-Marin & Garcia-Ramirez, 2005; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999)
	    o Supportive management, reward mechanisms, training and technology (Rod & Ashill, 2009)
	    o Participation in decision-making (Xanthopoulou *et al.* 2007)
	    o Feedback and information (Xanthopoulou *et al.* 2007)

Antecedent Category	***Antecedent variables***
Nature of the client service role	▪ Nature of the employee−client relationship (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993) ▪ Scope of client contacts (Cherniss, 1980) ▪ Role of client and expectations of service providers (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993) ▪ Nature of client interactions/client caseload (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993) ▪ Perceived lack of reciprocity (Truchot & Deregard, 2001) ▪ Perceived customer negative behaviours (Yagil, Luria & Gal, 2008)
Attitudes toward the job and organisation	▪ Job engagement (Rothmann & Joubert, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2001) ▪ Person−organisation fit (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Siegall & McDonald, 2003) ▪ Job insecurity (Rothmann & Joubert, 1997)
Personality and dispositional factors	▪ Conscientiousness (Witt *et al.*, 2004) ▪ Communal orientation (Truchot & Deregard, 2001) ▪ Emotional stability, openness to experience, agreeableness, coping strategies, sense of coherence (Storm & Rothmann, 2003) ▪ Big five personality traits (Swider & Zimmerman, 2009) ▪ Customer orientation (Babakus, Yavas & Ashill, 2009)
Factors related to identity, esteem and meaning	▪ Personal achievement and organisational expectations (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Hyvonen *et al.,* 2009) ▪ Significant change in work-related expectations (Stevens & O'Neil, 1983) ▪ Disillusionment (Pines & Maslach, 1978) ▪ Failed sense of significance and meaning (Pines, 2002; Pines, 1993) ▪ Failed expectations (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980) ▪ Self-efficacy (Cherniss, 1992) ▪ Search for recognition and identity (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2004, 2005) ▪ Vulnerability in terms of role definition and enactment and the creation of a positive sense of self (Hallsten, 1993) ▪ Loss of status and a sense of defeat (Buunk *et al.,* 2007) ▪ Emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Montgomery, Panagopolou, De Wildt & Meenks, 2006; Zapf *et al.*, 2001) ▪

Antecedent Category	***Antecedent variables***
Biographic/ demographic variables	▪ Age (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Stevens & O'Neil, 1983; Vredenburgh, Carlozzi & Stein, 1999) ▪ Work experience (Cherniss, 1980) ▪ Gender (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Vredenburgh *et al.,* 1999) ▪ Marital status (Maslach & Jackson, 1985) ▪ Educational levels (Pines & Maslach, 1978)

Table 3 was constructed following an extensive review of the literature related to burnout antecedents. As depicted in the table, the antecedents to burnout can be divided into seven main categories: work/job characteristics; organisational characteristics; the nature of work-related relationships; attitudes towards the job and organisation; personality and dispositional factors; factors relating to identity, esteem and meaning and biographic and demographic variables. The distinction between work/job and organisational characteristics is not always clear, since a number of organisational characteristics that have implications for the development of burnout are also evident at the job level within the organisation. For instance, organisational culture and institutional goals carry implications for the extent to which the individual has access to job resources. A lack of job resources is therefore evident at both the work/job characteristic level and the organisational characteristic level as depicted in **Table 3**. Factors related to identity have also been placed in a category along with factors related to esteem and meaning. As will be shown in the role identity literature review that appears later in this chapter, identity construction is connected to esteem needs and meaning.

In the sections that follow, each of these antecedents will be discussed, with specific reference to the manner in which they result in burnout. Later in the chapter, it will be shown how aspects relating to role identity can result in a number of the antecedents discussed in **Table 3**.

2.2.7.1 Work/job and organisational characteristics

From an analysis of the literature pertaining to work/job and organisational characteristics and their relationship to burnout, it became apparent that these cannot always be regarded as conceptually distinct. As already mentioned, variables that exist at the organisational level have an impact on variables that exist at the job level. Conversely, variables that exist at the job level have an impact of variables that exist at the organisational level. Autonomy and involvement in decision-making, for instance, can be regarded as both characteristics of the organisation and characteristics of the job. While every attempt will be made to keep the two levels conceptually distinct, a number of scholars have simultaneously incorporated both organisational and work-related variables into models of burnout antecedents.

Cherniss (1980) for instance, theoretically identified eight organisational and work stressors that could result in burnout. These stressors include workload; lack of stimulation; scope of client contacts; unclear institutional goals; lack of autonomy; lack of leadership and supervisory support; social isolation and inadequate orientation. These role stressors have traditionally been studied in terms of the direct effects that they exert on outcome variables such as job satisfaction, job performance, organisational commitment and turnover intentions. But in a study examining the effect of role stressors on burnout amongst marketing client service employees, burnout was shown to mediate the negative effects of role stressors on other job outcomes (Singh *et al.*, 1994: 559). As a result, burnout can be described as "a more potent predictor of various job outcomes than one or more role stressors" (Singh *et al.*, 1994: 559) and that burnout occur as a result of the cumulative effect of a number of role stressors.

Research into the impact of work/job characteristics on the development of burnout has almost exclusively focused on the relationship between job demands and job resources (Fernet *et al.,* 2004). According to the structural model proposed by Maslach *et al.* (1996: 36), burnout develops in response to excessive job demands and a lack of available resources to cope with these demands. Job demands can be described as those "physical, social and organisational aspects of the job that require prolonged physical and mental effort and will result in physiological and psychological costs" (Demerouti *et al.,* 2001: 501). They include aspects related to role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict (Low *et al*., 2001). Job resources, on the other hand, can be described as the "physical, psychological, social and organisational aspects of the job that may assist an individual in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and stimulate personal growth and development (Demerouti *et al*., 2001: 501). They include job control and autonomy (Fernet *et al.*, 2004); feedback and participation in decision making (Xanthopoulou *et al*., 2007), social support (Albar-Marin & Garcia Ramirez, 2005; Gmelch & Gatesman, 1997; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999), supportive management, reward mechanisms, training and appropriate technology (Rod & Ashill, 2009).

Maslach *et al.* (2001: 407) make a distinction between qualitative and quantitative job demand variables. Quantitative job demands occur when there is too much work for the available time resulting in role overload, while qualitative job demands include aspects related to role conflict and role ambiguity (Maslach, *et al.*, 2001: 407). Singh *et al*. (1994: 559) refer to these qualitative demands as role stressors and make a distinction between two kinds of role stressors. Role conflict occurs when there is a high degree of incompatibility between the various expectations associated with a single role, while role ambiguity occurs when insufficient information to support adequate performance in a role exists. A further distinction can be made between qualitative and quantitative role overload (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993: 631). Qualitative role overload occurs when an individual lacks the talent and skills necessary to perform the job adequately, while quantitative role overload refers to aspects relating to caseload.

The Maslach *et al.* (1996) structural model that proposes the link between burnout and job demands and resources is depicted in **Figure 3**.

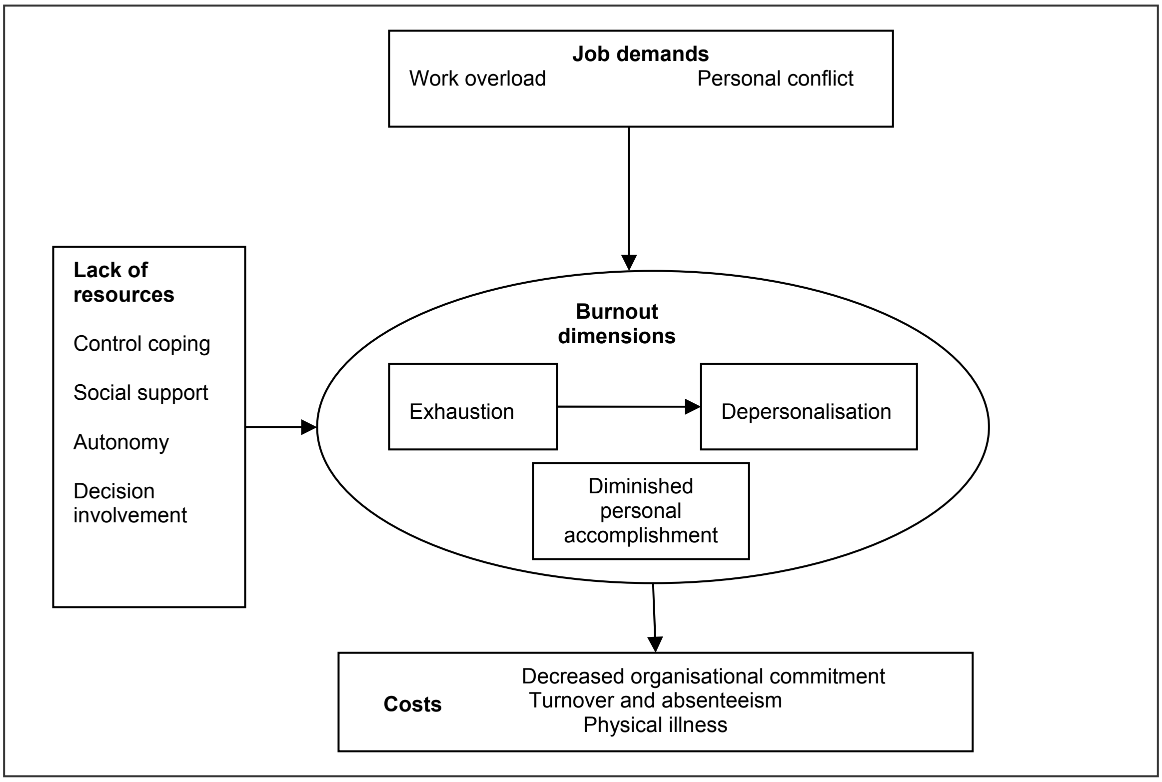

Figure 3: The structural model of burnout
(Maslach *et al.*, 1996: 36)

This theoretical model, does, however, not comment on how each of the antecedents (job demands and lack of available resources) leads to each of the burnout dimensions. Based on earlier discussions of the temporal sequence in which the three burnout dimensions occur sequentially, it can be deduced that excessive job demands and a lack of resources to deal with these demands can result in exhaustion, which ultimately leads to depersonalisation. It is unclear from the model whether feelings of reduced personal accomplishment result from depersonalisation or whether they develop independently due to a lack of resources to cope with excessive job demands.

A number of scholars have, however, empirically examined how demands and a lack of resources are differentially related to each of the three burnout dimensions (Lee & Ashforth, 1993a; 1996; Leiter, 1993). Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) model proposed by Hobfoll (1989), Lee and Ashforth (1993a; 1996) examined the extent to which the various demand and resource variables and attitudinal and behavioural correlates are related to each of the three burnout dimensions. According to the COR model, individuals constantly strive to maintain valued resources while at work in order to offset the negative effect of excessive demands. These resources can take the form of objects, work conditions, personal characteristics and energies. When these resources are threatened or lost, or when individuals invest in resources that do not yield the anticipated return, stress may result. When individuals experience a loss of resources, they may engage in coping behaviours to reduce the effect of this loss. According to the COR model, job demands should therefore be strongly related to emotional exhaustion, while job resources should be strongly related to depersonalisation. In their 1993 study, Lee and Ashforth (1993a) concluded that most demand correlates were associated with exhaustion and depersonalisation, and only weakly associated with personal accomplishment. Leiter (1993), on the other hand, concluded that demands are more strongly related to emotional exhaustion, while resources are more strongly associated with both depersonalisation and personal accomplishment. A subsequent study by Lee and Ashforth (1996: 130) however, found that both demand and resource variables are more strongly related to emotional exhaustion than to depersonalisation and personal accomplishment.

According to Cordes *et al.* (1997: 688), demand stressors, such as qualitative and quantitative work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload will be associated with exhaustion. Qualitative demands made on the employee through interpersonal relationships may also result in emotional exhaustion. Variables associated with a random, uncontrollable environment are associated with the development of depersonalisation. Variables that create the perception that one is not appreciated or incompetent in one's work, such as a lack of contingent rewards, will result in feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. In a study of managers and HR professionals Cordes *et al.* (1997: 689) found significant paths between role overload and emotional exhaustion, non-contingent punishment and depersonalisation and contingent rewards and personal accomplishment.

These conflicting findings initiated a host of studies into the differential relationship between demand and resource variables and the three burnout dimensions. The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model, originally proposed by Demerouti *et al.* (2001:

501) postulated that job demands are associated with the development of exhaustion, while an absence of job resources such as performance feedback, participation in decision-making, job control and social support are associated with depersonalisation. The JD–R model is presented as **Figure 4** and is premised upon two dual processes that play a role in the development of job strain and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2004).

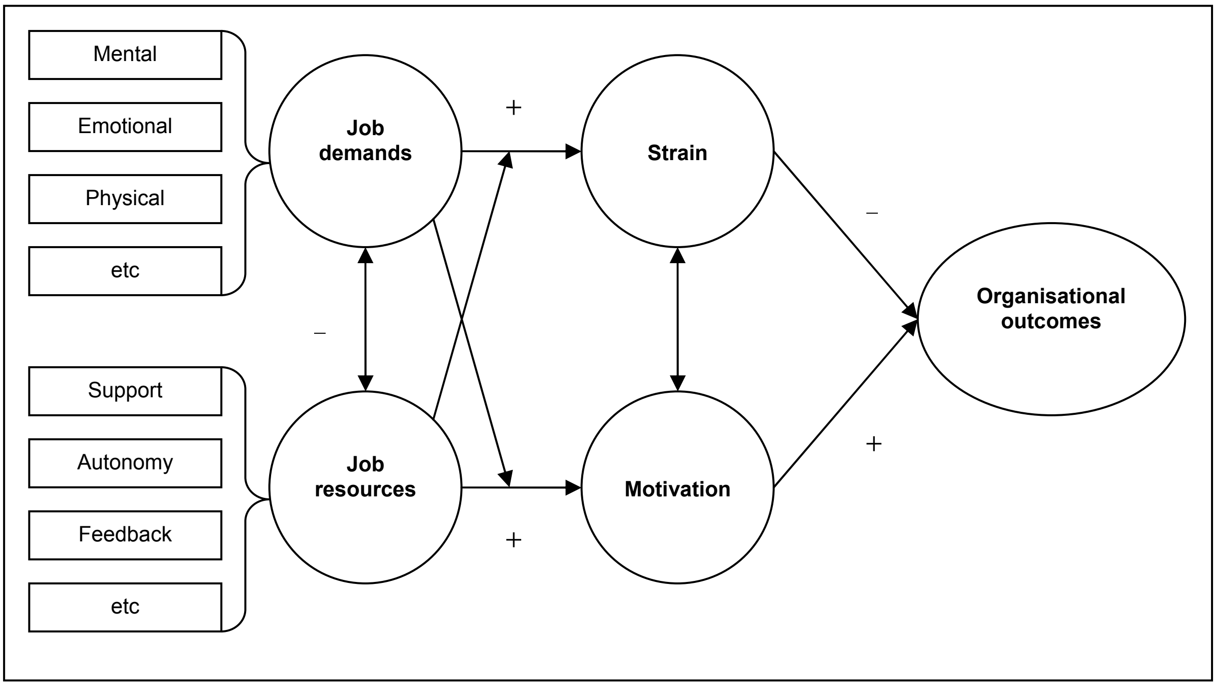

Figure 4: The job demands–resources model
(Bakker & Demerouti, 2007: 313)

Job demands (mental, emotional or physical) exhaust the employee's physical and emotional resources resulting in excessive strain, exhaustion and health problems. Job resources (support, autonomy and feedback), on the other hand, play a motivational role that result in job engagement and improved performance levels. These job resources play both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivational role, in that they enhance individual growth and development and facilitate the achievement of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007: 313). As illustrated by the diagonal arrows in **Figure 4**, while job demands and job resources can independently result in strain and motivation, they also interact. Job resources can buffer the effect of job demands, while job demands can significantly reduce the positive effect of job resources on motivation (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001).

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007: 313) the link between emotional exhaustion and job demands can be explained using Hockey's (1993) control model for demand management. According to Hockey (1993 as cited in Bakker & Demerouti, 2007: 313), when individuals are under sustained environmental stress, they employ a "performance–protection strategy" by increasing subjective effort or mobilising "sympathetic activation" at both an autonomic and endocrine level. The greater the subjective effort (or sympathetic activation), the larger the physiological costs are for the individual and the greater the possibility of emotional exhaustion. In a study across three occupational groups using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, Demerouti *et al.* (2001: 508) established that job demands are primarily related to exhaustion, while job resources are primarily related to disengagement from work. Based on the principles contained within the Job Demands–Resources model, Demerouti *et al.* (2001) assert that the three components of the burnout syndrome are differentially related to various job demands and resources. According to the researchers, job demands are associated with the development of exhaustion, while an absence of job resources, such as performance feedback, participation in decision-making, job control and social support are associated with cynicism or disengagement. In a study of 310 managers at a platinum mine in South Africa, emotional exhaustion was predicted by workload, job insecurity and a lack of resources, while cynicism was predicted by a lack of organisational support and advancement opportunities (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007).

A study of home care employees (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Dollard, Demerouti, Schaufeli, Taris & Schreurs, 2007) set out to examine which job resources are best at buffering specific demands that are known to produce burnout amongst home care professionals. Four job demands (emotional demands, patient harassment, workload and physical demands) were studied alongside four job resources, namely autonomy, social support, performance feedback and opportunities for professional development. The research concluded that job resources were stronger buffers of the relationship between emotional demands and patient harassment and burnout, than the relationship between physical demands and workload and burnout.

Organisational characteristics such as the nature of the organisation and its policies have received considerably less attention in the burnout literature when compared with job-related variables. They are, however, important to consider, since they have an impact on the nature of job related variables. Factors related to team structure, culture and types of leadership (Schultz *et al*., 1995: 335) have been linked to the development of burnout insofar they contribute to a lack of autonomy, social support and participation. Team cultures, for instance, encourage participation among organisational members by creating a climate of social support and acceptance. As already discussed, social support and participation are important job resources that have the potential to inhibit the development of burnout. Transformational types of leadership also facilitate participation and autonomy in the workplace, thereby also buffering the development of burnout (Schultz *et al*., 1995).

The relationship between job demands/resources and burnout are important for the present study. As shown in the second section of this literature review, the role identity of the client service employee could potentially have considerable influence on both work-related perceptions and work-related behaviour of the employee. If the client service employee defines his identity as subordinate and subservient to that of the client, he may engage in behaviours that increase work overload. In such cases he may also exercise little autonomy, or feel that he has little control over the resources that are (or are not) at his disposal. The relationship between job demands/resources and role identity are explored in further detail in Chapter 3.

2.2.7.2 Interpersonal relationships as antecedents to burnout

The quality of interpersonal relationships has also been linked to the development of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). The kinds of interpersonal relationships that have been examined in relation to burnout include the relationship between the client and the employee (Bakker *et al.,* 2000; Yagil *et al.,* 2008), the employee and his co-workers (Leiter & Maslach, 1988) and the employee and his supervisor (Rod & Ashill, 2009).

Cordes and Dougherty (1993: 629) are of the opinion that the client–employee relationship remains the most important variable in the study of burnout. Most research examining the role of the client-employee relationship in the development of burnout has been conducted in the helping professions (Bakker *et al*., 2000) where employees experience a high degree of emotional strain when dealing with their clients. In such contexts, research has shown that the nature of the client and the expectations of the service provider surrounding the role of the client can play an important part in the development of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Although limited, more recent research has focused on the relationship between burnout and the client-employee relationship outside of the so-called helping professions. In these contexts, the perceived quality of the social interaction between client and employee (Yagil *et al.*, 2008) and perceptions of client behaviour (Grandey *et al*., 2004) have shown to correlate with burnout.

The client-employee relationship is, however, not the only interpersonal work-related relationship that has the potential to contribute to burnout. Leiter and Maslach (1988: 304) have shown that pleasant co-worker contact is positively related to personal accomplishment, while pleasant supervisor contact is negatively related to depersonalisation. Conversely, unpleasant supervisor contact is positively related to emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Rod and Ashill (2009) show that perceived management support also has the potential to buffer burnout.

Burnout has also been examined in the context of social exchange and equity theory, whereby a perceived lack of reciprocity in an individual's interactions with his/her recipients initiates the development of the burnout syndrome (Truchot & Deregard, 2001). According to equity theory, individuals evaluate their relationships with others in terms of investments and outcomes. Relationships will be judged as equitable if investments ploughed into the relationship are perceived as equal to the outcomes or benefits of the relationship (Bakker *et al.*, 2000: 425). This social psychological perspective perceives burnout as emanating from a social context, the outcomes of which are based on how individuals perceive and interpret the behaviours of others (Buunk & Schaufeli, 1993: 53). Through a five-year longitudinal study of general practitioners, Bakker *et al.* (2000) concluded that a lack of perceived reciprocity on the part of the general practitioner mediated the relationship between patient demands and emotional exhaustion.

Schaufeli, Van Dierendonck and Van Gorp (1996) extended this model of reciprocity to include not only perceptions of reciprocity at the interpersonal level, but also perceptions of reciprocity at the organisational level. This idea of reciprocity at the organisational level is derived from the notion of the psychological contract between individual and organisation. This contract implies that the individual has certain expectations of the organisation in return for certain investments on the part of the individual employee. Schaufeli *et al*. (1996) propose a model whereby burnout is related to social exchange at the interpersonal level (i.e. between the human service professional and his/her recipient) and the organisational level (i.e. between the employee and the organisation). They tested this model on two independent samples of student nurses and found that a lack of reciprocity at both levels is positively related to burnout. Perceptions of inequity result in a depletion of emotional resources, which result in a decrease in investments resulting in depersonalisation and cynicism. They also conclude that a lack of reciprocity at the organisational level results in low levels of organisational commitment.

As shown in subsequent sections of this chapter, the role identity that the client service employee assumes in relation to that of the client can exert considerable influence on his behaviour, attitudes and perceptions towards work. Based on the studies discussed in the preceding section, it could be argued that client service employees who perceive their relationships with their clients as inequitable may experience higher levels of burnout than those who do not. If, for instance, a client service employee perceives the client as powerful and domineering in relation to his (the client service employee's) role identity; he could perceive the relationship as inequitable.

2.2.7.3 Personality or dispositional factors as burnout antecedents

A number of individual personality (or dispositional) factors have been linked to the development of burnout (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Nurses and social workers scoring high on communal orientation have been shown to display lower levels of burnout resulting from perceived inequity than those scoring low on communal orientation (Truchot & Deregard, 2001). In the client service context, conscientiousness has been shown to mediate the relationship between call volume and emotional exhaustion amongst call centre customer service professionals (Witt *et al*., 2004), while customer orientation has been shown to moderate the job-demand-performance relationship (Babakus *et al*., 2009) Job resourcefulness, described as a situational personality trait, has been shown to buffer burnout in the call centre environment, while simultaneously enhancing service performance (Rod & Ashill, 2009).

In the South African context, the role of personality traits and coping strategies in the development of burnout has been examined across a range of occupational groupings. Rothmann and Jackson (2003) show how a weak sense of coherence, combined with stress caused by excessive job demands and a lack of resources are associated with all three dimensions of burnout in a sample of 270 local government employees in South Africa. Using the MBI–GS, Rothman (2004) assessed the relationships between burnout, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, locus of control and coping strategies amongst a sample of 64 senior managers in a manufacturing organisation in South Africa. The results of the study showed how exhaustion, cynicism and low levels of professional efficacy were associated with low scores on psychological strengths. Later, Storm and Rothmann (2005) showed how emotional stability; extraversion; openness to experience; agreeableness and conscientiousness were associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and higher levels of personal accomplishment among pharmacists. The same study also displayed a positive path between constructive coping strategies and personal accomplishment.

2.2.7.4 Person–organisation fit and burnout

Person–organisation fit (Siegall & McDonald, 2004) and value congruence (Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009) have also been linked to the development of burnout. This proposition maintains that the greater the mismatch between a person's values and the organisation's culture, the more burnout the person will experience (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Siegall & McDonald, 2004). To test this proposition, Siegall and McDonald (2004) administered a survey among 524 faculty staff and found that person–organisation value congruence was negatively associated with burnout and that burnout formed a partial or complete mediation for three (job satisfaction, withdrawal from teaching and less engagement in professional development) of the ten dependent variables (Siegall & McDonald, 2004: 298).

2.2.7.5 Burnout and job engagement

Burnout has also been measured in relation to what some refer to as its positive anti-theses, job engagement (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Rothman, 2003; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). According to Maslach *et al.* (2001), the interest into the positive antipode of the burnout syndrome can largely be ascribed to the emerging interest in positive psychology. The relationship between job engagement and burnout was initially introduced to burnout researchers by Maslach and Leiter (1997: 34), who defined engagement as the portrayal of "energy, involvement and efficacy", during work activities. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997: 34) energy, involvement and efficacy are the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions. Also burnout can be conceptualised as the erosion of engagement, whereby energy turns into exhaustion, involvement becomes cynicism and feelings of accomplishment turn into feelings of ineffectiveness. Accordingly then, engagement could be measured by the MBI, and would reflect low scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, and high scores on personal accomplishment.

A number of authors have however challenged this view, arguing that burnout and engagement cannot be conceptualised as two opposite poles of the same continuum (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002). Instead, Schaufeli *et al.* (2001: 74) define job engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption". Vigour is characterised by high levels of energy, persistence and a willingness to invest effort into one's work despite challenges. Dedication is characterised by pride in one's work and deriving pride from the significance of one's work, while absorption is present when one is engrossed in one's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004: 295). In a study of undergraduate students and employees from private companies, Schaufeli *et al.* (2002: 75) concluded that burnout and engagement scales are negatively correlated. According to research conducted by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) burnout is negatively related to engagement, and engagement is predicted by the availability of job resources.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2001 as cited in Rothmann, 2003: 17) developed a well-being at work model that includes burnout and engagement as two of four possible states of well-being at work. The model, which is presented in **Figure 5**, comprises four quadrants and is split by two axes.

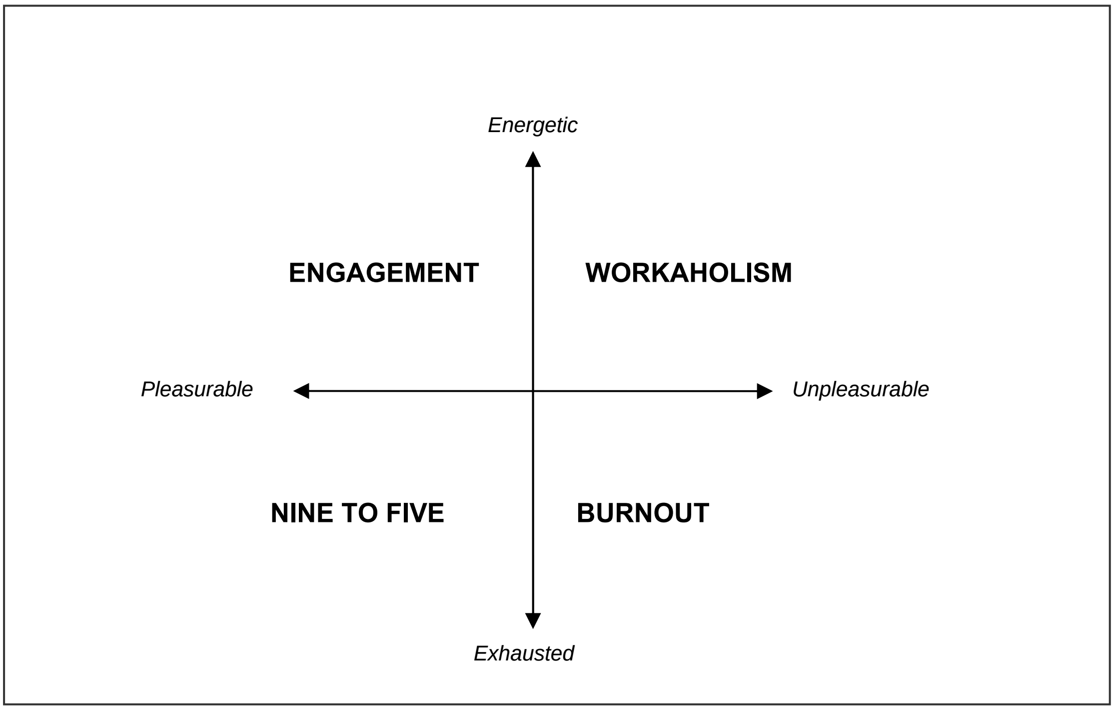

Figure 5: Schaufeli and Bakker's (2001) well-being at work model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001 as cited in Rothmann, 2003)

The vertical axis represents the application of energy, while the horizontal axis represents pleasurable or unpleasurable attitudes towards work. The significance of this model lies in the fact that employees who are emotionally exhausted, may not necessarily suffer from burnout if they find pleasure in working hard. If, however, they find work unpleasurable, but still approach it energetically, they could be regarded as workaholics. The model also suggests that burnout and engagement are not mere antipodes on an energy continuum, but that they are independent and negatively correlated states.

The importance of the literature on engagement for the present study is that it provides an alternative in terms of conceptualising the characteristics of low burnout individuals. Since the objective of the qualitative study will be to explore the relationship between client service role identity and burnout, it will be important to name and identify behaviour that is characteristic of low burnout as well as behaviour that is characteristic of high burnout. Individuals that reflect low burnout scores on the MBI should then also reflect the characteristics of engagement in the qualitative phase of the research.

More recent research into antecedents of the burnout phenomenon has focused on the role of subjective perceptions of work, the environment and the client in the development of burnout. This research appears to have developed from the existential perspective, which describes burnout as developing as a result of thwarted attempts at establishing personal meaning through work. Expectations have also been linked to the development of burnout, as has the maintenance of a positive, esteem-enhancing role identity. The role of subjective identity perceptions in the development of burnout will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

2.2.7.6 The existential perspective and the development of burnout

The existential perspective of burnout is premised on the notion that "the root cause of burnout lies in peoples' need to believe that their life is meaningful, that the things they do, and consequently they themselves, are important and significant" (Pines, 2002: 123). Accordingly, the development of burnout can be linked to higher order needs such as self-actualisation (Pines, 2002) and failure to accomplish our goals and expectations through work (Hyvonen *et al.,* 2009). This existential perspective corresponds closely to Freudenberger and Richelson's (1980) original definition of burnout, which states that burnout is a "state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward" (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980: 13). The existential perspective on burnout therefore sees the development of burnout in the context of a motivational framework, where burnout is conceptualised as the end of a process that commenced with high motivation and involvement but ended with low unexpected returns. If employees are unable to meet their goals and expectations within a supportive working environment then burnout can ensue (Pines, 1993: 38). In a study attempting to demonstrate the relevance of the psychodynamic existential perspective, Pines (2002) demonstrates that a negative correlation exists between sense of significance derived from work and levels of burnout amongst a group of Israeli teachers and four comparison samples of American teachers. It is, however, critical to note that within the existential perspective; objective failure does not necessarily contribute to the development of burnout. Instead, it is the subjective perception that although one has tried to make a difference, one's work has not had a significant impact that results in the development of burnout.

In keeping with the general sentiment expressed by the existential perspective, Cherniss (1993: 135) examined the role of professional self-efficacy in the development of burnout. Drawing on Hall's (1976) psychological success model, Cherniss maintains that when people do not feel successful, they may chose to psychologically withdraw from work, resulting in what is synonymous with the depersonalisation or cynicism dimension of the burnout syndrome. Accordingly, Cherniss (1993) argues that people with a stronger sense of self-efficacy, are less likely to experience burnout. Feelings of self-efficacy can be maintained through autonomy at work; appropriate challenge; feedback of results and support from supervisors and co-workers.

As shown in later sections of this chapter, the maintenance of an esteem-enhancing role identity requires that the individual continually engage in identity processes that result in self-verification. Failure to self-verify a role identity may result in subjective feelings of failure, and, in accordance with the view expressed by the existentialists, result in burnout.

2.2.7.7 Burnout and the pursuit of recognition and identity

Research into the relationship between burnout and identity is diverse, predominantly as a result of the numerous definitions and conceptualisations associated with the identity concept. The majority of research into identity and burnout has focused on the extent to which identification with a social identity (Kang *et al*., 2010) or professional or occupational identity (Edwards & Dirette, 2010; Kremet-Hayon *et al*., 2002; Schaible, 2006) contributes to the development of burnout. Of more relevance to the present study, is research that examines how subjective identity perceptions and processes could potentially contribute to burnout.

By employing a Lacanian perspective (which focuses on the unconscious role of language as subjective perceptions), Vanheule, Lievrouw and Verhaeghe (2003) and Vanheule and Verhaeghe (2004; 2005) investigate how an imaginary or symbolic attitude towards work and client outcomes can assist in the differentiation of people who are suffering from burnout and those who are not. The researchers interviewed 15 high and 15 low burnout special educators and concluded that "burnt out professionals can be differentiated from those that are not burnt out by the specific way they strive for recognition and identity" (Vanheule *et al*., 2003: 499). High burnout individuals displayed a strong sense of personal obligation towards their clients and often manifested feelings of powerlessness in their interaction with their clients. These individuals tended to identify closely with the problems of their clients and often felt threatened in their dealings with them. Low burnout individuals, on the other hand, managed to maintain a subjective distance from their clients, held flexible expectations in relation to recipient outcomes and attributed failure to the client and context rather than their own inadequacies as educators. Instead of expressing feelings of powerlessness, they would resign themselves to the impossibility of difficult situations.

In a longitudinal study of Spanish teachers, Buunk *et al.* (2007) examined the development of burnout from an evolutionary social rank perspective. The research was premised on the assumption that burnout could be related to being placed in an "unwanted" and "subordinate" position, resulting in a number of social stresses such as powerlessness, shame, loss of status and feelings of inferiority, that are characterised by similar symptoms to burnout. The study concluded that status-related variables such as a perceived loss of status and a sense of defeat explain considerably more variance in burnout scores than the demand stressors that have traditionally been linked to the development of burnout (Buunk *et al*., 2007: 481).

The conclusions drawn by Vanheule *et al.* (2003) and Buunk *et al.* (2007) are of particular relevance to the present study. These authors support the notion that identity perceptions and processes have the potential to contribute to the development of burnout. When one considers role identity, which can be described as the subjective meanings people attach to playing a specific role, it becomes evident that this too could impact on the development of burnout. In accordance with this view and the research on identity perceptions discussed above, it is suggested that client service employees who define themselves as powerless and subordinate to the client may experience higher levels of burnout than those who define themselves as equal to the client.

The findings of Vanhuele *et al.* (2003) resonate with the observation made by Hallsten (1993: 99) that "burning out is assumed to appear when the enactment of an active, self-definitional role is threatened or disrupted with no alternative role at hand". According to Hallsten (1993: 99) burnout occurs when individuals undergo a sense of vulnerability in terms of role definition and enactment and when there are few options available to create a positive sense of self. This vulnerability is experienced when:

- there is a degree of instability present in the individual's self-image,
- when the individual is dependent on a specific self-defined role and there is a lack of subsidiary or potential roles for self definition, and
- when there is an absence of social support outside of the work domain.

According to Hallsten (1993: 101) individuals strive to create a positive sense of self through role enactment. Accordingly, "these strivings constitute a part of an active, self-definitional role enactment under threat; that is, they have the function of creating or maintaining an acceptable personal identity and meaning in life" (Hallsten, 1993: 101). When an individual is made vulnerable due to his or her inability to maintain a positive sense of self through role enactment, he/she may experience a sense of lost control or powerlessness, low self-esteem, cynicism and withdrawal. These feelings result in success depression (burnout), non commitment (a detached, passive attitude) and finally, general depression. While Hallsten's (1993) assertions above do resonate with the sentiments expressed by the existential tradition, he presents an ad hoc theory that has not been empirically tested.

According to Burke's identity control theory (1991, 1997), which will be discussed at length later in this chapter, individuals experience negative emotional arousal when they are unable to self-verify an existing role identity. It is therefore suggested that failure to verify the client service employee role identity will result in negative emotional arousal, which could eventually develop into burnout. The present study therefore hopes to build on Hallsten's (1993) theory discussed above, by validating his assertions through empirically generated data.

Research into the role of subjective identity perceptions in the development of burnout should be interpreted with caution due to the constraints of causality to which much burnout research is subject (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Since high burnout is often correlated with poor job and organisational conditions, researchers have generally concluded that these conditions result in burnout. According to Maslach and Schaufeli (1993: 8), however, this could mean that people who suffer burnout may experience the job context in a particularly negative light.

2.2.7.8 The role of expectations in the development of burnout

The inability to meet expectations has also been linked to the development of burnout. Cordes and Dougherty (1993: 636) make a distinction between personal achievement and organisational expectations. Personal expectations include expectations that employees hold about the profession into which they have entered, the organisation where they work and their own levels of personal efficacy within these two arenas. Achievement expectations include the expectations that employees hold with regards to the achievement outcomes while at work. Lastly, organisational expectations refer to those expectations that individuals hold towards the nature of the organisational and professional system.

Stevens and O'Neill (1983) tested the assertion that burnout is related to a significant change in work-related expectations. They found that staff in the development disabilities field, who experienced a large negative expectation change, also displayed the highest levels of burnout. Age and educational level have been shown to correlate with burnout, due largely to the differential impact that each of these demographic variables have on expectations. Younger employees may experience higher levels of burnout than older employees due to the fact that they are more likely to suffer disillusionment with work (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Employees with higher educational levels may experience more burnout than their less-educated counterparts due to the fact that they foster greater expectations with regard to the work context and associated work outcomes (Pines & Maslach, 1978).

As will be shown in the section on role identity later in this chapter, role identities incorporate the set of behavioural expectations to which the incumbent of the particular role must adhere. Failure to attain these expectations leads to failure in self-verification, resulting in negative emotional arousal and possible burnout.

2.2.7.9 Emotional labour and burnout

The relationship between emotional labour and burnout has also received considerable attention in the literature (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Montgomery, Panagololou, De Wildt & Meenks, 2006; Zapf *et al.*, 2001). Hochschild (1983: 7) defines emotional labour as "the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display". It is believed that it contributes to the development of burnout through the creation of emotive dissonance between the authentic, inner feelings of the individual employee and the fake expression of emotions required by the work (Copp, 1998). The exercise of emotional labour is particularly prevalent in the service sector. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 90) service providers, who are situated at the customer interface, are expected to express and experience a range of feelings. These expressions are differentiated according to range; intensity; duration and object of emotion, depending on the kind of service setting or occupational group concerned. The range, intensity, duration and object of emotion are generally determined by organisational display rules. These rules, in the service setting, are orientated

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towards the display of emotions that communicate a sense of well-being, helpfulness and customer satisfaction.

Emotional labour is performed through the utilisation of surface acting or deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting refers to the display of emotions that are not actually felt. This involves careful manipulation of facial expression, tone of voice and gestures. Deep acting occurs when the employee actually attempts to feel or experience the emotion that he/she is required to display (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). While emotional labour serves a number of important organisational functions (Mann, 1997: 11), it has been described as a "double-edged sword" that can carry a number of negative implications. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 1005), if the emotional labour confirms an identity-relevant experience i.e. it is "consistent with a central, salient and valued social and/or personal identity, it will lead to psychological well-being" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993: 1005). If however, the practice of emotional labour is inconsistent with personal or professional identity, it could lead to "emotive dissonance" and a loss of the individual's authentic self.

A number of empirical studies have examined the impact of emotional labour on the development of burnout. Zapf *et al.* (2001) show how the emotional work associated with engaging with clients is a significant predictor of all three burnout subscales. A cross-sectional study of 174 Dutch governmental workers suggests that the need to hide negative emotions and engage in surface acting is related to burnout (Montgomery *et al.*, 2006).

Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) make a distinction between deep acting and surface acting, and maintain that the two forms of emotion management processes are differentially related to each of the burnout dimensions. According to the researchers, surface acting requires the mobilisation of more emotional resources than deep acting does, and requires that the employee depersonalise the client and treat them as objects. This may eventually result in guilt on the part of the client service employee. Deep acting, where the employee tries to control internal thoughts and feelings so that they are in accordance with the display rules of the organisation, results in feelings of personal accomplishment. Through their research, Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) confirm that deep acting relates negatively to depersonalisation and positively to personal accomplishment, while surface acting relates positively to emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation.

Brotheridge and Lee (2003: 58) apply a conservation of resources model to the relationship between emotional labour and burnout. They propose that the effect of emotional labour on burnout is also influenced by the outcome of the service encounter. Through the use of emotional labour during service interactions, employees seek to acquire favourable reciprocal relationships and experience a sense of "authenticity of self". If, through emotional labour, they are unable to establish good relationships with clients and maintain an authentic sense of self, emotional exhaustion is likely to occur. This finding is consistent with earlier findings by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) that maintain that the enactment of emotional labour that is not consistent with an individual's role identity can lead to the development of emotional dissonance. This dissonance occurs as a result of the fact that through the enactment of behaviours that are inconsistent with the individual's role identity, the individual is unable to verify this role identity.

2.2.7.10 Burnout and biographic and demographic variables

Limited evidence supporting the role of biographic and demographic variables in the development of burnout has been found. Age has been found to correlate with burnout, suggesting that younger employees are more prone to the development of burnout than older employees (Maslach *et al,* 1996; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Stevens & O'Neil, 1983; Vredenburgh, 1999). A limited number of studies have found an association between gender and burnout. Women generally tend to score higher on emotional exhaustion, while men score higher on depersonalisation (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Vredenburgh, 1999). Unmarried individuals have shown to report higher levels of burnout when compared with their married counterparts (Maslach & Jackson, 1985), and people with higher educational levels have also displayed higher levels of burnout when compared with those with less education (Pines & Maslach, 1978). In the South African context, Jordaan *et al.* (2007) confirm a significant relationship between age, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation amongst a group of counselling psychologists. In the same study, male counselling psychologists display higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation than females do. While non-married respondents display higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation than their married colleagues do.

2.2.8 The consequences of burnout

2.2.8.1 General consequences of burnout

The consequences of burnout have received less attention in the literature when compared to burnout antecedents. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997: 62) burnout is generally ignored in organisational settings due largely to the fact that it is described in personal terms. As a result, organisational practitioners look for personal solutions to the problem, which, according to the range of antecedents discussed above, is largely an organisational or job context problem. While burnout carries a number of implications at the individual level, these individual implications can have a direct effect on the manner in which the burnt-out individual engages on the job, and hence, can affect the organisational bottom line.

The first clinical symptoms of burnout were documented by Freudenberger and Richelson (1980) and included, amongst others, exhaustion; impatience; cynicism; paranoia and disorientation. Burnout leads to depression; poor physical health and turnover; unproductive work behaviours; problematic interpersonal relationships and reduced job satisfaction (Kahill, 1998). Furthermore, Noworol, Zarczynskli, Fafrowicz and Marek (1993: 163) maintain that burnout results in a loss of creativity and innovation and that burnt-out individuals are self-doubting, vulnerable to authority and conformist. Kuruuzum *et al.* (2008: 189) cite diminished job performance; turnover intention; absenteeism; marital and familial conflict; reduced levels of self-esteem; problems concentrating; social isolation; substance abuse and physical and psychological disorder as some of the primary consequences of the burnout syndrome.

A total of 132 symptoms have been associated with burnout at the individual level (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 19). As depicted in **Figure 6**, these symptoms can be affective; cognitive; physical; behavioural and motivational.

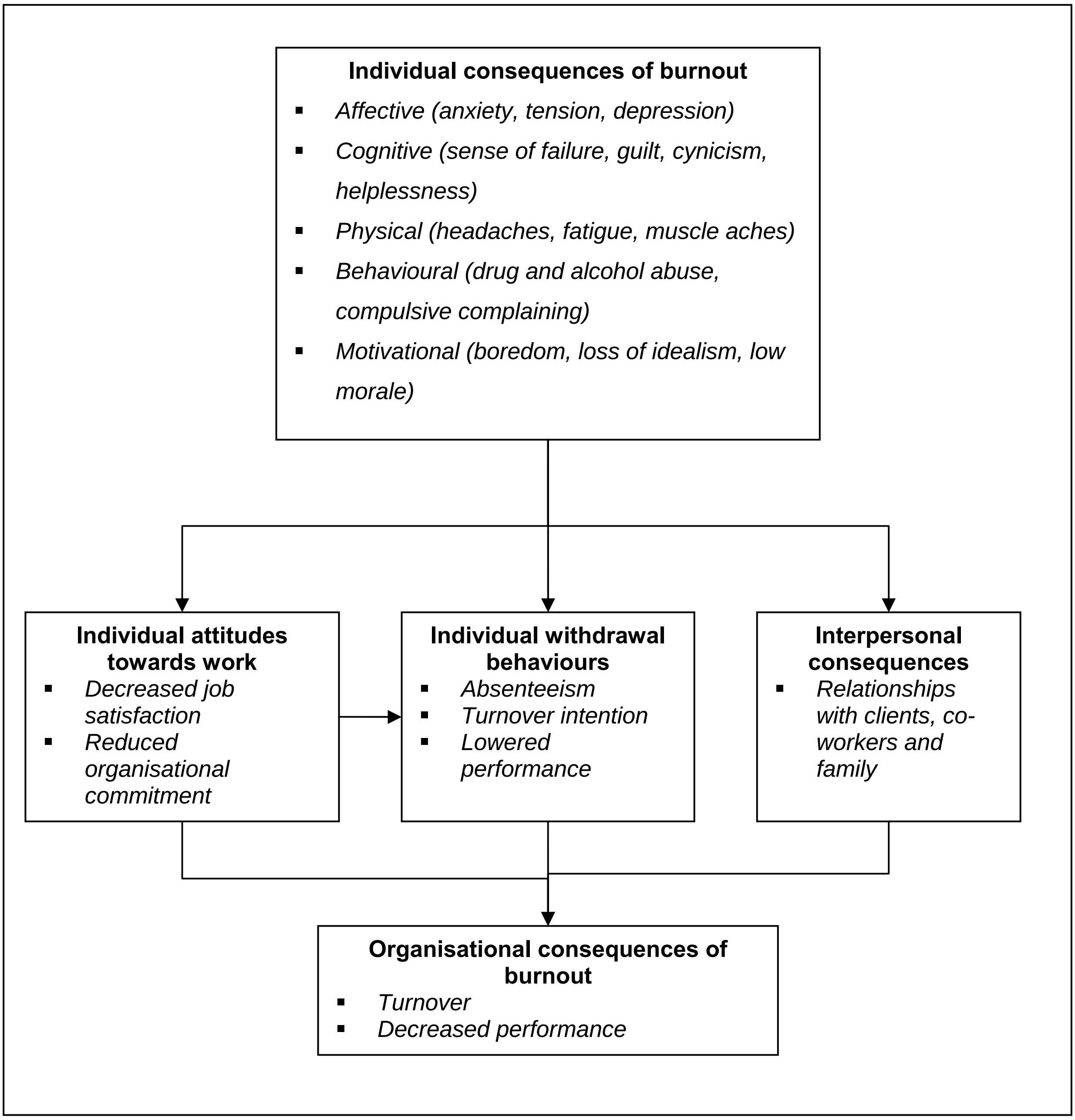

Figure 6: **Individual and organisational consequences of burnout**

Affective symptoms include anxiety, tension, decreased job satisfaction and depression. Cognitive symptoms include a sense of failure, helplessness, and difficulty making decisions, cynicism and feelings of guilt. Physical symptoms include headaches, muscle aches, fatigue and nausea. Compulsive complaining increase, use of alcohol and drugs and hyperactivity manifest as behavioural symptoms and boredom, loss of idealism and low moral are characteristic of symptoms related to motivation (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 19-31). As shown in **Figure 6**, burnout has been linked to the development of negative work-related attitudes and behaviours, including decreased levels of job satisfaction, reduced organisational commitment and withdrawal behaviours. Cordes and Dougherty (1993: 638) add interpersonal consequences in terms of clients, co-workers and friends to this list. At the organisational level, these attitudes and behaviours can result in high levels of absenteeism, turnover and reduced levels of performance.

As illustrated in **Figure 6**, the individual consequences of burnout have a direct effect on the organisation. Burnt-out individuals experience negative attitudes towards work that could result in withdrawal behaviours. These withdrawal behaviours, which include absenteeism and turnover intentions, carry a number of negative implications for the organisational bottom line (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998: 19). The negative attitudes of burnt-out individuals also carry a number of negative implications for personal relationships at work. Burnt-out individuals may adopt negative attitudes towards their co-workers, subordinates, clients and supervisors, which could adversely affect organisational culture, teamwork and service levels (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993: 638).

The relationship between job satisfaction and burnout has been extensively examined in the literature (Bhana & Haffejee, 1996; Dolan, 1987; Tsigilis, Koustelios & Togia, 2004) and moderate to high correlations have been revealed. Tsigilis *et al.* (2004: 671) exposed a strong negative relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, with the three dimensions of burnout displaying varying levels of correlation with job satisfaction. Job satisfaction displayed moderate negative correlations with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, and weak positive correlations with personal accomplishment (Tsigilis *et al.*, 2004: 672). A longitudinal study amongst 362 school-based teachers revealed that all three burnout components displayed significant and independent correlations with job satisfaction (Burke & Greenglass, 1995).

Since antecedent variables are differentially related to each of the burnout dimensions, as discussed earlier, it only makes sense to expect that the psychological and behavioural consequences of burnout are differentially related to each of the three dimensions. According to Leiter (1993) outcome variables associated with withdrawal tendencies such as turnover intention and decreased job involvement are related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. Outcome variables related to positive self-efficacy, such as control, coping and favourable attitudes to work are more strongly related to personal accomplishment. Similarly, Lee and Ashorth (1996: 130) maintain that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation are more strongly related to turnover intention and organisational commitment and weakly associated with control coping. Personal accomplishment was, however, strongly related to control coping.

As mentioned in the preceding section on burnout antecedents, much burnout research is subject to causal limitations. Research into the consequences of burnout is no exception, since most such studies have been cross-sectional. As a result, it is difficult to conclude as to whether outcome variables are indeed the result of burnout. Cherniss (1992) conducted one of the few longitudinal studies on the long-term consequences of burnout by exploring the relationship between levels of burnout experienced during the career year of 25 human service professionals and subsequent career adaptation during the next decade (12 years later). Career adaptation was measured through the use of variables including career stability, work satisfaction, attitudes towards recipients and flexibility. The results of the study were surprising and showed how individuals that were more burnt out at the start of their careers, were less likely to change careers and adopted a more flexible approach to work. As a result, Cherniss (1992: 11) concludes that burnout experienced early on during one's career does not result to any significant long-term consequences.

2.2.8.2 The consequences of burnout in customer service environments

Burnout amongst client service employees can have a detrimental impact on the organisation, since burnout has been shown to induce a decrease in concern for clients; resulting in compromised levels of service performance (Singh *et al.,* 1994). In a study conducted amongst customer service dyads (including the customer service representative and the customer) from a number of public service organisations, it was found that a negative relationship exists between levels of burnout in customer service environments and customer satisfaction (Yagil, 2006).

This negative relationship was found to be stronger when client service representatives displayed a high level of empowerment (Yagil, 2006: 258). In a study of call centre customer service representatives, Singh *et al.* (1994) revealed that burnout acted as a partial mediator between role stressors and a number of psychological and behavioural job outcomes. This indicated the importance of research into burnout amongst “boundary-spanning” employees. In 2001, Low *et al.* (2001: 588) replicated the study by Singh *et al.* (1994) by examining the antecedents and outcomes of burnout in a sales environment. Low *et al.* (2001: 589) deviate slightly from the antecedents proposed by Singh *et al.* (1994) by adding intrinsic motivation as an antecedent of burnout. Their research, which was based on a sample of 148 field salespeople in Australia, showed that intrinsic motivation, role conflict and role ambiguity are all significant antecedents to burnout. Job satisfaction and salesperson performance are direct outcomes of burnout, as well as mediating the influence of burnout on organisational commitment and intention to leave.

Due to the often precarious positions that client service employees find themselves in by having to satisfy the often competing demands of clients and management, Singh (2000: 15) makes a distinction between burnout tendencies experienced in relation to company management and burnout tendencies experienced in relation to the client. While Singh *et al.* (1994) make this distinction between burnout tendencies, they aggregate these scores to a total burnout measure. Singh (2000) argues that these tendencies are differentially related to both antecedent and outcome variables, and should therefore be kept separate in an analysis of burnout tendencies amongst client service employees. As such, Singh (2000) measured burnout tendencies that develop in response to the client and burnout tendencies that develop in response to company management and found that burnout mediates the relationship between role stress and quality and role stress and commitment. He also found that burnout in response to the client has a negative effect on quality, while burnout in response to management has a positive effect on quality. Both burnout towards client and management have a significantly negative impact in commitment (Singh, 2000: 31).
The negative consequences of burnout, particularly in the client service setting, points to the importance of gaining a better understanding of the burnout construct within this setting. It is postulated that a number of the burnout antecedents discussed in this section on burnout are inextricably linked to the concept of role

identity. It is further argued that the nature of the client service employee's role identity can result in behaviours and emotions that result in burnout. It will therefore be shown in the sections that follow how the content of role identities could lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. Client service employees who define their role identities as powerless and subordinate in relation to the client may experience a loss of autonomy or a sense of diminished personal control within the workplace. As was already shown in this chapter, reduced feelings of autonomy and control have been researched as antecedents to the burnout syndrome. The role identity of a client service employee will also carry implications for the way in which he or she defines his/her relationship with the client. Relationships that are perceived as inequitable or unfair could result in the development of burnout amongst these employees.

More recent developments in burnout research have shown how a sense of self-esteem and status can buffer against burnout. Using Burke's (1991, 1997) identity control model, we will show in the next sections of this chapter how failure to self-verify an existing role identity can result in negative emotions associated with burnout. In so doing, we will draw from the work by Hallsten (1993), Buunk *et al.* (2007) and Vanheule *et al.* (2003).

The next section of this literature review will elaborate on the definition of role identity, its antecedents and its role in shaping behaviour.

2.3 ROLE IDENTITY

As mentioned in the preceding literature review on burnout, most studies into the antecedents to burnout have focused on situational variables such as organisational and work context. The present study will depart from this tradition by focusing on the relationship between role identity and burnout. It is proposed that client service employees adopt role identities that are at least in part based on the client discourse of the organisation. The internalisation of these role identities could carry implications for the behaviour and work-related perceptions of client service employees that could result in the development of burnout.

In the next section of this literature review, the concept of role identity will be explored. Special attention will be given to the manner in which role identities influence behaviour and work-related perceptions. This will be followed by a discussion of organisational discourse and the implications that this discourse holds for the formation of client service role identities.

2.3.1 Symbolic interactionism and the concept of role identity

The concept of identity has been frequently applied in both the social and behavioural sciences. As a result, numerous theoretical traditions have explored the concept, resulting in as many conceptualisations of the term (Burke, 2003: 1). Social identity theory, for instance, assumes that one's identity is linked to the social category to which one belongs. Personal identity theory, on the other hand, focuses on the individual's sense of self as constituting the core of his/her identity (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). The present study, however, will use the concept of role identity as intended by the structural symbolic interactionists. For ease of purpose, the concept "role identity" will be used interchangeably with concept "identity", unless specifically stipulated.

The concept of role identity as defined by the current study is derived from the structural symbolic interactionist approach to self and identity as proposed by Stryker (1980). Symbolic interactionism is a micro sociological perspective that focuses on the formation of the self and the manner in which interpersonal interactions shape the individual's sense of self (Cerulo, 1997: 386). The sociological approach to self and society assumes a reciprocal relationship between the self and society. The self influences society through the behaviour of individuals which ultimately shape the groups and institutions that constitute society (Hoelter, 1993). Conversely, society influences the self through shared meanings and language that enable a person to engage in social interactions. The traditional approach to symbolic interactionism, also known as the situational approach, views society as unstructured, unstable and in a constant state of flux. Society is continually shaped and reshaped through the interpretations and meanings that individuals apply to various situations. In opposition to this view, Stryker (1980) proposes the structural approach to symbolic interactionism which assumes society to have a stable and durable nature due to the "patterned regularities that characterise most human action" (Stryker, 1980: 65). The structural symbolic interactionist perspective therefore assumes that individuals act in ways to verify their conceptions of who they are, resulting in a durable social structure created through patterns of individual and inter-individual behaviour at a number of levels of analysis. The example by Stets and Burke (2003: 129) in the paragraph below illustrates this reciprocal relationship between self and society perfectly.

"*A scientist, for example, may act in ways that make it clear to herself, as well as to others, that she is careful, analytical, logical and experimentally inclined. She may engage in a variety of actions and interactions to convey these images. These are individual patterns of behaviours that help us to understand the individual scientist. These same patterns of behaviour may be part of a larger social structure. We may find, for example, that scientists who are careful, analytical, logically inclined and who do these things well are elected to high positions in their scientific organisations"* (Stets & Burke, 2003: 129).

Stets and Burke (2003: 129) go on to state that the movement of such persons into "positions of prominence" is facilitated by their activities as scientists, which are focused at maintaining boundaries between themselves and non-scientists. The maintenance of these boundaries also ensures that resources keep flowing to the groups and organisations to which these scientists belong.

The example of the scientist just cited illustrates the symbolic interactionist's view that a reciprocal relationship exists between the self and society, whereby individual actions exist within the patterns of action and interaction that constitute society. Social structure therefore arises from the actions of individuals who in turn receive feedback from the structures they and others have created. Social structure is therefore constituted through the actions of individuals and these individuals in turn receive feedback from the social structure and adjust or re-negotiate their behaviours accordingly.

2.3.2 Role identity defined

Identity theory, within which the concept of role identity assumes a central position, has emerged from this structural variant of symbolic interactionism and is based on a number of underlying principles consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective. It has been described as a "micro sociological theory" that seeks to explain individual role-related behaviour in terms of the reciprocal relationships between self and society (Hogg *et al.,*1995: 255). According to identity theory, individual behaviour is dependent upon the meanings situated in the named or classified world. These meanings carry with them a set of behavioural expectations that are largely derived through social interaction (Hogg *et al.*, 1995: 255).

Using the symbolic interactionist framework, Stets and Burke (2003: 134) explain that:

"…the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role and incorporating into the self the meanings and expectations associated with the role in its performance. Sociological social psychologists see persons as always acting within the context of social structure, in that they and others are labelled such that each recognises the other as an occupant of positions or roles in society" (Stets & Burke, 2003: 134).

As described above, the meanings that individuals attach to themselves within particular situations are referred to as role identities, and encompass a set of expectations that prescribe behaviour that is considered appropriate within a specific role-related situation. By assigning meanings and identities to others and things, we enable ourselves to act appropriately towards those persons or within those situations, since the assigned identities incorporate a set of behavioural expectations attached to the person occupying the role (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 64).

McCall and Simmons (1978: 65) define role identity as "the character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a particular social position". This concept of role identity incorporates a "conventional" as well as an "idiosyncratic" dimension. The conventional dimension denotes the role which relates to the expectations tied to the social position, while the idiosyncratic dimension refers to the identity or unique interpretations that individuals bring to their roles. It is an “imaginative view” in terms of how people like to think of themselves as “being” and “acting” in the world. This imaginative view of the self serves as the primary source of plans for future actions since it contains expectations of behaving. It allows us to appraise our or another’s behaviours and gives meaning to our interpretations of situations and the people we encounter (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 69).

Hogg *et al.* (1995: 256) describe these role identities as “self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions or self definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy and through a process of labelling or self-definition as a member of a particular category”. Grube and Piliavin (2000: 118) define role identities as “those components of the self that correspond to the social roles we play”. The identities we assign to ourselves and others define the range of behaviours that we engage in.

The symbolic interactionist approach to behaviour does, however, not view the concept of role as a static prescription of role-related behaviour. Instead, by incorporating the concept of “identity” with that of “role”, the symbolic interactionists maintain that the subjective meaning the individual associates with a role position informs adaptive behaviour. To illustrate this point, Lynch (2007: 381) makes a useful distinction between the functionalist approach to roles and the interactionist approach to roles. The functionalist approach views roles as the set of expectations that society places on an individual and therefore views roles as deterministic prescriptions for behaviour. These expectations include all the rights, responsibilities, privileges, duties and obligations associated with the occupation of a social position in relation to others occupying other positions, and serve to foster regularised patterns of behaviour. The interactionist perspective, on the other hand, views role performances as less static than the functionalist approach does. The interactionist perspective maintains that the unique meaning the individual associates with the occupation of the role renders role performance adaptive and person-specific. For instance, two individuals enacting the same societal role may attach very different meanings to the role, and therefore display different role-related behaviours.

In the client service context, for instance, an organisation will most likely have a set of expectations according to which the client service employees working for that organisation should enact the role. These expectations will be communicated to the employees through managerial discourse, organisational policies, job descriptions and other forms of organised sanction and reward (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). While each individual client service employee will internalise these expectations to a certain degree (Alvesson & Willmott, 2004), the role of each client service employee will be infused with a person-specific meaning (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996) when enacted by each individual client service professional. As a result, the role identities of each client service employee should differ slightly, depending on the degree of internalisation and identification with the organisational discourse.

To summarise, role identities can be described as an organised collection of behavioural expectations. They are idealised notions of how we ought to behave in situations (Neale & Griffin, 2006: 23) and can be distinguished from general identities in that they represent the "sets of expectations and demands that define the parts that people play in social interaction" (Wood & Roberts, 2006: 781). General identities, on the other hand, are not context specific and account for commonalities in the identities assumed across a variety of contexts or situations.

Role identities are highly relational in that the meanings attached to the self are learned by the individual through interaction with others. According to Burke (1980: 19) "others respond as if the person has an identity appropriate to that particular role performance". These responses provide clues to the appropriate role performance, and, by implication, to an appropriate identity for one who performs in appropriate ways. When individuals engage in identity-related behaviour, they take on the role of the generalised other, thereby giving the role meaning in relation to others. Accordingly then, the identity assumed by a particular individual in a specific position is always related to an alternative, counter-identity i.e. identities are enacted as they relate to counter-identities. In the client service setting, for instance, the client service employee forms an identity in relation to that of the client.

The relational aspect of role identities is well illustrated by Parker (1997: 12) when he states that individuals construct identities by creating a "pattern of fractures" that separates the activities of one group from the activities of another. This differentiation is based on the individual's ability to make a distinction between similarities and differences amongst other individuals and groups. This idea that identities are relevant insofar as they are tied to counter-identities echoes Hegel's description of the master-slave dialectic. According to Hegel, the identity of an individual (master) is revealed through a process of "reciprocal recognition" whereby the identity of the master is only confirmed in recognition of the identity of the slave. Hegel maintains that the slave only gains an identity in the face of the master and that the master only gains identity in the face of the slave (McDonald, Rogers & MacDonald, 2008: 585). Applied to the present study, the meanings that are therefore contained within the client service identity can therefore be partly exposed through an understanding of the meanings they (as client service employees) attach to the counter-role or role of the client. As Bleakley (2006: 419) states: "comparison and contradiction" of one's role identity with that of the relevant other is a useful tool in the construction of identity relevant meanings.

Since role identities are tied to the positions one occupies in the social structure and since one individual can occupy a number of positions, an individual can assume multiple identities. The self is therefore comprised of a number of identities each of which is tied to certain positions within the social structure. A number of researchers have passed comment on the structure of these identities within the self and most postulate that these identities are organised hierarchically (McCall & Simmons, 1966; 1978; Stryker, 1980).

McCall and Simmons (1978: 84) maintain that an individual's identities are arranged hierarchically with the most prominent or influential identities situated towards the top of the hierarchy. The prominence of the role identity is determined by its need for support; the perceived degree of opportunity for the profitable enactment of the role; the intrinsic gratification the individual derives from portraying the role identity and the extrinsic gratification that the role affords the individual.

Stryker (1980), on the other hand, asserts that role identities are organised in a salience hierarchy, not a prominence hierarchy as postulated by McCall and Simmons (1978). According to Stryker (1980), a salient role identity is one that is frequently activated across situations. Salience is therefore determined by how one behaves and not by that which one values (Stets & Burke, 2002: 135).

The salience of an identity is determined by the commitment an individual has towards an identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Quantitative commitment to an identity is determined by the number of people one is tied to through an identity. While qualitative commitment is determined by the depth of ties one has towards others based on a particular identity.

2.3.3 Burke's cybernetic model of identity control

Structural symbolic interactionism has developed into "two somewhat different but closely related dimensions" (Stryker & Burke, 2000: 285). While Stryker (1980) and colleagues (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; 1994) have largely focused on how societal structures affect the self and how the meanings attached to the self affect social behaviour, Burke (1991) and colleagues (Burke & Cast, 1997; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999; Cast & Burke, 2002) have focused on the internal dynamics associated with self-processes and how these affect behaviours. In so doing, Burke has developed a micro-sociological model that explains social behaviour in terms of role identity processes.

According to Burke (1991a; 1991b; 1997), the relationship between meaning, identity and behaviour can be explained as a cybernetic model, or a perceptual control system. Since identity can be described as the set of meanings applied to the self in a social role, this set of meanings acts as a standard against which perceptions of the environment are compared. As indicated by **Figure 7**, when a specific role identity is activated, a feedback loop is established through which the individual compares the meaning standards contained within the role identity with the results of his/her actions or behaviours (output). Contained within the role identity of a client service employee, for instance, are a number of meaning standards against which the individual will judge his/her role-related behaviour. When the client service role is activated, the client service employee will attempt to act in accordance with the standards contained in the identity standard, since these identity standards serve as guides for behaviour. Once the individual has engaged in meaningful role-related behaviour, she will compare the results/outcomes of her actions with the expectations contained in the identity standard.

If the individual experiences incongruence between the expectations for role-related behaviour contained in the identity standard, and their appraisal of the situation (input), they will modify their subsequent behaviour (output) in an attempt to control the perceptual input to match the identity standard (Stets & Burke, 2003: 132).

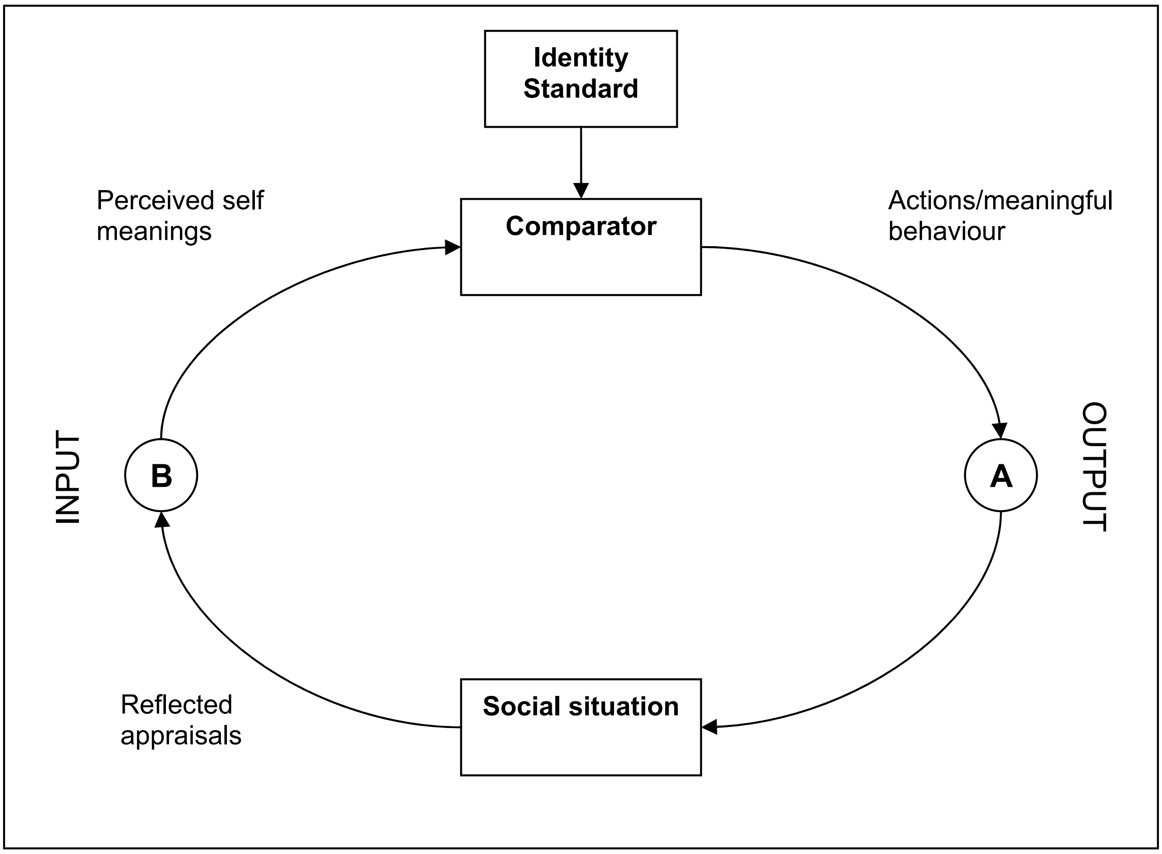

Figure 7: Burke's cybernetic identity control model (Burke, 1991a)

As a result, when a specific identity is activated, a feedback loop is established. As illustrated in **Figure 7**, this feedback loop consists of four components, namely:

- The **identity standard** (or self meanings) attached to the role (the meaning content of a role)

- The perceptual input of self-relevant meanings derived from the situation (the individual's self-perceptions of the identity enactment derived from the social environment) **(B)**
- **Comparator** − a process that compares the perceptual input with the standard
- An output to the environment in the form of meaningful behaviour that is the result of the comparison of the input with the relevant identity standard **(A)**.

In developing the cybernetic model of role identity control, Burke (1991a, 1991b) was focused on explaining the implications that role identities hold for behaviour. According to Burke (1991a), individual behaviour can be predicted through the understanding of the meanings that an individual attaches to a particular role identity.

According to the cybernetic model described in **Figure 7**, individuals act in accordance with the identity meanings contained within the identity standard. The individual compares the perceptual input derived from his/her behaviour in the situations with the identity standard. If the individual experiences incongruence between the perceived self meanings and the identity standard, he/she will modify his/her subsequent behaviour (output) in an attempt to control the perceptual input to match the standard. The control system therefore functions to modify the behaviour of the individual (output) to the situation in an attempt to enhance the match between the perceptions of the situation and the identity standard (Burke, 1997: 139). Individual role-related behaviour therefore occurs in response to the individual's constant goal to match the meaning contained within the identity standard with the situational inputs present in the situation. If the self meanings (standard) do not match the situational meanings as perceived by the individual, behaviour is modified to counteract the situational meanings and restore perceptions to match the standard. As a result, role-related behaviours are a means by which one strives to keep the self-relevant meanings in line with the meanings emerging from the situation at hand.

In keeping with the general principles underpinning symbolic interactionism, Burke's (1997) identity control model incorporates two underlying processes – that of reflexivity and that of self-verification.

Reflexivity can be described as the process by which the individual is able to evaluate the fit between the identity standard and the input from the social situation or interaction (Collier, 2001: 218). According to identity theory, the individual's ability to engage in a process of self-reflection by taking on the role of the other forms the cornerstone of understanding individual role-related behaviour. Through the process of self-reflection, individuals are able to form interpretations of how they think others see them. These interpretations become the set of meanings which ultimately make up the individual self-concept. The self-concept therefore emerges out of the reflected appraisal process (referred to in sociological theory as "the looking glass self"), whereby our interpretations of how others see us influence the way in which we see ourselves (Stets & Burke, 2003: 131). An identity is therefore formed through the processes of identification, whereby the self takes itself as an object and categorises, classifies and names itself in relation to other social categories or classifiers. This categorisation is based on the self as an occupant of a role and the incorporation into the self, all the meanings and expectations associated with performances in a role (Stets & Burke, 2000: 224).

Self-verification, on the other hand, can be described as the process by which the identity standard serves as a reference that people use to evaluate their behaviours in any given situation (Burke, 2004b). When the individual's perceptions of the situation match the meanings contained within the identity standard, identity is verified and people continue to act as they have been. If, however, there is a mismatch between the identity standard and the perceived situational meanings resultant from role-related behaviour, the person will act to counteract this imbalance (Burke, 2004b: 5). The behavioural goals that people therefore seek to attain are in fact the meanings and expectations that are held in the identity standard. According to Burke (2004b: 6):

"These meanings constitute the state of affairs that we strive to obtain and maintain as role occupants and group members. We know that we have accomplished the goals when we make our perceptions match the standards in whatever manner we can" (Burke, 2004b: 6).

Based on the literature discussed above, it could be concluded that all client service employees will have certain self-expectations in terms of how they believe they should enact the client service role. When engaging in role-related behaviour, client service employees will appraise their behaviour, based on how they perceive others' reactions to their behaviour and the actual outcomes of the behaviour. Through appraisal, they will compare their role-related behaviour with the standard contained within the client service role identity. If their perceptions of their behaviours are in accordance with the expectations contained within the standard, they will experience self-verification. If, however, they perceive their behaviour as incongruent with the behavioural expectations contained within the identity standard, they will experience a sense of failed self-verification, and attempt to adjust their behaviour so that it meets the expectations contained in the identity standard.

2.3.4 Role identity, stress and behaviour

A primary contribution of the identity control theory is that it establishes a clear link between role identity and behaviour in a number of ways. According to the identity control model, behaviour occurs as a result of the expectations contained within the identity standard, in that people attempt to behave in a manner congruent with the expectations contained in the identity standard (Steward, Hutt, Walker & Kumar, 2009). When individuals appraise their behaviour as incongruent with these expectations, they experience negative emotions as a result of failed self-verification. A failure in self-verification results in the individual modifying his role-related behaviour so as to facilitate congruence between perceptions of the situation and role-related expectations.

Burke's (1991a; 1991b) identity control model therefore essentially proposes that identities influence performance and that these performances are evaluated by the self for the kind of identity that they imply. Accordingly then, the link between identity and performance is a two-way process, where the self reinforces behaviour and this behaviour then reinforces the self.

Burke and Reitzes (1981: 84) state that the link between identity and role performance lies in the fact that they have common underlying frames of reference.

The frame of reference that an individual uses to enact an identity in a situation is the same frame of reference that the individual uses to assess his/her role performance. This common frame of reference refers to the meaning attached to both the identity and the role performance or behaviour. Burke and Reitzes (1981: 84) tested this hypothesis by empirically examining the level of congruence between the meaning of an identity and the perceived meaning of associated behaviour. Using the Burke-Tully technique, the researchers gathered data from 640 college students and assessed the impact of the student identities on two performance variables of educational plans and participation in social activities. The study found support for the hypothesised link between role identity and performance (behaviour) through establishing common meanings between the two. Similarly, in a study on predictors of volunteer behaviour, Finkelstein, Penner and Brannick (2005: 403) found that role identity and the associated expectations were the strongest predictors of time spent volunteering and length of service.

Burke’s (1991a; 1991b) model further postulates that the relationship between role identity and behaviour is shaped through the process of self-verification. The process of self-verification carries a number of behavioural and affective implications for the individual. When the meanings attached to self in situation (input) are congruent with the meanings contained in the identity standard and self-verification occurs, the individual experiences positive emotional arousal accompanied by feelings of high self-esteem and personal mastery (Cast & Burke, 2002). When a discrepancy between the perceived self in situation and the standard becomes apparent, an individual experiences negative emotional arousal, generally in the form of depression, distress, anger and hostility. Negative emotions therefore arise when one is unable to meet the behavioural expectations contained in the identity standard, while positive emotion arises when one does (Stets & Burke, 2003: 139).

Burke’s (1991a; 1991b) model therefore indicates that people seek to achieve “semantic congruence” between the meanings contained in the identity and the interpretations of behaviour that flow from a particular identity (Large & Marcussen, 2000: 51). According to Stets and Burke (2003: 140) a discrepancy in the identity verification process results in the individual either adjusting his/her standard and expectations or adjusting his/her role-related behaviour accordingly. When the input meanings in a given situation are not congruent with the identity standard, stress occurs, resulting in a change in the output behaviour. For instance, people who perceived themselves as submissive acted even more submissively if they received feedback that they were perceived as dominant.

A number of researchers have examined the nature of identity process interruption and the types of stress that ensue (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Large & Marcussen, 2000, 2003; Marcussen, Ritter & Safron, 2004). Burke and Reitzes (1991) maintain that the more committed a person is to an identity; the harder the person will work to maintain congruence between the identity standard and the environmental input (self-appraisal of the identity enactment). Burke and Reitzes (1991) propose that commitment to an identity can be based on cognitive and/or socio-emotional factors. The cognitive basis for commitment to an identity refers to the individual's perceived cost or benefit of maintaining the identity. The socio-emotional basis of commitment refers to the emotional ties that are formed with others while enacting an identity. In the context of the current study, it is likely that the cognitive basis for commitment to the client service role is strong due to the fact that the enactment of the role as determined and maintained through the employment relationship.

The interruption of an identity leads to higher levels of stress when there are repeated or severe interruptions to the identity; when the interrupted identity is highly salient; when the individual is highly committed to the identity and when the source of the perceived identity input is highly significant to the individual (Burke, 1991a: 84). Furthermore, the identity process loop can be broken when the individual perceives her behaviours to have little or no effect on the situation, leading to feelings of low self-efficacy, alienation and the loss of a sense of self (Burke, 1991a). The identity loop can also be interrupted when an individual is unable to perceive the meanings associated with a specific situation, or when there is interference from a person's other identities resulting in role conflict. Tightly controlled identity systems where appraisals of the input are required to match the identity standard closely are also more susceptible to interruption and resultant stress.

According to Thoits (1991: 105) the "more salient the role identity, the more meaning, purpose and behavioural guidance the individual should derive from its enactment, and thus the more that identity should influence psychological well-being". Events that disrupt a person's most salient role identities (identity relevant events) will therefore be psychologically more damaging than events that threaten less-valued role identities. Thoits (1995: 73) is therefore of the opinion that the more salient an identity, the more important it is as a source of meaning. As a result, identity relevant events that damage highly salient identities should induce more psychological stress than events that damage less salient identities. Conversely, identity enhancing events should have greater positive effects when they occur in relation to salient identities. In a stratified two-wave panel sample of 532 married and divorced urban individuals, Thoits (1995) found that the influence of events on changes in psychological distress were, however, not dependant on the salience of the role identity.

A number of researchers, have found support for Thoits' (1995) proposition that the more salient an identity, the greater the resultant stress when self-verification fails. According to Marcussen et *al.* (2004: 289), research suggests that stress occurring in roles that are most salient to an individual's sense of self is more likely to have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of the individual. In a study examining the role of identity in the stress process among a group of 174 undergraduates at a Midwestern university, Marcussen *et al.* (2004: 305) found that performance based inefficacy related to a role resulted in decreased feelings of self-esteem and personal mastery. The research also concluded that higher levels of commitment to an identity and identity salience increased the effects of stress on psychological well-being. In the case of client service employees, where the role identity associated with client service is largely formed as a result of the contractual obligations contained within the employment relationships, verification of the role becomes even more important. Failure to verify in these situations could therefore result in greater levels of stress, since the individuals identity standard is based, in part, on expectations derived from the employment relationship.

Burke (1991a) was initially of the opinion that any interruption in the identity verification process would result in some form of distress – the amount or degree of which would be a function of the degree of organisation of the identity and the severity of the interruption. Later theorists, however, argue that an identity discrepancy does not necessarily result in negative emotion (Large & Marcussen, 2000; Stets, 2005). If, for instance, an individual is rewarded during such a discrepancy, the standard can be adjusted to confirm the reward, thereby removing the discrepancy.

In a study examining the role of emotions in identity theory, Stets (2005: 40) set out to test whether a lack of identity verification produced negative emotion despite the direction of the incongruence between the identity standard and the input. He also attempted to determine whether a recurrent lack of verification results in more intense emotions and whether a lack of verification from familiar others affects the individual more strongly that would a lack of verification from unfamiliar others. To test his hypotheses, Stets (2005: 40) made use of an experiment that simulated a work situation in which worker identity was involved. Workers were requested to perform simple tasks and received feedback from a manager following task performance. The feedback was poised at inducing verification, lack of verification in a positive direction (where individuals were provided with feedback more positive than they would have expected), or lack of verification in a negative direction (where individuals were provided with feedback that was more negative than they would have expected). The results of the study contradict Burke's (1991a) original argument that non-verification (in either direction) results in negative emotion, by showing how non-verification in a positive direction results in positive emotion. The study also shows how persistence in non-verification results in a decrease in the strength of negative emotions associated with the role. Whether or not the feedback received was from a familiar or unfamiliar other played little role in the strength of emotional reactions.

Marcussen and Large (2003: 49) offer an extension of Burke's identity theory (1991a) in order to explain the degree of stress experienced by individuals when they experience a discrepancy in the identity verification process. They explain that the form of distress experienced by an individual during enactment of a role identity is a function of the meaning that the role holds for the individual. The authors use Higgins's (1987 as cited in Marcussen & Large, 2003) self-discrepancy theory to extend Burke's (1997) link between identity processes and stress. According to the self discrepancy theory, the self consists of three domains, namely an *actual* self, an *ideal* self and an *ought* self. The *actual* self can be described as those attributes that the individual (or others) believes he possesses. The *ideal* self refers to those attributes that the individual or others with whom the individual comes into contact wishes or hopes that the individual possesses. Finally, the *ought* self refers to those attributes that the individual or others believe that the individual should possess.

A further distinction can be made between the two positions through which the self is evaluated − own and other. *Own* refers to evaluations made by the individual of his/her behaviours and attributes, whereas *other* refers to the evaluations made of the individual by others with whom the individual comes into contact. The three self domains (*actual, ideal* and *ought)* can then be cross-tabulated with the two self perspectives resulting in six possible self-state representations: *actual own, actual other, ideal own, ideal other, ought own* and *ought other*. The representations of who we are (actual self) and who we believe others think we are (actual other) constitute the self concept and are similar to Burke's (1991a) system input (appraisals of role-related behaviour). The remaining self-state representations are self-motivating standards akin to Burke's (1991a) identity standard. Individuals compare these self concepts (actual) to their self guides (ideal and ought) and attempt to gain a state of congruence between the two. The type of emotional reaction to a discrepancy is dependent on which self guide is incongruent with the actual self. A discrepancy between the *actual* self and the *ideal* self produces depression, while a discrepancy between the *actual* self and the *ought* self produces anxiety (Marcussen & Large, 2003: 15).

Marcussen and Large's (2003) extension of Burke's model (1991a) is useful to the present study since it differentiates between the self guides included in the identity standard. Role identities of client service employees may, to a large extent, be shaped by the client discourse of the organisation. This client discourse or client ethic will be communicated to the employee through job descriptions, processes of performance appraisal and the client service culture of the organisation. This discourse will contain the expectations that the organisation has of employees when engaging in a client service role. As a result, the role identities of client service employees may contain strong *ought* dimensions. Failure to self-verify under these circumstances would therefore result in high levels of anxiety amongst client-service employees.

Stets and Tsushima (2001: 283) conducted an interesting study by drawing a distinction between role-based identities and group-based identities and the kinds of negative emotion resulting from a discrepancy in the verification process of each. They studied the worker identity as the role-based identity. Since role-based identities emphasise performance, the enactment of a role, especially within the workplace, is evaluated in terms of competence. According to Stets and Tsushima (2001: 286) role identities in organisational settings are often differentiated in terms of power and status. Individuals with low status are less likely than high status individuals to experience self-verification due to the fact that they have fewer resources at their disposal to confirm their self views.

By virtue of their service roles, client service employees are often constrained in terms of behavioural options and resources. They are often required to meet the needs and expectations of the client within parameters prescribed by the institution. When clients make excessive, sometimes unreasonable, demands these employees may feel particularly restricted and powerless in terms of being able to meet the expectations of both client and organisation. In situations such as these, client service employees may find it difficult to self-verify and suffer associated negative emotion.

Stets and Tsushima (2001: 284) also maintain that when negative emotion results from failed self-verification, individuals adopt various coping responses to counteract these negative emotions. Individuals may either adjust their behaviour or change the meaning of the identity standard through cognitive strategies. According to Stets and Tsushima (2001: 293) role identities associated with non-intimate groups (such as the worker identity) are more likely to emphasise doing a particular task than being a particular person. As a result, role-based identities are more likely to be associated with behavioural coping responses as opposed to cognitive coping responses. Client service employees are therefore more likely to adjust their behaviour in an attempt to confirm role-related expectations. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this could result in burnout through role overload.

The concepts of role identity and self-verification have also appeared in research on emotional labour. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 88) propose that if emotional labour is consistent with a central, salient and valued social or personal identity, it will have a positive influence on psychological well-being. If the display of emotional labour is inconsistent with a salient identity, it will result in emotional dissonance and a loss of sense of self. Identification with a role may therefore enhance the impact of job stressors and performance failures. The greater the level of identification with a role, the greater the internalisation of role obligations and the greater the perceived sense of failure if these obligations are not met.

The relevance of the identity control model to the current study on burnout lies in the fact that the model establishes a clear link between role identity and forms and types of behaviour. Through the process of self-verification individuals act in such a way as to establish congruence between the identity standard and the self-referent meanings that are derived from the situation. When considering the impact of role identity on behaviour it is therefore important to consider both the content of the identity (meanings and behavioural expectations attached to the identity as contained within the identity standard) and the process through which the self is verified. While behaviour is to a large extent determined by the content of the identity standard, it is also largely a product of the process of self-verification. An important contribution of the identity control model is therefore that role identity should be considered not as a set of traits belonging to an individual, but rather as a process. Individual behaviour is therefore not solely a function of the content of a specific standard, but rather the result of the comparison of the input meaning with the identity standard (Burke, 1991a: 839).

A further contribution of the identity control theory to the current study is the clear link that the model establishes between failed self-verification and negative emotion. It is proposed that failure to verify the client service role identity through identity processes associated with client service work will result in negative emotion, stress and possibly burnout.

2.3.5 Origin of the identity standard

Since its development, Burke's (1991a) identity control model has been subject to a number of criticisms. One such criticism is that the model does not adequately address the origin of the identity standard. In essence, Burke's original model is silent in terms of the processes by which individuals recognise and internalise an identity standard and where the expectations contained within the identity standard come from. More recent research into the identity control model has tried to address this shortcoming (Burke & Stets, 1999) through the distinction between principle level identity standards and program level identity standards. Principle level identity standards include abstract goals states such as beliefs, values and ideals and operate at a higher level of control than program level standards. Program level standards, on the other hand, are concrete standards that are attached to specific situations. According to Burke and Stets (1999), these principle level standards operate in identity control systems that operate at a higher level, but essentially feed into the programme level identity standard that operate at the situational level. This distinction does, however, not provide insight into the origin of principle level standards.

Early sociological thought from an interactionist perspective seems to suggest that role identity standards are in a sense pre-determined by the social structure upon which they are based. According to symbolic interactionism, roles tied to social positions are social constructions insofar as occupancy of a certain role carries with it the expectations of how one ought to behave in that specific role. According to McCall and Simmons (1978: 72) identity construction is an interpersonal act i.e. we claim identities in relation to others and therefore need to legitimise these identities in front of these same others. Significant others confirm or support the role identity we have constructed for ourselves, and in a sense, provide a degree of "role support". Similarly, Burke and Tully (1977: 883) maintain that role identities are learned in that we constantly shape our identities in relation to similarities and differences of relevant counter-roles. For instance, the meaning of the "wife" role is only significant when understood in terms of the similarities and differences it shares with the "husband" role. Given that roles, and the standards they encompass, are based on the position which one occupies in a specific social situation and since these positions are part of the social structure, the expectations and standards for behaviour contained within the associated role are pre-determined through mutual understandings between the self and relevant others.

This view is consistent with the view expressed by Stryker (1980), which states that identity standards arise from societal expectations that are held for persons occupying certain positions in that structure. An identity standard is therefore acquired through socialisation into the expectations that exist for persons occupying certain positions. These arguments however, seem over-deterministic and are, in essence, counter to the structural symbolic interactionist perspective. According to the structural symbolic interactionist perspective, a reciprocal relationship exists between the self and society, whereby social structures inform the behaviour of the self, but that the self also shapes and informs the social structure through enactment.

In an attempt to overcome the determinism implicit in role identity theory, the concept of “role as resource” was developed by Baker and Faulkner (1991). According to them roles are used as resources in the establishment and maintenance of social structure. According to the interactionist perspective, roles limit, prescribe and constrain action, while the “role as resource” view, sees roles as making action possible. The role as resource view does not deny the fact that roles structure behaviour, but states that behaviour is limited and constrained through the denial of access to other roles. A further contribution of the “role as resource” view is that it takes into account that roles can evolve and are not completely static (McDonald *et al.*, 2008: 294).

Callero (1994: 232) extends this role as resource view and describes roles as cultural objects used to accomplish interactive goals in society. Roles as cultural objects must be shared and can be described as “cognitive categories” available in a “generalized manner” to the community as a whole. Callero (1994: 233) goes on to state that roles are more than just sets of expectations, but that they also contain cultural beliefs, emotions and interpretations.

Using the conceptualisation of “role as resource”, Collier (2001) developed a differentiated model of identity construction that explains how the behaviour of individuals occupying the same role can display differing patterns of behaviour. While Collier acknowledges that most conceptualisations of role identity include multiple dimensions of meaning, he argues that models of identity construction do not incorporate the notion that identity can comprise multiple meaning dimensions. By adding ideas from the "role as resource" perspective to Burke's identity control model, Collier (2001) developed a differentiated model of role identity acquisition which shows how when individuals find themselves in situations in which they can use an identity in new or different ways, they are able to make adjustments to role standards. According to Collier (2001) these adjustments are made by changing the relative weights of the different dimensions of meaning underpinning the role identity.

In some situations, certain dimensions of a particular role identity may come to the fore, while in other situations alternative meaning dimensions may come to the fore. The differentiated model also shows how role usage affects identity acquisition. According to the model, different reference groups may have different conceptions of the meaning dimensions underpinning a role. An actor can therefore adjust role referent meanings according to the group with whom he/she interacts. Different groups of people may therefore enact a role differently due to the fact that they may emphasise different role identity meaning dimensions. Collier's (2001) model therefore extends Burke's model by showing how "variation in role usage affects identity formation". According to Collier (2001) role identities are grounded in social contexts that differ in terms of the referent groups with which one interacts. Enactment of a role identity within one social context may bring certain meaning dimensions to the fore, while enactment of the same role in another social context, may bring an alternative set of meaning dimensions to the fore.

For organisational members, the acquisition and activation of roles, is, however, somewhat constrained. As employees, we are attached to the organisation through formal and psychological contracts and our actions as organisational members may be constrained by the roles that we are required to fill as members of these organisations. As mentioned previously, Burke (1991a) attests to the fact that some standards exist by way of instruction. For instance, we are told as organisational members to do our jobs. The role standards attached to the client service employee identity will therefore, to a large extent, be defined by the institution or organisation for which the individual works. The organisation will define these role standards in such a way as to facilitate the use of the role as resource to attain valued organisational outcomes.

By stating that the work-related standards contained within the role identities of organisational members are to a large extend pre-determined, it does not mean that all client service workers will, for instance, internalise the exact same role standard and as such, behave in exactly the same way. Role enactment is an individual activity, as is the formation of a unique role identity. While the expectations for role enactment contained within the identity standard may to a large extent be determined by the social structure (in this case the organisation), the identity assumed in relation to the role will be based on the manner in which the individual employee internalises these expectations. As such, individuals within the same employing organisation, occupying the same role, may have very different interpretations of the meanings attached to the role. Since the meanings attached to the role (as contained within the identity standard) have implications for behaviour, it is logical that individuals occupying the same position in the organisation may display differing behaviours due to the fact that they have internalised the role differently and attach different meanings to its occupancy.

2.3.6 Role identity formation in organisations

Before embarking on a discussion of the implications that the client service role identity carries for the development of burnout, previous research that examines how individuals construct identities for themselves through the internalisation of societal or organisational expectations will be explored.

In a study on the impact of role identity on volunteer performance, Grube and Piliavin (2000: 1109) maintain that the enactment of a role identity is initially initiated through an individual's perceptions of the expectations of significant others. Perceived expectations of significant others lead to the development of a role identity. And this role identity then leads to the development of intentions to continue with the enactment of a specific role identity. As a result, Grube and Piliavin (2000) conclude that the best single predictor of role identity is the perceived expectations of others. While the initial expectations of significant others are key to the formation of role identities, Grube and Piliavin (2000: 1109) also maintain that the organisational context within which an individual enacts a specific role identity is critical to the maintenance of that identity. According to them, when an individual perceives his/her role as being important to the success of a valued organisation, self-esteem increases and in turn, commitment to the role identity is increased. If the individual harbours positive feelings towards the organisation, any role identity which enhances the individual's connection to the organisation will therefore be reinforced through the organisational context.

This view is consistent with that proposed by Neale and Griffin (2006: 24) who state that a person's role can be understood as "an organised collection of behavioural expectations". According to Neale and Griffin (2006: 23) the sets of behavioural expectations that underpin the work-related role are derived from three role components namely system requirements, the self-concept and the role schema. These three components are schematically presented in **Figure 8**.

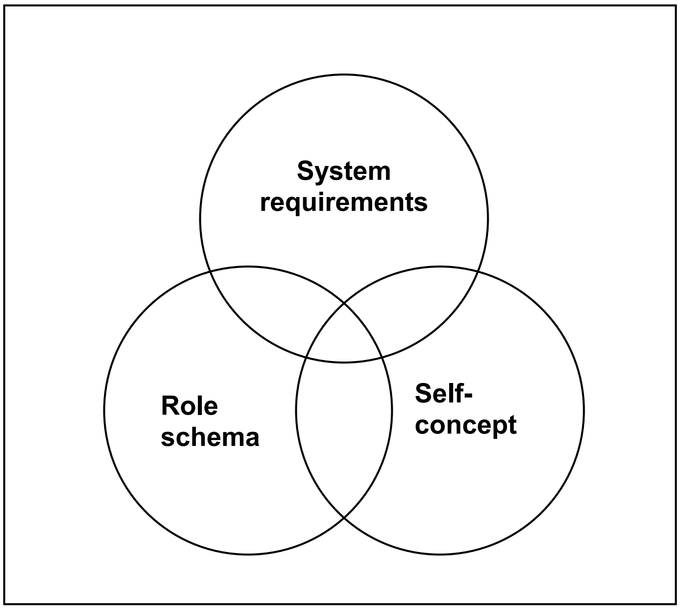

Figure 8: Neale and Griffin's (2006) role components
(Neale & Griffin, 2006)

Work-related behaviours are demanded by the organisation through system requirements which can be described as the perceptions the employee has of the employing organisation and the demands that the organisational system makes on them through the enforcement of sanctions and the provision of rewards. Included in these system requirements are the job demands of the task prescribed through formal job descriptions, manuals, organisational rules and organisational norms.

Role schemas can be defined as the "cognitive structures that define the expectations generically attached to a role" (Neale & Griffin, 2006: 28). These include the stereotypical behavioural expectations that are associated with a specific role. Role schemas are formed through experience with the organisation or similar organisations, job training, observation of other role holders and socialisation.

Lastly, the self-concept, defined as "a cognitive schema that filters, stores and organises information about the self", includes self-descriptive attitudes and traits which combine to form the ideal self. The self-concept is not static, and can change to incorporate aspects of expected behaviour. Each component is therefore a source of behavioural expectations and could therefore influence the enactment of role-related behaviour.

Similarities can be drawn between the views of Neale and Griffin (2006) and Burke's proposition that role identities are, to a large extent, culturally defined. According to Burke (2004a: 6), identities are tied to the positions we occupy in the social structure. These positions are in turn defined through culture since culture makes available the categories that name the various role positions that constitute social structure. In the organisational setting, these categories and shared meanings are communicated to the employee through the dominant discourse of the organisation. In order to function effectively in organisations and avoid sanctions, individuals internalise these discourses to varying degrees and construct identities based on the organisational expectations implied by this discourse. According to Blenkinsopp and Stalker (2004) organisational meanings and the identities invoked by these meanings are socially constructed through discourse. Since individuals construct and manage their identities as self-narratives, these narratives are likely to be congruent with the available discourses. Similarly, Jones, Latham and Betta (2008: 333) maintain that discourses provide individuals with the meanings and concepts by which they are able to "construct an understanding of themselves, their identity, their beliefs, their own meanings of issues that are going on around them, and to satisfy their need for making sense of their own experiences".

2.3.7 Organisational discourse and role identity

As discussed in the previous sections, role identity is constructed through the individual's interpretation of the expectations of relevant others. In the organisational setting, these expectations are communicated to the individual through organisational discourse. Employees then interpret and internalise these discourses to varying degrees, and construct relevant role identities.

According to Grant, Keenoy and Oswick (1998: 1) organisational discourse comprises the "languages and symbolic media we employ to describe, present, interpret and theorise what we take to be the facticity of organisational life". Traditionally, discourse was described only as spoken dialogue, and excluded reference to written texts. Contemporary theory on discourse, however, includes written and spoken texts, cultural artefacts and modes of thinking such as ideologies and philosophies (Cooren, 2004: 373; Van Dijk, 1997: 2). As a combination of both spoken words, written texts and artefacts, discourse arranges social reality into concepts, objects and subjects, thereby shaping the social practices in which we engage (Phillips & Hardy, 1997). At the level of the organisation, discourse can be described as a universally applied set of vocabularies or meanings attached to a phenomenon.

In the client service setting, for instance, identity relevant organisational discourse would comprise any company texts (both written and verbal) which contain role-related expectations of the client service employee. Job descriptions, training manuals, performance agreements, marketing brochures and company newsletters would all contain assumptions (often implicit) about what it means to be a client service employee in that specific organisation. As a result, organisational discourse in client service settings will be largely focused on communicating the client ethic of the company to employees. This client ethic refers to the norms and values the organisation and its employees prescribe to when interacting with the client. The client discourse therefore refers to the manner in which the organisation abstractly and symbolically refers to and defines the client and the relationships with the client (Anderson-Gough *et al*., 2000: 1151). Client service employees then interpret these assumptions as expectations for appropriate behaviour. These expectations become the identity standard to which all role-related behaviour on the part of the employee should conform.

Discourse does therefore not only refer to the expression of organisational life, but also represents the construction of organisational life (Van Dijk, 1997). Research into organisational discourse is largely conducted through a social constructivist lens, which maintains that social or organisational reality is enacted through discourse. Alvesson and Karreman (2000: 1130) contend that discourse drives subjectivity, enables us to make sense of ourselves and the organisations in which we operate and frames the way we understand and engage with the realities around us. Discourse drives the articulation of norms and informs the attitudes that we assume in particular contexts (Grant *et al.,* 2001: 8). Similarly, Hardy (2004: 416) asserts that discourse constructs reality by shaping the way issues are talked about and how individuals conduct themselves in relation to particular issues.

According to Alvesson and Willmott (2004: 436) organisations regulate and shape the identities of their employees by using various forms of control. In so doing, employees are "positioned" within "managerially inspired discourses" about work and organisation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2004: 437). By getting individuals to identify with the dominant discourse of the organisation, management is able to control individual and group behaviour in ways that would probably not be possible with traditionally recognised methods of control. According to Furlough (1995) those in power have more constitutive power in terms of determining the subject positions of others. Implicit in these discourses is a set of expectations that management has of employees. Employees internalise these expectations into their role identities to varying degrees, resulting in role-related behaviour and attitudes that are consistent with this discourse. To this end, Alvesson and Willmott (2004: 440) describe the employee as an "identity worker" who converts managerial discourses into "narratives of self-identity".

Figure 9 provides an illustration of the theorised relationship between identity regulation on the part of the organisation, identity work on the part of the individual and the resultant self-identity.

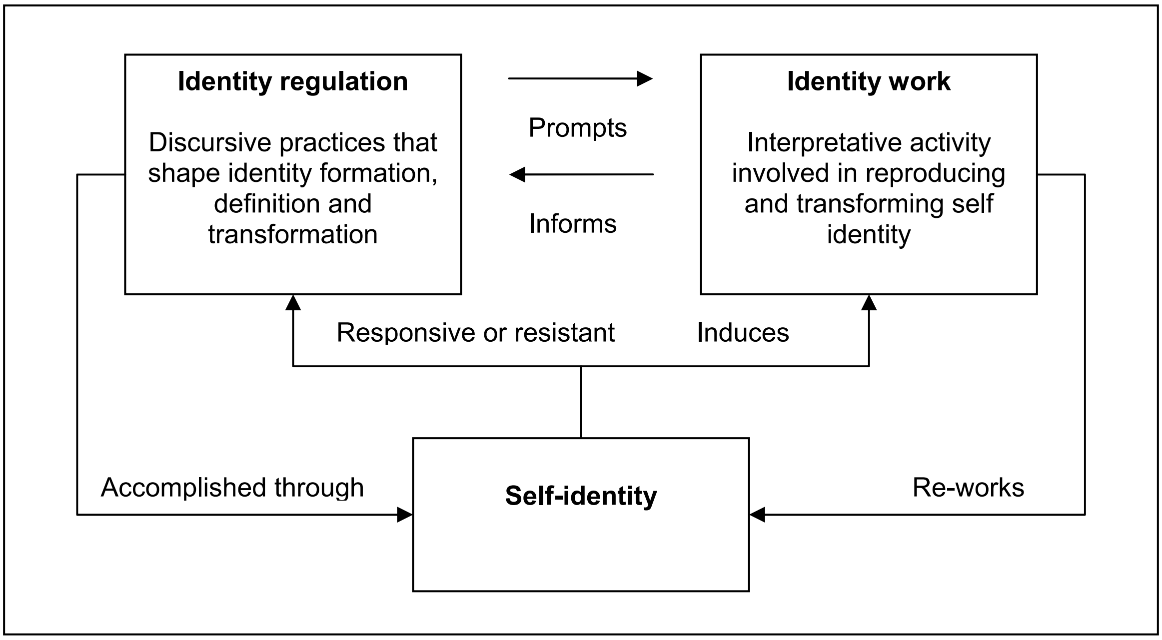

Figure 9: Identity regulation, identity work and self-identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2004: 445)

According to the model presented in **Figure 9**, self-identity is formed through identity work, where the individual adopts organisational practices and discourses that are targeted at the employee. Employees are, however, not "passive receptacles" of these organisational discourses, but instead critically interpret and internalise these discourses. Identity work then ultimately results in the formation of individual self-identity which comprises narratives of the self. This self-identity then reciprocally informs the nature of identity work and the extent to which the individual is responsive or resistant to identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2004: 446).

While the model above refers to the creation and regulation of self-identity, which Giddens (1991: 53) defines as the "self as reflexively understood by the person", the model can easily be applied to role identity theory by incorporating Burke's theory of identity construction. According to role identity theory, individuals construct role identities for themselves based on the perceived expectations of others. In the organisation, these expectations are communicated to the employee through various forms of organisational discourse. The individual employee will interpret and internalise this discourse to varying degrees and adopt a role identity which contains behavioural expectations related to a specific role.

Numerous studies have examined the constituting role that discourse can play in organisational life. Discourse has been shown to play a role in organisational power relations (Mumby, 1998; Phillips & Hardy, 1997), collective bargaining and negotiation (Hamilton, 1997), the construction and enactment of organisational strategy (Hardy, Palmer & Phillips, 2000), organisational learning (Oswick, Keenoy, Mangham & Grant, 2000), client service ethic (Anderson-Gough *et al.*, 2000) and organisational socialisation (Coupland, 2001). Several studies of particular interest to the current research have focused on the discursive construction of identities in organisational settings (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In a paper that examines how the discourses of patriarchy and class articulate the role identities of women in an organisation, Holmer-Nadesan (1996) argues that dominant organisational discourses that are embodied within organisational policies, manuals, job descriptions, values and rituals position individuals as subjects within particular contexts. Through various degrees of identification with these discourses, employees assume roles in relation to that of their clients. According to Holmer-Nadesan (1996) employees construct roles for themselves based on differential levels of identification with the dominant organisational discourse. While Holmer-Nadesan (1996) acknowledges that managerial discourses occupy a privileged position in defining what comprises appropriate organisational action, she argues that individuals have the ability to draw on alternative discourses. The degree to which individuals are susceptible to these alternative discourses is determined by the degree to which they identify with the dominant organisational discourse.

Anderson-Gough *et al.* (2000: 1151) examined how the concepts of client and client service are constructed through the client ethic discourse of two professional service firms and how the internalisation of the discourse affects role-related behaviour of organisational employees. Through qualitative analysis they show how the discourse privileges the client and how it influences the professional identity of employees within the two organisations. The study draws on an analysis of the firm's recruitment literature, appraisal documentation and qualitative interviews with approximately 70 trainee accountants and shows how trainee accountants learn to regulate their identities within the dominant client discourse of the organisation.

In a qualitative study examining how a group of men involved in the Promise Keepers Movement construct, maintain and organise their identities, Armato and Marsiglio (2002: 44) show how identity should be viewed as an ongoing process and not as a given or pre-determined status. According to the authors, "individuals continuously strive to maintain their identities, but never completely attain them in any stable sense because the world around them changes too rapidly to allow stability" (Armato & Marsiglio, 2002: 44).

Similarly, Tracy, Myers and Scott (2006: 284) maintain that while identity in organisations may be discursively constructed, it is by no means fixed or static. Instead, Tracy *et al.* (2006: 284) show how human service workers continually re-negotiate and redefine their identities through complex processes of sense-making in ambiguous and disturbing situations. According to the authors (2006: 303) human service workers use humour to make sense of themselves and re-affirm positive identities in the face of chaotic and threatening situations.

These findings are consistent with Alvesson and Willmott's (2004) model discussed earlier. According to these authors, identity work on the part of the employee does not merely imply the passive adoption of expectations contained in the organisational discourse. Each employee in the organisation will interpret the dominant organisational discourse differently, thereby rejecting and accepting certain components of this discourse and incorporating differing aspects of it into the identity standard. By implication, two client service employees working for the same organisation, exposed to the same client ethic, may display slightly differing role identities. While managerially defined discourses are generally dominant in the organisational setting, they do not exclusively determine behaviour and role-related identities. Every employee comes into an organisation with a pre-existing identity hierarchy, and will therefore be receptive to different aspects of the organisational discourse.

According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999: 413), people generally attempt to define themselves in a positive light. In a study of individuals engaging in dirty work (work with a physical, social or moral taint), Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) show how these employees construct esteem-enhancing identities through the creation of a strong work culture. While this research was conducted through the social identity theoretical perspective, it illustrates how individuals generally attempt to construct esteem enhancing identities. This proposition corresponds to what has been referred to as the self-enhancement motive. Since individuals have a need to evaluate themselves positively, identities which allow the individual to make positive self-evaluations will foster greater commitment to the role and therefore greater salience of the role (Hoelter, 1993: 141).

Research also suggests that identification with a work role carries implications for the consequences of emotional labour. Employees that identify cognitively with the organisation are less likely to feel the alienation from self or dissonance caused by emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Since the dissonance experienced as a result of emotional labour has been described as a clash between the fake self and the real self, processes of identity could play a role in the development of negative consequences following emotional labour. For instance, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 106) argue that the more central a specific role is to one's identity, the "stronger the association between one's emotional well-being and perceived successes, failures and demands". If employees identify strongly with a role and then perceive that role performance as failing, they may experience a range of negative emotions. Identification with a role carries a number of potential risks. One such risk entails burnout (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

In a study of female correctional service officers, Tracy (2005: 264) examines how "discourses of power and organisational processes enable and constrain certain constructions of identity and how these issues, in turn, impact the difficulty of emotion work". Tracy's data suggest that employees who identify strongly with the correctional setting were more prone to experience frustration in their search for power and meaning within the organisational setting. If emotional labour confirms the organisational or role identity to which the employee subscribes, then the enactment of emotional labour is easier. Furthermore, if employees perceive the enactment of emotional labour as part of a “strategic exchange”, they are more likely to find it easy. However, identification with the role does not always ease emotion work. In cases where the successful enactment of a role with which one identifies strongly is thwarted, it could result in stress and cognitive dissonance.

2.3.8 Conclusion

The aim of the present research is to explore the relationship between discursively constructed role identity and burnout among client service employees. It is argued that through the process of identity construction, client service employees will, to varying degrees, internalise the client discourse of the organisation, and assume roles in accordance with this discourse. It is further suggested that employees working in organisations with a strong service ethic may derive role identities from this discourse that place them in a subservient and subordinate position to that of the client. This position of subordination and subservience may place undue demands on the employee, resulting in emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment.

It is therefore not the aim of the present study to analyse organisational discourse as an independent variable. Instead, the research focuses on how client service employees interpret and internalise the client discourse of the organisation and construct role identities for themselves based on this discourse. Discourse in the context of the current study is therefore used in its broader sense as a “set of representations and ways of structuring reality that put strong imprints on cognition and attitudes” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000: 1129). Ideas and meanings as derived from organisational discourse are the focus of the study, not the actual organisational texts. Alvesson and Karreman (2000) refer to this as meso-level discourse analysis, which focuses on the study of social reality as discursively constructed. Micro-level discourse analysis, on the other hand, refers to the analysis of social texts and language.

In the next chapter, the research argument is developed by drawing on the theories presented in this literature review. A conceptual framework is presented, which links the development of burnout with the enactment of role identities in client service settings.