

CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT BASED ON EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to a conceptual understanding of employees' experiences of a transformation process. This is done by relating described experiences to existing theory and even building or extending theory where applicable. First, a perspective of transformation is offered portraying it as a phenomenon consisting of various stages. This is done with the explicit aim of underscoring the fact that any of the stages of such a process can potentially impact on employees and therefore need to be distinguished. Then follows a discussion on the development of individual frameworks of transformation, referred to as "concepts" of transformation, that represent employees' understanding of the why, what and how of the process.

Descriptions of employees experiences of the general outcome of the process as well as references to the management of the process, are then used to describe a conceptual model for understanding employees experiences of the transformation process. Possible mediators for facilitating positive experiences are also discussed and finally the contribution of the study is highlighted.

2 TRANSFORMATION AS A PROCESS OF IDENTIFIABLE STAGES AND DIMENSIONS

The discussion of the individual experiences of the transformation process as well as the identification of common themes of the collective experiences leads to the clear (and rather simple) conclusion that transformation elicits a wide range of diverse experiences, agreements, disagreements and feelings (positive and negative). This empirical study, focusing on employee's experiences of a completed process, provides valuable insights into the multiplicity of events, decisions, processes and interpersonal encounters that elicited particular responses.

2.1 Stages of a transformation process

This study shows that employees experience transformation as consisting of different phases or entities. As indicated earlier, they related their experiences and opinions to the period before (pre-transformation), during and after the transformation. The significant aspect is not that these phases correspond with Levin's (in Burke, 1987) managerial perspective of unfreezing, moving and refreezing stages, but rather that employees experienced these phases differently. In other words, the different phases had identifiably different impacts on employees. Pedro's remark about the difference between the decision and the implementation is a good example of the different responses that might be elicited by the different phases of the process: "...die besluit om



te transformeer was op sigself nie problematies nie maar wel die implementering daarvan.” Thus, when discussing, studying or analysing the impacts or effects of a transformation process on employees, it cannot be treated as a single phenomenon, but rather as one consisting of identifiable stages and dimensions.

This finding on the different impacts of the various stages of a change process corresponds with Brockner's (1988) conclusions on employees' reactions to layoffs. In a theoretical study reflecting on the research, theory and practice with respect to layoffs, Brockner (1988) concluded that studies on layoffs need to regard survivors' reactions (experiences) as a process in which three periods can be used, namely before, during and after the layoff has taken place.

Recognising the process as consisting of different phases has definite implications for the management perspective of transformation or large-scale change. Not only should the management of a process invest energy in establishing a readiness for change (pre-transformation) by comparing the present with the future end-state, but the management should also actively revolve around the transition (moving from here to there) and the final outcome of the process. “Critical mistakes in any of the phases can have a devastating impact...” (Kotter, 1995, p. 60).

In a study on a large South African organisation that underwent transformation, Hamilton-Attwell (1997) found that the employees grew more negative about the transformation the more they experienced its impact. The reference to “experiencing its impact” raises the question whether the increase in negativity is not rather attributable to the later phases of the process (transition and post-transformation) than to the decision to change from one paradigm (the first phase) to another. In an empirical study on the transformation of the management of Extrusion Company from a traditional to a participative form, Hennestad (2000) came to the conclusion that too little management attention was the major reason why the idea did not fully succeed in practice.

It demonstrates that it is simply not enough to design and proclaim a new order — in this case, participative management. New organizational practices are not ensured by commitment to ideas alone; a complex process is required to create them (Hennestad, 2000, p. 330).

His findings underscores the notion that great organisational effort before implementation, thus creating a readiness for change in the before phase, does not guarantee almost instant or successful implementation. The term “instrumental change management” is created to refer to the process whereby organisational ideas are turned into organisational reality, which is different from operational management. This corresponds with the transition phase identified by Beckhard and Harris (1987) as a period in need of special, dedicated structures and management mechanisms to accomplish the major tasks of that period — and even more so when the change is large and complex (Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Barrett & Cammann, 1984). Although not within the ambit of this study, it is interesting to note that Hennestad (2000) also concluded that the findings on instrumental change management challenge the argument that leadership rather than management can produce change. His findings imply that there is both a leadership and management dimension to change.

Apart from instrumental change management, managing the transition by using structures and mechanisms to implement the proposed change, employees also respond to the way the transition is done. So, for example, participants in this study complained about the lack of consultation during the process, the limited extent of involvement in decision-making and management's



indifference to the emotional impact of the process on employees. According to Cooper (1995, p. 39), "Organizations are bound to continue having trouble implementing change until they learn that people resist not change per se, but the way they are treated in the change process and the roles they play in the effort." Cunningham (1997) concludes that employees' negative feelings during the death of an organisation resulted from the way the process was handled and administered. As one of his respondents remarked: "It is not losing the job that bothered me, it is the insensitivity and callousness by which they dealt with me" (Cunningham, 1997, p. 488).

It is inevitable that the change to a new or different organisational paradigm (the end-state) will produce gains and losses. In William and Stephan's case they both lost their positions on the executive management committee as a result of the change to representivity. Foote (2001) indicates that it is critical to identify (timeously) who is going to lose what in the end state. Losses should be acknowledged instead of simply accepted as part of the process and efforts should be made to give something back to employees (Foote, 2001).¹ Tamboe (1990) argues for a change model that dedicates time at the end of the process to deal with those employees who are adversely affected.

Apart from the impact of the change paradigm, it is also possible that practical implications of the newly implemented paradigm or the various decisions during the process may impact (negatively) on employees. Within the transformation process, several smaller changes eventually culminate in the materialisation of the vision or end-state. These smaller changes also consist of a conceptual element (ie, the essence or conceptual content of the decision), the implementation and finally the practical implications of the decision. This implies that employees experience the "practical outcome" of implemented decisions throughout the process. So, for example, the process of upward mobility in the organisation with representation on the executive committee as the highest rank was made redundant by the decision to have participatory decision-making. Several participants also complained about the heavy workload that resulted from the decision to offer new and changed courses to clients. These new courses had to be developed amidst their normal or usual duties. It is thus possible that employees could lose faith in the new paradigm or become negative somewhere in the process (as Anja, in fact, experienced) due to the adverse effects of implemented decisions. Although some outcomes, such as an increased workload, seem to be an inevitable outcome of such a process, it is necessary to at least acknowledge the changes that resulted from the decision, provide organisational support of some kind, develop new career options or even compensate employees for their efforts in one way or another (Goodstein, et al., 1991, p. 13).

For an organisation to move from the current to the future reality, Goldratt (1994) advises that the organisation deliberately go through an exercise to envisage consequences of the future state (by drawing future reality trees) and timeously develop action plans to prevent or combat potential negative consequences of the change. The administrative chaos with a multiple meetings and bosses to which William referred, could perhaps have been anticipated and dealt with proactively. Dealing with the practical implications of decision is therefore considered an essential part of the change process that needs deliberate attention (Goldratt, 1994; Kendall, 1998). It

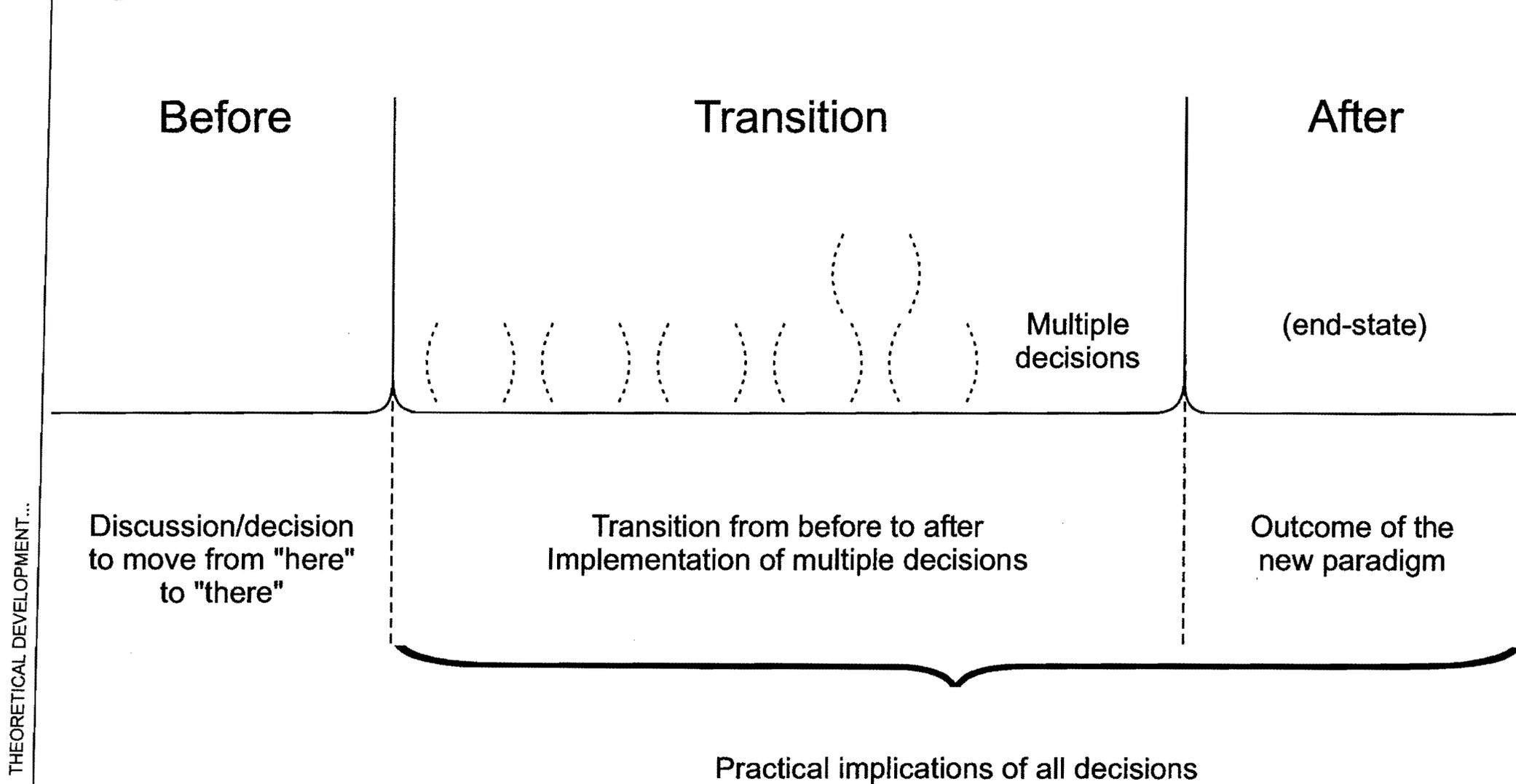
1. Acknowledging losses would imply that the view that employees deserved the losses, or that it is due to their conduct (or misconduct) needs to be changed. It is even suggested that a proper period of grieving needs to be introduced to allow employees the opportunity to part from the past.



is surprising though that in the literature on transformation, little attention is given to the potential impacts of the practical implications of an implemented decision. Figure 5.1 presents the different stages and dimensions of an experienced transformation process.

It is thus concluded that when referring to a transformation or large-scale change, it is necessary to distinguish between the different stages and domains of such a process, as each of these can elicit very different responses from employees. So, for instance, an employee may fully agree with a particular decision (substitute one paradigm for another), but disagree or be adversely affected by the instrumental change management or the way in which the decision or change has been implemented. In the same way, an employee may agree with the decision, the instrumental change management and the way it was implemented, but is adversely affected by the practical implications or outcome of the decision. (See, for example, where participants complained about access to resources that became difficult as a result of the structural changes with which they agreed). To understand and deal with the impact of transformation on employees, it is thus critical to differentiate which stage or domain of the transformation process or decision elicited a particular response as it might require quite different strategies.

Figure 5.1 Stages and dimensions of a transformation process





3 DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PROPOSED TRANSFORMATION

The pre-transformation phase indicates the period of “coming to the decision” that transformation is necessary. This phase refers to the organisation as perceived and experienced by employees before any changes took place. It also encapsulates the period of discussion and reflection in the organisation leading to the decision to transform and the communication of this decision to employees and other stakeholders. This may be regarded as Levin’s (Burke, 1987) unfreezing period, Beckhard and Harris’ (1987) current or present state of an organisation, or Levy’s (1986) decline and transformation phase where the need for change is accepted, and the organisation commits itself to change and depart from the old beliefs (paradigm) and habits.

Based on the analysis of data in the pre-transformation phase of the process, all except one of the participants felt that the organisation had to transform. Despite their agreement with the decision to transform, employees gave different reasons as motivation for the change. Some participants indicated outdated products as a reason while others felt that intra-organisational issues and/or changes in the external environment necessitated the decision. Furthermore, it was deduced that employees’ perceptions of why transformation was necessary, were influenced by various individual reasons, such as their personal beliefs and upbringing, prior work experience, exposure to literature and external people, personal characteristics and the nature or level of personal investment in the old organisation. It was thus concluded that agreement with the decision to transform happened for different reasons based on their personal beliefs and values and prior experience or history.

3.1 Influence of organisation-employee relationship on the development of an understanding of change

The deduction that there are multiple and different perceptions of the necessity for change is consistent with research findings that individual employees do not necessarily interpret the reasons for transformation in the same way (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999; Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993; Eby, Adams, Russel & Gaby, 2000). The second deduction, namely that many factors/constituents, such as personal experience and background, organisational issues and external developments shape individual perceptions of the necessity to change also concurs with research findings. Research on the causal frameworks used by employees to understand change distinguishes between social accounts theory and motivated reasoning. Social accounts refer to the reasons, explanations or excuses offered by management for the proposed change. Motivated reasoning refers to employees’ active interpretation of the reasons for the proposed transformation. According to motivated reasoning, employees interpret the reasons given for the change (social accounts) differently (Armenakis, et al., 1993). Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999, p. 526) conclude that employees rely on “a system of beliefs regarding their relationship with the organization and its management” to understand and interpret the reasons for change. Employees understand the reasons for change differently, depending on the nature of their relationship with the organisation. So, for example, employees are inclined to doubt the legitimacy of management’s reasons for change if the relationship lacks trust. In this particular study, Soonja, Heike and Leslie voiced their mistrust in the organisation by referring to how they experience the organisation as such. An employee’s relationship with the organisation is a pro-



duct of the organisation-employee history and the nature of the employee's psychological contract with the organisation (Rousseau, et al., 1999; Strelbel, 1996). A relational contract which entails mutual obligations to support each other's interests, offers security, loyalty and commitment and involves a high degree of flexibility is believed to be more facilitative of the acceptance of change (Rousseau, et al., 1999; Strelbel, 1996). A transactional contract, on the other hand, consisting largely of a narrowly defined exchange of specific job tasks for monetary compensation, seems to be less facilitative for the acceptance of change (Rousseau, et al., 1999). Thus, employee perceptions of, say, an organisation's trustworthiness, flexibility and willingness to listen and to support (based on prior experiences) filter an employee's understanding of the reasons for change.

3.2 The influence of individual histories and characteristics on the development of an understanding of the proposed transformation

Armenakis et al (1993, p. 687) refer to mass communication theory to explain different perceptions of the reasons for change. Individual difference theory specifies that "specific individuals may react differently to the same message" whereas an individual's cultural or sub-cultural membership will influence the understanding according to the social differentiation theory (cultural or sub-cultural groups should be understood as referring to hierarchical levels, professional groupings, unions etc). Issues such as loyalty, commitment and feelings about the leaders may influence individual members' understanding of the reasons for change (Rousseau, et al., 1999, p. 526). Eby et al (2000, p. 422) state that the understanding of the reasons for change reflects an individual's unique interpretive reality of the organisation. Employees hold different perceptions of a particular objective reality (Spreitzer, 1996). Worren, Ruddle and Moore (1999) claim that employees' different educational background and functional responsibilities contribute to distinctive perceptions of the reasons for change and how to go about it. Katz and Kahn (1978) justify employees' interpretive and active involvement in the construction of an understanding of the reasons for change as follows: "The wish to name the game, to choose and define it rather than merely to play it, is distinctively human..." (Katz, et al., 1978, p. 666).

In the process of comparing a future, preferred state with the current state of the organisation to arrive at an understanding of why the organisation has to change, the participants Soonja, Heike and Pedro pointed out that their expectations of what the process would comprise and would result in were raised. These "individual" expectations were based on their individual interpretations of the organisation and their individual conditions or situatedness in the organisation. It is thus argued that the understanding of the need for change individual employees arrive at also consists of their individual expectations about the content and outcome of the process. This deduction is consistent with Eby et al's (2000) view that the process of responding to happenings in their environment, of understanding the reasons for change, is based on individually held assumptions and expectations. This is the way individual employees interact with a chaotic system in order to make sense of it and instill order (or a new order) (Eby, et al., 2000; Wheatley, 1992).



3.3 Open membership of employees as contributing factor to the development of an understanding of the proposed change

The above discussion about employees' understanding of the reasons for change argues that employees interpret the reasons for change given by the organisation (social account) in an individualistic manner to arrive at their own, personal understanding (motivated reasoning). The assumption is thus that the process of understanding starts with the speculations prior to and then the announcement by the organisation that transformation is inevitable. Soonja, Heike, Pedro and Delianne's descriptions of their particular perceptions of the need for change indicate that they were of the opinion that the organisation had to transform prior to the formal decision taken by management. Soon after their respective appointments, both Soonja and Heike felt that the organisation was out of touch with the external environment whereas Pedro indicated that over time he realised that change is inevitable. These three participants, in particular, advocated the necessity for transformation prior to the actual decision taken by the organisation. The point of this argument is to indicate that the foresight and vision that organisational transformation has to happen in order to remain in business is not the prerogative of management only. This study shows that ordinary organisational members can also reflect on the status quo of the organisation, interpret the changing environment in which the organisation functions and come to know that change is necessary. As a matter of fact, it seems as if employees can even play an active role in influencing the opinion of management in favour of a decision for transformation.

Employees do not only interpret and understand the organisational message of why change is necessary in a unique manner (Eby, et al., 2000; Rousseau, et al., 1999; Armenakis, et al., 1993), but they can also arrive at an understanding of the necessity for change based on their personal interaction with the external environment (Levy, 1986; Griffin & Mathieu, 1997). It is thus postulated that besides interpreting the message communicated by management (social account) (Rousseau, et al., 1999), employees also interpret changes in the external environment to come to the understanding of why change is necessary. Acknowledging that an organisation is an open system (Katz, et al., 1978), implies that, as members of the organisation, employees are exposed to the external environment. Cappelli (1991) points out the important role the external environment plays in determining the behaviour of individual employees. Exposure to the external environment is quite visible in an academic institution where the organisational boundaries are permeated by "the culture of the enterprise, the culture of the academic profession at large, and the culture of academic discipline" (Dill, 1982, p. 308; Herguner, 2000). Individual employees are therefore members of four "organisations" simultaneously (organisation, larger enterprise, profession and the discipline) which increases their exposure to the external environment and other opinions. According to Satow in Dill (1982), when conflict arises between professional commitment and bureaucratic role, the potential power of multiple membership enables employees to give preference to the pursuit of knowledge and not to the organisation.

Ashford (1988) points out that there is a tendency to focus on individual resistance to change while ignoring that many employees actually actively try to cope with and adjust to changes. The proactive involvement of participants in bringing about the transformation contradicts the general assumption (and even perhaps management paradigm) that, generally speaking, employees resist change. The proactive involvement of employees is also in sharp contrast to the view that



employees' adjustment to change compares to the psychological stages Kübler-Ross identified that terminally ill patients go through, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Hamilton-Attwell, 1997). The underlying assumption of such a view is that transformation is necessarily perceived and experienced by all employees as a loss. This seems to be an oversimplification. At best it can be argued that some employees, who experience the process as more negative than beneficial, may go through these phases. The responses of participants in this study clearly illustrate that some employees actually experience transformation as a challenge and providing opportunities (see Pedro, Anja, Ute, Delianne, Leslie, Drohan). It can thus be inferred that employees who work towards the change and see it as a challenge do not go through the specified psychological stages (Warren, 1984).

3.4 The role of collegial relationships in the development of an understanding of the proposed transformation

According to the social relationships theory, employees' understanding of the reasons for change, "hinge on the network of relationships" they have (Armenakis, et al., 1993, p. 687). Individual employees are susceptible to colleagues' opinions on the reasons for change (Armenakis, et al., 1993; Rousseau, et al., 1999). Burke (1987) refers to the potentially influential role that informal leaders can play in changing opinions about organisational transformation. The focus of this argument is therefore predominantly on the opinion of colleagues, peer groups or informal leaders about the reasons for change. The potential influence of the nature of the relationships between/amongst colleagues is not highlighted in this regard.

Delianne's experiences of with respect to her relationship with colleagues highlights a different dimension of these relationships, which may influence the understanding of the change. In her description of her perceptions of the old organisation (prior to the transformation) Delianne mentioned several times that her previous colleagues did not allow her the freedom to speak her mind as her opinion diverged from the popular or dominant opinion. She described herself as the outsider whose work had been sabotaged and who was forced to become somebody different. She also indicated that this poor relationship with prior colleagues influenced her perceptions of the change process (*...die manier hoe dit vroeër beleef is, kan nie afgeleer word nie want daar bestaan nie 'n basiese vertrouensverhouding nie*). It thus seems that the history and nature of the relationships between colleagues may have an impact on individual employees' interpretations of the reasons for change.

This argument can be substantiated by the application of chaos theory to organisational science, where an organisation is seen as consisting of relationships (Wheatley, 1992). Individual employees are defined by the relationships amongst them: "None of us exist independent of our relationships with other" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 34). Barczak, Smith and Wilemon (1987) also stress the significance of the nature of employee relationships in a transformation process. They identify bonding and attunement amongst organisational members as one of four key ingredients for successful large-scale change (the other three ingredients are pattern breaking, experimenting and visioning). According to Barczak et al (1987, p. 29), bonding and attunement develop when members cultivate "a greater sense of community, trust, respect and shared values". This corresponds with Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) and Eby et al's studies that identified the level of trust and acceptance, tolerance, shared emotional experiences, and the convergence or divergence of personal ideologies as elements contributing to the nature of the



relationships amongst employees. It is thus argued that as the nature of the relationship between an individual employee and the organisation influences the unique understanding of change, so does the relationship between individual employees or groups of employees influence individual perceptions of change.

4 MULTIPLE CONCEPTS OF CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF A WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS

An understanding of the reasons for change (as discussed in the previous section) is achieved through the development of an awareness of the discrepancy between a desired end-state and the present state or performance of the organisation (Katz, et al., 1978; Bunker & Alban, 1992; Armenakis, et al., 1993). Therefore, when individual employees develop their own understanding of the reasons for change, they have actually compared (intuitively or deliberately) their individual perceptions of a desired end-state with their individual perceptions of the present state. As stated earlier, this process of arriving at an understanding of change is influenced by personal values, beliefs, expectations and previous experiences, the reciprocal relationship between an employee and the organisation and collegial relationships. Bartunek and Moch (1987) and Lau and Woodman (1995) describe this understanding of transformation, or the "concept" of transformation (as used in ch 3) as schemata of change which Lau and Woodman (1995, p. 538) define as "a sense-making framework containing organized knowledge of change attributes".

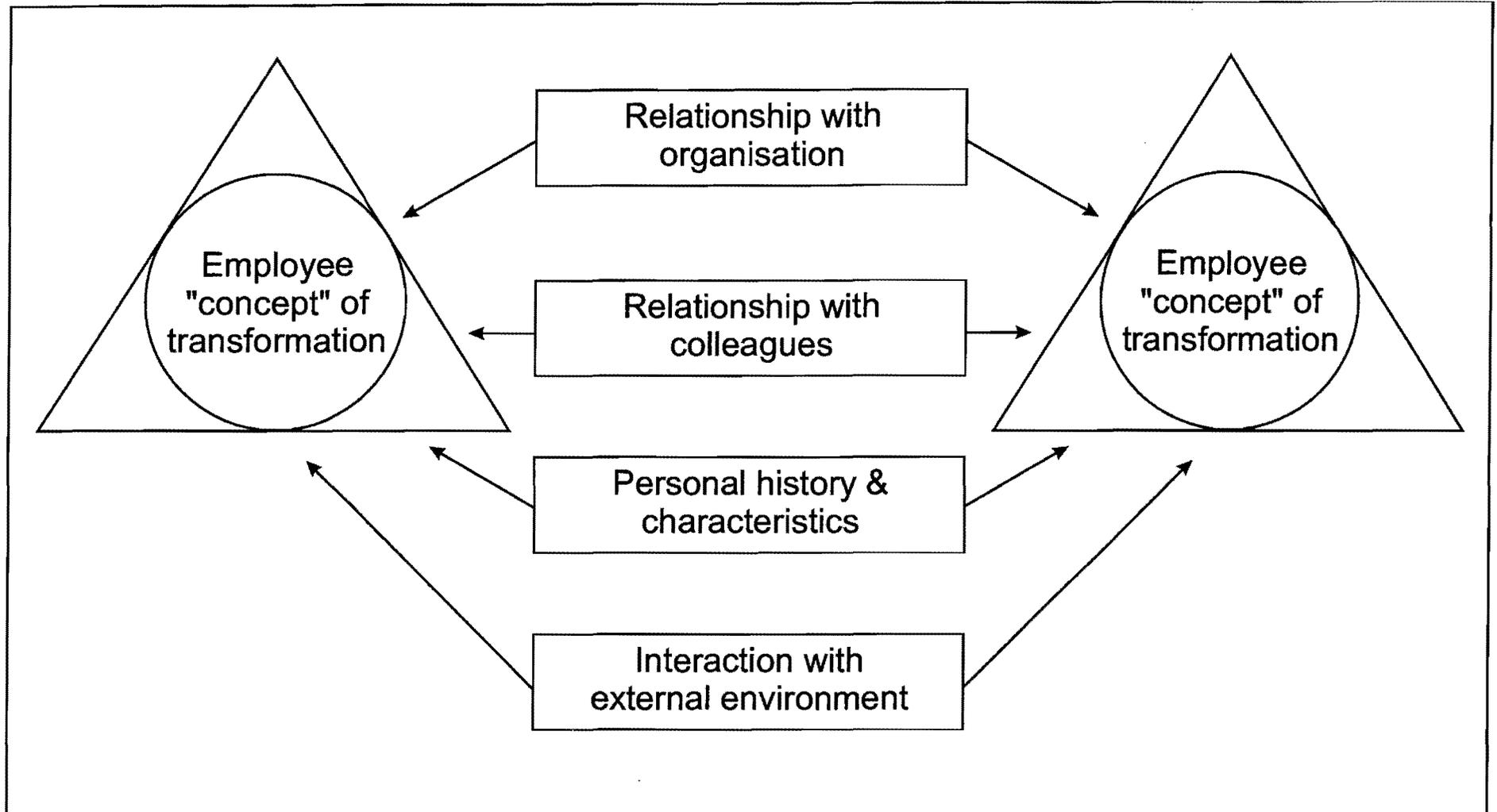
Armenakis et al (1993) and Eby et al (2000) use the term "readiness for change". Armenakis et al (1993, p. 682) define it as the "cognitive precursor to the behaviors of either resistance to, or support for, a change effort" and also add an employee's perceptions of the organisational capacity to successfully change.²

Although a "concept" or "schemata" or "understanding" of change is utilised, it is important to highlight that this state or concept is based on cognitive (factual) as well as relational information. Figure 5.2 presents a model (slightly altered from the one in ch 3) to include the various constituents and relationships that contribute to the development of individually held concepts of transformation.

It is thus clear that "employees are not merely passive recipients of change messages" (Rousseau, et al., 1999, p. 516). They are present in this phase with all their prior individual experiences, beliefs, group membership, opinions about the relevance of the organisation, their personal make-up and expectations. All of these constituents contribute to the interpretative pro-

2. Focusing on participants' opinions on and understanding of the need for change, it is interesting that they focused mainly on their own views. Perceptions about the capacity of the organisation to change were not as prominent. Opinions about the impetus for change may be interpreted as participants' evaluation of the organisational capacity to change. So, for example, did Soonja mentioned that the process originated externally as she was of the opinion that the organisation would not have taken the decision themselves. This opinion portrays an organisational unwillingness or even inability to change. Heike, on the other hand, felt that the internal origin of the transformation provided the organisation full control over the process. This may reflect her opinion that the organisation perhaps had a predetermined agenda. These opinions about the impetus for the change are also an indication of the nature of their relationship (lack of trust) with the organisation. Although it is not the intention of this study to discuss the definition of the concept "readiness for change", it seems valid to remark that the two aspects of individual readiness and organisational capacity, are not necessarily experienced by employees as elements of the same dimension.

Figure 5.2 Development of individual concepts of transformation



cess whereby employees develop their individual concepts of transformation (Griffin, et al., 1997; Jurow, 1999). Therefore, in the pre-transformation phase many different, individually comprised concepts of transformation are present which are not necessarily (highly unlikely) congruent with the concept of transformation understood by the organisation (management).

The first implication of this model of experiences/opinions in the pre-transformation phase is that the introduction of transformation in an organisation happens amidst already existing perceptions and relationships between the individual employee and the organisation and mutually amongst employees or groups of employees. Thus, when transformation is introduced, it happens in the context of a whole web of relationships and against a background of histories of past experiences involving perceptions of trust, support, honesty, fairness, and integrity. These relationships and experiences are therefore mitigating factors in employees' experiences and opinions regarding the proposed transformation.

The second implication is that, due to the active, interpreting role of employees in understanding the reasons for change, many diverse concepts of transformation are present in the pre-transformation phase. It thus clear that the concept or schema of transformation as presented by management is definitely not the only concept present when the process is implemented. Given that such a concept serves as a set of guiding principles for people's attitudes, behaviour, participation and direction during a transformation process, it seems valid to conclude that many diverse sets of principles are active when a transformation process is started. It is thus postulated the employees' experiences and opinion of such a process are also influenced by the extent to which their individual concepts of transformation are congruent with the organisation's concept of transformation.

4.1 Bridging the gap between the organisational concept of transformation and the various individually held concepts of transformation

This study indicates that employees construct their own pictures of the change and these pictures of the change direct their opinions, experiences and conduct during a transformation process. The question is how successful a transformation process can be if various incongruent and sometimes even incompatible pictures (such as Leslie's and Heike's to some extent) are guiding the process. This implies that the various concepts of the stakeholders in the process need to be similar or at least as congruent as possible (Bunker, et al., 1992; Miller, 1998). Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (1990) argue that the development of a shared diagnosis of what is wrong and what must be improved is a critical first step in a change effort. However, this study suggests that the communication of the organisational concept of transformation — even "effective" communication — does not imply a shared or congruent vision or concept of transformation.

Bartunek (1987) points out that an organisation's schema of change, which assumes shared frames of reference (for the whole organisation or at least subgroups) has to be negotiated amongst the individual members; it does not happen automatically. Tampoe (1990, p. 349) concludes that successful change "requires a period of consultation so that a coincidence of views and goals can be achieved". According to Schaafsma (1997, p. 41) research data on the concerns of middle managers regarding organisation-wide change indicate that the model or blueprint (concept) used in the process needs to be adapted and transformed by stakeholders:



“Models of change need to be socially constructed”. Morgan in Schaafsma (1997) states that all stakeholders in the change process need to co-construct the pictures and metaphors for the change. This participation in the development of a shared picture results in more than shared content: “It is the process of developing a shared vision and values that both creates the glue and mobilizes action, not the content alone. For those who are not involved in the process, the result is only words on a paper that are unlikely to create energy” (Antal, 1993, October, p. 12).

Schaafsma (1997) indicates that the common denominator of various contemporary change models, such as the networking model, matrix model and open systems model, is refocusing on the people. This focus requires building consensus among the stakeholders on the critical components of the change. Thus, the development of a shared vision or concept of change presupposes first, the understanding that each employee is differently “situated” within the organisation and thus experiences and perceives the “need to change” differently for valid reasons over which the organisation has little or no control. Secondly, it presupposes an organisational “will” to invite employees to speak, to share their minds, to reveal the origins of their particular perceptions of the concepts of change without fear. It thus presupposes a particular organisational culture that values the intellectual ability of employees, a culture of structuring avenues for employees to share their ideas and opinions (without fear), a culture where differences in opinion and conflicting viewpoints can be maintained (Levine, 2001).

However, arguing for the necessity of a process of consultation or negotiation, or social construction of a shared concept of transformation, does not exclude the possibility that, despite these efforts, some employees may still not share the organisational concept — due to the inevitable existence of individual concepts. Beer et. al (1990) describe commitment to change as uneven. In the same way it may be argued that agreement with the shared concept of transformation will always be uneven.

4.2 The context

It has been concluded that when transformation is introduced into an organisation, it is done in the context of a whole web of existing relationships and against a background of histories of experiences, and perceptions of trust, support, honesty, fairness, and integrity. The context, from the perspective of an employee, consists of three elements namely the individual, the organisation (usually represented by management) and colleagues. The context is characterised by an organisational paradigm,³ which corresponds to a lesser or greater extent with the beliefs and values of the individual members (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1996).⁴ Furthermore, this context also contains the formal and informal relationships within the organisation (between employees mutually and between employees and the organisation). The nature of “formal” relationships depends, to an extent, on an organisation’s perception of employees (their role, status) (Kabanoff, Waldersee & Cohen, 1995) and would be reflected in the various policies and codes of conduct dealing with human resources issues (Goodman, Ravlin & Schminke, 1987).

3. Pascale (1990) distinguishes between an individual’s beliefs and values and organisational beliefs and values or paradigm as a paradigm can only exist in a group context

4. The reference to beliefs and values as they pertain to the organisation is simply to specify them as such to distinguish them from beliefs and values in general. An individual’s organisational beliefs are naturally based on the person’s general belief system. However, personal beliefs and values pertain to more than just the organisational environment.

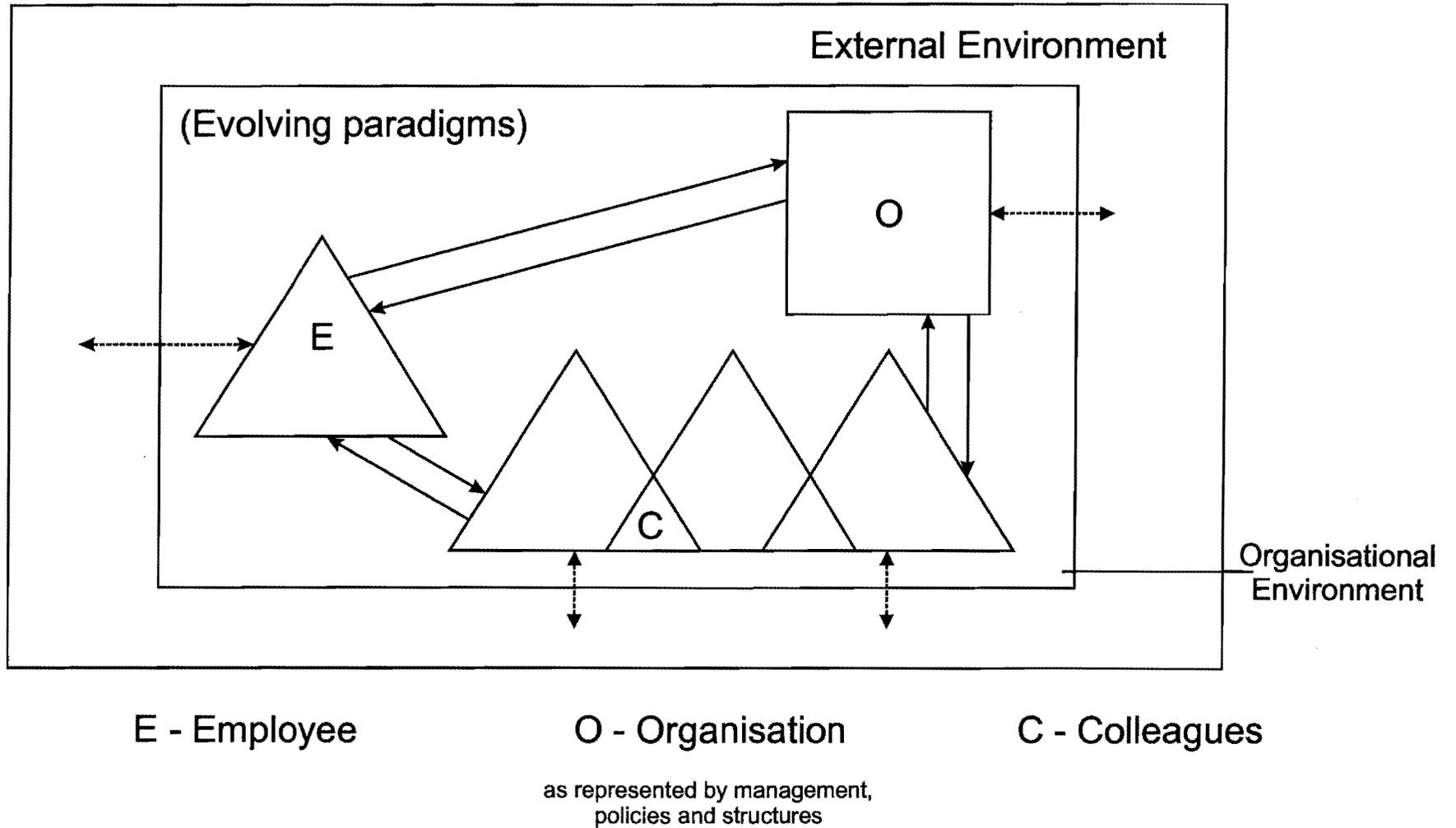


So, for example, an organisation with a strong elitist and leadership perspective would perceive employees as unequal to those in positions of authority who should be managed to perform particular tasks. On the other hand, organisations with a strong meritocratic or collegial perspective would perceive employees as equals who would be valued for their commitment, participation and teamwork (Kabanoff, et al., 1995).

Informal relationships would thus refer to the general, day-to-day interaction in the organisation between management and employees, and employees mutually. The relationship between an individual and colleagues (or groups of colleagues) is influenced by various factors, such as the extent of agreement between the individual and group beliefs and values (O'Reilly, et al., 1996), and the extent to which an individual is willing to and actually does contribute to group objectives and tasks (Mpofu & Das, 1998). Participants' reference to colleagues who actually became friends, the support provided by some and the informal work discussions in the corridors or over a cup of tea leads to the argument that these behaviours refer to the innovative spontaneous behaviours that go beyond role requirements (Katz, et al., 1978). Spontaneous behaviour, such as helping colleagues, spreading goodwill, protecting the organisation, willingness to cooperate, and making constructive suggestions, is also referred to as prosocial organisational behaviour or organisational citizenship behaviour (Organ, 1990; George & Brief, 1992). This kind of behaviour is often (if not always) taken for granted, probably because these acts seem so humble (Katz, et al., 1978) and are often overlooked in systematic study (George, et al., 1992). However, spontaneous behaviour is necessary for organisational effectiveness and according to Katz (in George & Brief, 1992, p.311) "an organization which depends solely upon its blueprints of prescribed behavior is a very fragile social system".

The context is thus a dynamic environment of beliefs and values, shared past and present experiences, encounters, interactions and formal and informal relationships amongst employees, colleagues and the organisation. A particular context may be more beneficial to some employees than to others (Bartunek, et al., 1987) because of the extent of congruence between individual, group and organisational beliefs and values, for instance. However, it has been argued that the context in which an individual employee is situated plays a pertinent role in shaping an individual's concept of transformation. The organisational context is presented in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Context





5 EXPERIENCES OF THE POST-TRANSFORMATION PERIOD (INCLUDING THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE TRANSFORMATION)

The comparison of data both in and between categories pertaining to employees' experiences of the post-transformation period, led to four deductions:

- Experience of the process in general (including the nature and extent) depends, *inter alia*, on the degree to which the end-state of the process corresponds with an employee's "concept" of transformation.
- The experiences of the process in general depends, *inter alia*, on the impact of the changes on employees' personal work situation, in other words, how the employee was personally affected. However, it has also been deduced that employees differ in their definitions of the "personal work situation" or the domains they regard as essential elements of their work situation.
- Agreement with the decision to transform (readiness for change) does not necessarily mean that an employee will agree or be satisfied with all the decisions taken. On the other hand, disagreement with a particular decision or aspect of the process does not imply that an employee does not understand or agree with the necessity to change.
- Finally, experiences of the process in general indicated that transformation can be experienced as an emotionally taxing event for employees, irrespective of their agreement or disagreement with the notion of transformation.

5.1 Congruence between the end-state of a transformation and an employee's concept of transformation

Chapter 4 argued that an employee's experience of a transformation process in general depends, among other things, on the extent of correspondence between the outcome (end-state) of the process and the employee's personal concept of transformation. The closer the outcome of the process is to an employee's concept of transformation (understanding and expectations), the more positive the general experience of the transformation will be. However, given the fact that employees are constantly interacting with and interpreting information and developments to which they are exposed (Wheatley, 1992), it is acknowledged that employees' concept of transformation in the pre-transformation phase did not necessarily remain unchanged throughout the process. In a study on the evolving interpretations of managers, Isabella (1990) identified four stages of interpretation as the process of change unfolds, namely anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath. She concluded that these shifts in interpretation support previous research indicating that "construed realities constantly change as new facts arise and new questions are asked" (Isabella, 1990, p. 31). In his study of change towards participative management, Hennestad (2000) found that in the transition phase, employees felt that nothing had changed with respect to the management style and that a lot still had to be achieved. However, to the question of how the transition period compared to the pre-transformation phase, employees acknowledged that marked changes had actually occurred. What seems to happen is that as changes materialise, employees are inclined to move the "requirement" or "expectations" forward, expecting even more changes than what was perhaps initially perceived to be satisfactory (or the end-state).

When referring to concepts of change and the actual outcome or end-state, the assumption is made that the organisational concept will show greater resemblance to the end-state than an individual employee's concept. Thus, although it is acknowledged that employees' concepts of transformation evolve as the process continues, individual concepts of transformation will not



necessarily (even automatically) come closer to the organisational concept of transformation. It is contended that congruence between individual and organisational concepts of change depends on the extent of mutual interaction or communication. Following this argument, it thus seems valid to conclude that experiences of transformations depends to an extent on the level of agreement between individual concepts and the actual outcome.

A second argument on the agreement between concepts of change and the actual outcome is that although concepts evolve, some of the elements that construe the concept of change may remain stable throughout this interpretative process. Some of these elements may be tangible or measurable, which will provide employees with the ability to assess the extent to which the end-state deviates from the personal concept (or the intended end-state). So, for example, did Soonja felt that the intended change to participatory decision-making and diversity did not materialise as the new heads of departments were all white males just as in the pre-transformation era (in contrast to a representative management committee). She expected a measurable change in the profile of the managers which did not materialise and thus contributed to her disappointment. William, on the other hand, supported changes to multiculturalism, diversity and equal relationships in the work environment but did not envisage (expect) that the composition of the managerial committee would also be affected. Thus, the discrepancy between his expectation of the election of the committee based on seniority as opposed to representivity in the end-state contributed to his disillusionment with the process. In some instances, the discrepancy may relate to an employee's expectation that his or her position will improve in the transformed organisation.

Employees' concepts (evolving and consisting of fixed elements) of transformation can play an important role in their experience of the final outcome. In his study on experiences of the death of an organisation, Cunningham (1997) stressed the powerful role of beliefs and expectations in influencing employees' experiences and behaviour. Cunningham (1997, p. 486) refers to the words of William Isaac Thomas in this regard: "If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences". Thus, if people expect a process to produce a particular outcome, that outcome becomes a reality in their minds. Deviation from that (expected or believed) reality may thus have adverse affects on their experiences of the success or the outcome of the process in general.

5.2 Impact of the completed process (desired end-state of the organisation) on employees' personal situation

The deduction that employees' experience of a transformation process to some extent depends on the impact (level of disruption) of the process on their personal work situation corresponds with Ashford's (1988) findings that perceived disruption caused by transformation increased employee stress levels even months after it occurred. In this particular study, participants related their experiences of the process in general to the impact of the process on their personal (work) situation in the organisation. For example, Stephan complained about his position of lesser seniority in the post-transformation period as well as his job insecurity due to the possibility of forced retirement. Pedro expected his personal position to improve in the organisation due to an increased acceptance of himself and his strange ideas, but his did not materialise. Soonja and Heike found their personal situations less favourable than earlier due to tarnished interpersonal relationships. Drohan, on the other hand, indicated that he had nothing to complain



about as he was in just as a good position after as before the changes. Tampoe (1990) confirms that a change process may result in various changes on the individual level, such as a change in jobs, movement sideways, downwards and upwards, which will inevitably affect their own performance as well as that of the organisation. Rousseau (1998, p. 228) points out that "in change, losses are more painful than the gains are good".

Another deduction from participants' descriptions of the personal work situations is that participants did not describe their personal work situations in the same manner or as consisting of the same domains. They referred to different aspects (eg, professional academic activities, relationships with colleagues, position in the organisation) as constituting their personal situation. It has also been argued that the reference to different domains of the work situation could be as a result of (1) participants' referring only to areas in which recognisable changes occurred (no change, no reference) and/or (2) the relative importance of a particular domain of the work situation to a participant and/or (3) the extent or nature of changes with respect to those domains a participant regarded as important for the personal work situation. Ute, for example, "lost" the majority of her previous colleagues in the process and thus had to get used to new colleagues. However, she did not find this changes in the "relationship domain" affecting her personal work situation at all as she expressed a total disinterest in people (colleagues) in general.

These personally determined constituents of the personal work situation should be distinguished from the psychological contract that exists between an employer and employee. The psychological contract is more like a mutually agreed relationship of responsibilities (Rousseau, et al., 1999), whereas the personally determined constituents refer rather to the individual's involvement in the organisation depending on his/her work needs. Some perceive an organisation as a place to apply their particular skills in exchange for money whereas others expect an organisation to provide social interaction and opportunities for creative development and demonstrating other abilities.

In their study on subjective well-being and job satisfaction, Judge and Locke (1993, p. 485) conclude that job satisfaction is moderated by the degree to which a job is considered an important part in one's life. Thus, the impact of the transformation process on a particular domain of the personal work situation is moderated by the extent to which the domain is considered important.

5.3 The role of personal characteristics in facilitating experiences of transformation

So far it has been argued that employees' experience of a transformation process in general is determined, amongst other things, by the congruences between their concept of transformation and the final outcome of the process, and the extent (nature) of changes in the personally determined constituents of the personal work situation. In addition, some participants explained their experiences of the process in general by referring to the facilitative role of some personal characteristic in dealing with change. For example, several participants referred to characteristics such as a preference for a dynamic/changing work environment (Drohan), critical/independent thinking (Heike), personal flexibility and preference for change (Delianne, Robert), inflexibility due to age (William), and a desire to be creative (Pedro). Research into the role of personal traits, coping strategies and thinking patterns suggests that personal characteristics, such as internal locus of control (perhaps more the belief about the ability to control as actual control), high feelings of self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity, a high self-esteem (Ashford,

1988), and an ability to adjust personal frames of reference to include information from the external environment (Cunningham, 1997) facilitate experiences of and adjustment to change and threatening situations in the work environment.

In several cases the analysis of participants' experiences of the process led to the deduction that employees' contributions despite disappointments may perhaps be attributed to the degree of personal commitment to the organisation or the job. However, findings on the facilitative role of commitment during organisational transformation seem confusing and contradictory. Begley and Czajka (1993) concentrated their research on the moderating effect of commitment on experiences of organisational change. There are two opposing views on the role of commitment: some studies found the positive experiences of organisational change were facilitated by low levels of commitment while others found exactly the opposite. Begley and Czajka's (1993) findings support the notion that high levels of commitment facilitate acceptance of change. O'Neill and Lenn (1995) are of the opinion that the higher the individual's level of commitment before downsizing, the more difficult it will be to accept the change.

This line of research seems to focus primarily on personal dispositions, with very little reference to the context in which the particular dispositions were explored. In a study on the moderating effects of Type A behaviour patterns and locus of control on the relationship between change in job demands and change in psychological strain, Newton and Keenan (1990) came to the conclusion that in stress research the context is largely ignored or only treated briefly. They emphasised Rotter's (in Newton et al, 1990) findings that internal/external locus of control as personality trait is to some extent a function of the environment: "... particularly in competitive skills situations, there were a number of external who acted much as we expected internals to act" (Newton, et al., 1990, p. 1232). Cappelli (1988) contends that the environment (context) needs to be acknowledged in cognitive approaches as the environment provides information for and assists in structuring the process of cognition. Particular cognitive approaches to personality stress the relevance of context in individual functioning (individual being): (these approaches) "conceptualise personality as something of a "handbag", a portable repository for various identity schemas that are cued up by differing social contexts" (Ryan, 1995, p. 398).

This argument about the contextually-sensitive nature of personal dispositions and behaviour once again draws attention to the importance of taking cognisance of the context in which the transformation process is taking place.⁵

5.4 Individual constituents, circumstances, conditions and relations that can determine experiences of transformation under specific conditions

Employees' experiences of the impact of the outcome of the process lead to the identification of multiple constituents or domains affecting individual experiences of a transformation process. It is argued that with the onset of such a process, individual employees are directed by their individual concepts of a transformation. Their experiences of the outcome of the process have been linked to the degree of agreement or convergence between their own concept and the actual end-state. However, it has been argued that the "concepts" of transformation are not

5. Context, as referred to, should not be seen as a static situation. In the process of change, the context is also changing or evolving. The evolving nature of the context is described as part of the proposed model understanding individual experiences of transformation.



necessarily stable although some “measurable elements” of the concepts might be stable. The impact of the process on employees’ personal situation has been identified as a potential domain that may contribute to experiences however, with due reference to the personally determined constituents of the personal work situation. Finally, comments on the role of specific personality traits in facilitating experiences of change also highlighted the potential role of contextual factors in facilitating or eliciting specific personality traits. The discussion of data in chapter 4 also emphasised issues, such as the management of the process, relationships with colleagues and opportunities to do something new and creative, as dimensions contributing to particular experiences of the process.

Considering all the potential constituents or domains that may play a role under certain contextual or individually determined circumstances (or both), it seems as if certain commonalities can be identified. Some of the variables suggest individual differences (thus something to do with personality); others have a cognitive dimension in common (eg, aspects of the concept of transformation) while others entail relational and even emotional aspects. Instead of describing all the possible variables (dependent and/or independent) that may impact on employees under certain conditions, it is possible to try and identify underlying domains that can perhaps link groups of variables together, or present some kind of model to understand experiences.

6 A MODEL FOR DESCRIBING AND UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES OF A TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

To some extent research and theory on the impact of layoffs on survivors can inform the thinking on the impact of transformation on employees. In a theoretical study on the research, theory and practice with respect to layoffs, Brockner (1988) remarks that various studies suggest that layoffs can be experienced very differently and that many independent variables can be associated with survivor’s reactions. That would include for example psychological states such as anger, resentment, relief or positive inequity, and an increase or decrease in levels of motivation. He also refers to the various factors that have been identified as moderators or mediators of the effects of layoffs (such as individual differences, the nature of the work and the informal organisation). Brockner firstly concludes and suggests that research and theory on layoffs need to move towards groups of factors as opposed to lists of independent variables. He proposes that the influence or effect of layoffs are apparent on three levels namely, individual psychological states, group processes and organisational structures. This perspective therefore proposes the application of multiple-theories (individual, group and organisational) in stead of a single theory approach.

As this study focuses on individual experiences of transformation (the whole process), the individual and individual well-being will be used as the point of departure in the process of describing a conceptual model to understand employee experiences. However, individual experiences are firmly conceptualised in a context recognising the role of the group and the organisation.

6.1 Level of employee participation in the organisation — the vertical axis

As indicated in Table 4.2, employees identified problems in different areas of the organisation as the motivators for change. The areas focused on product-related aspects, intra-organisational issues and the organisation-external environment relationship. These areas may also be des-

cribed as different organisational levels ranging from the individual or job level, group or organisational level and the external stakeholder level. Employees' experiences of the outcome of the process support the notion that individual employees are sensitive to particular levels or focus their attention on particular organisational levels. So, for example, Pedro referred to all three levels, while Delianne only referred to the organisational level. Verma and McKersie's (1987) research on employee involvement programmes supports the argument that individual employees differ with respect to the level of their involvement or participation⁶ in the organisation. They conclude that employees participated in employee involvement programmes because of a pre-programmed eagerness (or "taste") to influence decisions rather than as result of the character or attractiveness of the programmes. Participating employees were also more attracted to group and voluntary activities than nonparticipants. Graham and Verma (1991) differentiate between habitually active and habitually inactive organisational members depending on the extent to which they regard participation as a virtue in itself. Thus, it may be concluded that employees differ in their desire or "taste" regarding organisational activities and levels they choose to involve themselves.

However, it cannot be inferred that employee involvement on particular levels in the organisation is merely the result of personal taste or choice. Leslie, for example, focused mainly on the job level. It seems as if his experience of the organisation as undemocratic, homogeneous and inflexible made the organisational level inaccessible and involvement even risky for fear of victimisation. This deduction is supported by Graham and Verma (1991), who also point to the relevance of contextual or situational factors (such as the organisation's view on participation) in facilitating or inhibiting habitually active behaviour.

Following the above argument, a conceptual model is now proposed consisting of two axes where the vertical axis depicts the level of an employee's involvement in an organisation prior to and during the transformation process (whether by choice or external conditions, or both). The three levels are the personal job level, the intra-organisational and the organisation-environment level. Given the fact that most of the experiences of participants revolved around the job level and the intra-organisational level, it will just simplify the model to refer to two levels, personal job level and organisational level, with the understanding that the organisational level may also include an external focus.

6.2 Underlying psychological needs — the horizontal axis

Bartunek and Moch (1987), Lau and Woodman (1995) and Isabella (1990) argue that the cognitive sciences could add a new dimension to understanding the organisational development enterprise and specifically to employees' experiences and responses to organisational change. Common to the cognitive explanations or descriptions of employee responses to large-scale change is the postulation of the schema of change that guides people's reaction to change. These schemata or concepts offer a practical conceptual tool for understanding the interpretive processes employees apply in coming to grips with transformation. Schemata offer explanations

6. Participation or involvement in this context refers essentially to the level in the organisation that an employee feels comfortable or feels compelled to participate in rather than the extent to which an employee is involved in his/her job or organisation. Although it can be argued that so-called employees' "focus" has something to do with their particular involvement in their jobs and the organisation, that is outside the ambit of this study.

for what employees perceive with respect to the process and how they perceive or interpret it. However, it is argued that the identification and description of schemata (including the dimensions or contextual factors that influence the development) do not offer an understanding “why” employees experience a transformation process in a particular way. Ryan's (1995) model of psychological well-being, the ability to grow and to integrate new behaviour, offers a practical conceptual tool not only for understanding why employees respond in a certain manner, but also for understanding the process whereby individuals assimilate and integrate new behaviour as internally motivated conduct (this aspect is described later with reference to the learning of new behaviour). His model furthermore offers a good alternative to lists of variables and conditions that may have contributed to a specific response in certain, specified circumstances. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the role of the social context in the model responds to Cappelli and Sherer (1988) and Goodman et al's (1987) criticism that cognitive science approaches impoverish theorising on this topic because of the absence of the contextual dimension (social, environmental and policy dimensions).

Ryan's (1995) model forms a prominent part of the proposed model for understanding employees' responses and experiences, it is necessary to briefly explain it and place it in the context of paradigms in the cognitive and personality theories.⁷

In the debate on personality and cognitive development, three broad groups of theories on the ability of people to grow and to integrate externally induced behaviour can be identified. One group (eg, Piaget, Jung and Maslow) share the assumption that people have inherent abilities or tendencies to actively learn, grow and integrate information and behaviour for social development. This assumption is strongly questioned by another group (eg, Skinner and Bandura), who argue that the integration of behaviour is attributable to contingencies in the environment rather than to natural (inner) tendencies. An alternative to these two approaches argues that growth (integration) and psychological well-being are attributable to natural integrative tendencies (inner abilities) as well as to contingencies or characteristics of the social context (Ryan, 1995).⁸

Ryan argues that some basic psychological needs are essential for the inner ability to grow (integrate) and to be psychologically well. From the perspective of self-determination theory he identifies three psychological needs essential for growth and well-being, namely autonomy (to have a voice), competence (to feel/be effective) and relatedness (to feel connected with others). He argues that individuals will experience the greatest well-being, satisfaction and level of integration in situations (contexts) where they find their psychological needs supported. Ryan highlights the fact that the well-being, growth and motivation of an individual is the function of the prior history (previous contextual support) as well as current conditions (Ryan, 1995). The psychological needs identified by Ryan concur with Lau and Woodman's (1995, p. 539) findings that the development of an individual schema “would logically be influenced by personal disposi-

7. It is acknowledged that the mere reference to theories such as individuation (Jung), synthetic functioning (Freud) and actualising tendency (Jung) in no way does justice to the complexities and subtleness of these theories. Moreover, such a superficial description or grouping of theories would be heavily attacked by scholars in these areas. However, it is outside the scope of this study to consult the primary sources or to engage in elaborate discussions on these theories. The objective of the broad brush strokes is simply to give some indication of where the Ryan model fits in.

8. It is stated here that the argument presented in the discussion that follows is based on the acceptance of the approach or assumption that growth and psychological well-being are attributable to inner abilities as well as to contingencies in the social context.



tional factors to change". Lau and Woodman (1995) identify locus of control, dogmatism and organisational commitment as personal dispositional factors. According to them dogmatism defines the extent to which a person's belief system is open or closed.⁹ Spreitzer (1996) seems to follow the same line of thinking as Ryan (1995) where empowerment is defined as intrinsic motivation manifested in four cognitions namely meaning (the fit between work role requirements and personal beliefs, values and behaviours), competence, self-determination and impact (the degree to which an individual can influence administrative, strategic, and operating outcomes) (Spreitzer, 1996, p. 484).¹⁰

6.2.1 Competence

Competence on the level of job involvement/focus implies that individuals have the abilities and skills to perform their functions. It can also entail the perceived competence or confidence and employee experience in having to perform certain activities. Spreitzer (1996, p. 484) defines competence as "self-efficacy specific to work — a belief in one's capability to perform work activities with skill". It is argued further that individual competence (and/or perceived competence and confidence) revolves around the extent of congruence or compatibility between the individual's own beliefs and values regarding his/her job activities and the actual beliefs and values that underpin the job activities as the individual has to perform that in practice. Spreitzer (1996) refers to the fit between the beliefs, values and behaviours of a person and the work role requirements. Competence on the job level can be illustrated by referring to the participants' descriptions of their job-related activities. Several participants (Drohan, Anja, Ute, William and Pedro) indicated that in the pre-transformation period they did not feel themselves comfortable with the content of course material. The remark by Anja is a good example: *...daar (was) soms boeke voorgeskryf waarmee ek nie saamgestem het nie*. Because of the individual disagreement with the content (underlying values/beliefs) it can be argued that their feelings of effectiveness were inhibited. The post-transformation situation was more supportive of the need for competence (perceived competence) because all of these employees develop new course material to their satisfaction which supposes that it was to a large extent consistent with their personal views (beliefs/values) about the subject.

Competence on the organisational level operates on the same basis as on the job level and thus refers to an employee's feelings of having the skills to function properly on the organisational level. It also refers to the fit between the beliefs, values and behaviour of an individual and the required values and beliefs as they are operational at a given time (O'Reilly, et al., 1996). So, for example, employees who value an egalitarian perspective would find themselves unable or incompetent to function in an authoritarian organisational context where the right to be heard and to influence decisions belong to a few privileged senior people. In this, Anja described how women learned to speak their minds in the broader organisational context. Pedro also commented on the more prominent role of women in the transformed organisation. It is possible that

9. In the researcher's opinion, the three dispositional factors identified by Lau and Woodman (1995) are not on the same level. Locus of control and dogmatism may be defined as personal characteristics but organisational commitment is more of a situational attitude than a personal characteristic.

10. Without going into an extensive debate, it is argued that the concepts of empowerment (as defined by Spreitzer) and psychological well-being, have conceptual common ground. It may be argued that psychological well-being is a necessary precursor (personal condition) of empowerment, hence the similarities in the underlying "cognitions" or "needs" of the two concepts.



the appreciation of women as equal employees provided the opportunity for women to participate confidently in the broader organisational context.

6.2.2 Relatedness

The need for relatedness is described as the need to feel connected to others. On the job level, relatedness would imply good relationships or connectedness with the close group of colleagues, or the primary work group (George, et al., 1992).¹¹ Relatedness on the organisational level would thus refer to the feeling of connectedness with colleagues other than those in the primary work group. The importance of the need for relatedness in periods of change is supported by Gerpott's (in Nelson, 1995) findings that the detrimental effects of a job transfer were reduced by high levels of interpersonal support extended to those employees. Toshio Okuno successfully managed a change process in his plant by applying the following principle: "I believe that in order to find life worth living, individuals require more than just money; they have to be recognized by others as valuable people" (Cooper, et al., 1995, p. 45). A significant conclusion of this study is that participants experienced the loss of prior contact with the primary work group especially as a major negative impact of the transformation process. Not only did participants experience a lack of support during the process, but some of them found their personal situation in the new organisation less satisfactory as a result of poor or broken relationships with significant colleagues — they felt isolated, marginalised and unconnected.¹²

Judging from the participants' comments on the establishment of new relationships, "relatedness" does not come easily or quickly, despite the positive experiences attached to getting to know new people. Getting to know new people or replacing the old primary group with a new group does not necessarily mean that employees' need to feel connected will be satisfied. As Delianne said, it takes time to develop relationships of trust and thus to feel connected to and valued by others. It may thus be argued that participants' psychological well-being was negatively affected by the process, given the fact that in the new structure the relational support they had was drastically diminished.

Relatedness in an organisation (job and organisational level) is not under the individual's control only. Becoming related or connected to a group (primary and/or secondary) also depends on the extent of support or legitimacy granted to an individual from a particular organisational constituency (Spreitzer, 1996). Granting legitimacy to an individual may depend on how the group or constituency perceives the individual's interest in group concerns and contribution to group goals or objectives (or organisation at large) (Mpofu, et al., 1998). Participants' skepticism about the competency of redeployed people and their ability and willingness to contribute to the transformation process is a good example of how the group experiences and evaluates individual interest. In this particular case, it seems as if redeployed employees would have to work much harder to obtain legitimacy from the group.

11. George and Brief (1992, p. 320) define the primary work group as "the set of individuals, within the organization, with whom one interacts frequently in carrying out his or her prescribed role".

12. Participants in the study referred explicitly to the role of increased physical distance (due to the physical relocation) in straining their previously close relationships with the support group. Due to the distance, close colleagues were no longer easily accessible. In their study George and Brief (1992) refer to research indicating that physical distance between group members actually decreases the attraction between members.



The extent to which an individual will relate to colleagues and at the same time will be granted the opportunity to become related also depends on the fit between individual and group beliefs and values. Delianne, for example, described herself as an outsider, or unrelated to colleagues in the pre-transformation period because she disagreed with the dominant paradigm of the time. She felt herself distanced from colleagues as a result of her way of thinking and was also not accepted by colleagues because of her thinking. In this respect O'Reilly and Chatman (1996) refer to the powerful role of social control in organisations where individuals are "motivated" through peer influence and social construction of reality to subscribe to the preferred or desirable organisational values, beliefs and attitudes. Deviation from the preferred values, especially in a context where a strong, homogeneous value system is adhered to, is thus not lightly accepted. They further argue that individuals will adhere to values and norms they doubt to be in accordance with the desire of friends (O'Reilly, et al., 1996). Differently put: some individuals will and have to suppress their differences — especially in a context with strong monocultural values — in order to relate or be allowed as part of the group (Miller, 1998). This "fear" of becoming an outsider or estranged from colleagues perhaps clarify the difference in employees' public and private opinions reported by participants. It thus seems that employees with alternative values and beliefs will less likely be granted legitimacy to relate to the group in a strong homogeneous value system than a more heterogeneous, diverse system (Miller, 1998).

6.2.3 Autonomy

Ryan (1995) refers to autonomy as having a voice. According to Weick (1984, p. 46), "control is the tendency to act and feel as if one can have a definite influence (not the influence) on situations through the exercise of imagination, knowledge, skill and choice". Greenberger and Strasser (1991) describe autonomy or personal control as a reflection of an individual's belief at a given time that he or she has the ability to affect a change in a desired direction. They furthermore concluded in their review on personal control research that "people generally are motivated to seek control and that control is necessary for the individual's well-being" (Greenberger, et al., 1991, p. 115). Control on the job level would thus entail the ability to contribute to the work content (eg, writing course material) and have control over the process of "working". The positive experience of participants with respect to the freedom they had in developing new course material, can thus be interpreted as their satisfaction with the extent of control they experienced at the job level. Soonja's remark that her darkest experience of the transformation process resulted from responsibility being taken from her: she could develop the material but she did not have any decision-making power. Thus, personal control would therefore include freedom as well as responsibility.

Personal control on the group level would refer to an individual's (perceived) ability to exercise control in group situations, such as defending one's interest at a meeting (Newton, et al., 1990, p. 1251) or an individual's (perceived) ability to influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes in the work situation (Ashforth in Spreitzer, 1996). In situations where individuals have no autonomy, where they feel too powerless, issues or problems become depersonalized. "This lowers arousal, leading to inactivity or apathetic performance" (Weick, 1984, p. 41). Thus, an unsupportive context regarding autonomy during a transformation process not only affects employees' psychological well-being but can contribute to their disinterest and apathy in the process.



Although the psychological needs have been identified and discussed as three distinctive entities, it should be noted that these needs do not exist independent of one another. Changes with respect to the extent of support for one need may affect the support experienced for another need. So, for example, it can be argued that the lack of personal control on the job level may also affect an employee's feelings of competence on the job level.

It is thus postulated that employees' experience of a transformation process depends, amongst other things, on the way their psychological well-being is affected during the process based on the extent of support experienced for the psychological needs. The horizontal axis of the proposed model thus refers to employees' psychological well-being with specific reference to the extent of support for the three psychological needs of competency, relatedness and autonomy. Figure 5.4 shows the horizontal and vertical axes of individual experiences of transformation.

However, it is argued that an employee's experience of the contextual support for the psychological need is moderated by the perceived relevance or applicability of the psychological need for the work environment. As discussed earlier, not all participants regarded relatedness (for example) as an important dimension of the work environment.¹³

6.3 The contextual dimension

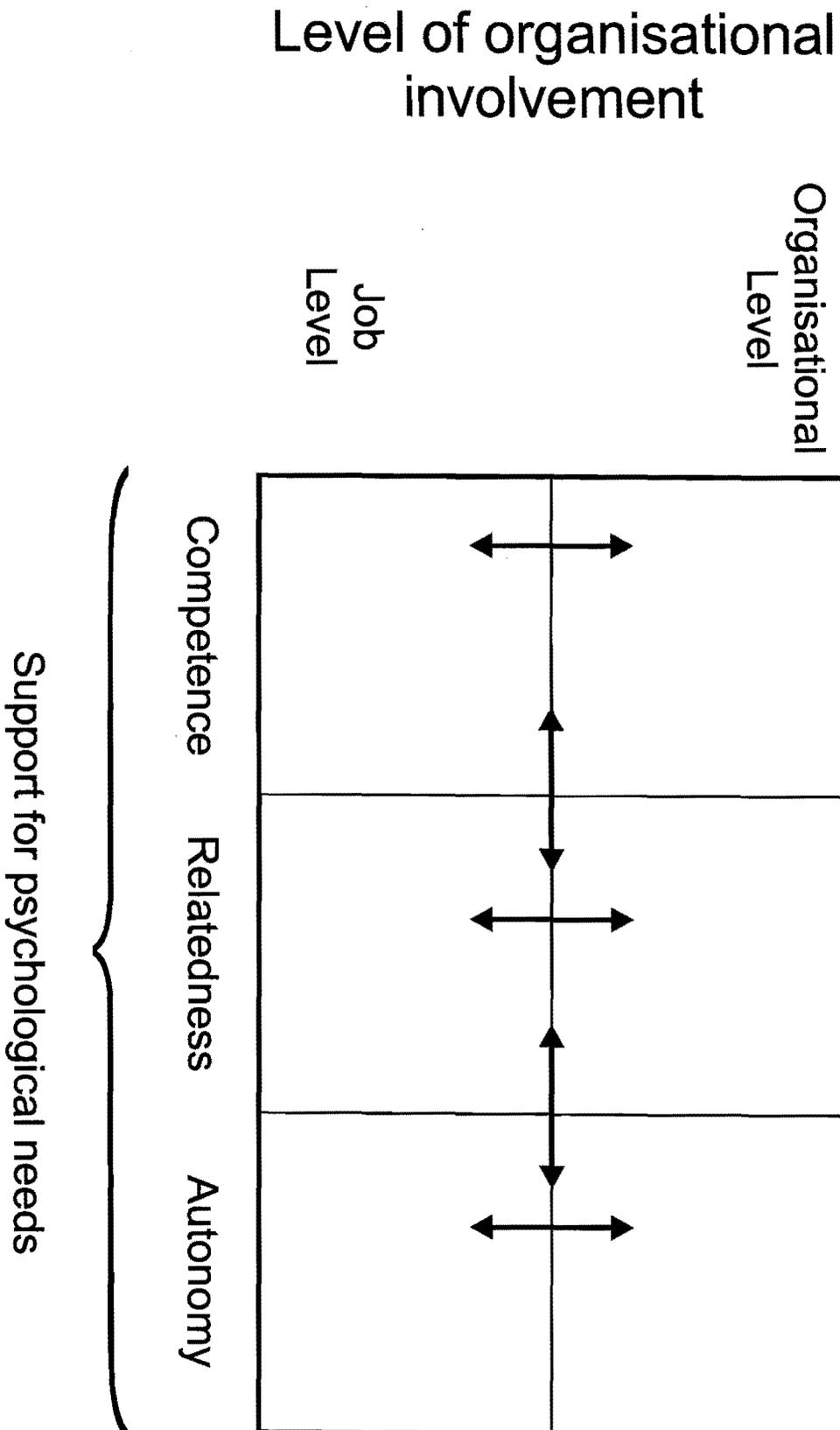
Figure 5.4 indicates that individual employees' psychological needs are applicable to the personal job level as well as to the organisational level. Ryan (1995) also argues that despite the need to feel effective, to have a voice and to feel connected with other matters in every situations, the practical factors affecting the fulfilment of these needs are often context-specific. Thus, in response to Ryan and the concerns of Cappelli and Sherer's (1988) and Goodman et al's (1987) concerns about the relevance of context, as well as strong arguments in previous sections that the context plays an influential role in participants' concepts or schemata of transformation, the context (as described earlier) forms part of the proposed model.

However, during the period of transition and even shortly afterwards, the context may be regarded as evolving due to the various changes happening in the organisation. The change of paradigms within the organisation affect employees' positions and the relationships in the organisation. Employees (like Stephan) who used to be the champions of the old system are not necessarily the champions of the new system. New champions are identified. Activities and behaviours that used to be inapplicable to the old system, now become acceptable and even desirable. "Old alliances will be dissolved and new ones forged, and yesterday's "failures" may be the stars of tomorrow" (Tampoe, 1990, p. 347).

The evolving context involves its fair share of power struggles and broken relationships, however. Delianne referred to the power struggles that happened between opposing groups in order to maintain or achieve the upper hand. According to Greiner and Schein (1988), it is natural that organisations consist of differing interest groups who pursue different goals they regard as in the

13. As noted in the section on the method of the study, a potential respondent for the study refused to participate in the study because she felt very strongly that personal experience is a very personal issue that should not be part of the work environment. She clearly expressed her opinion that indulging in personal experience would be considered unprofessional. This thinking supports the argument that employees differ on the appropriateness of the support of particular psychological needs in the work environment.

Figure 5.4 Two axes of model





best interest of the organisation — sometimes these goals are selfish. “Political behavior results when an attempt at influence is countered by another interest party and group” (Greiner, et al., 1988, p. 17). Although the power struggle or process of bargaining between different groups or coalitions is a natural phenomenon, it seems as if it could be argued that during a transformation process such activities are intensified simply because of the scale of the change taking place. It is furthermore argued that due to the fierceness of the bargaining process and the inherent gains and losses, working relationships can be affected in the process. Delianne mentioned the difficulty some employees had to adjust to the previous underdogs being the favourites in the new system. Thus, during the process of transformation, the web of relationships between the three elements of the context is in flux and is potentially powerful and political.

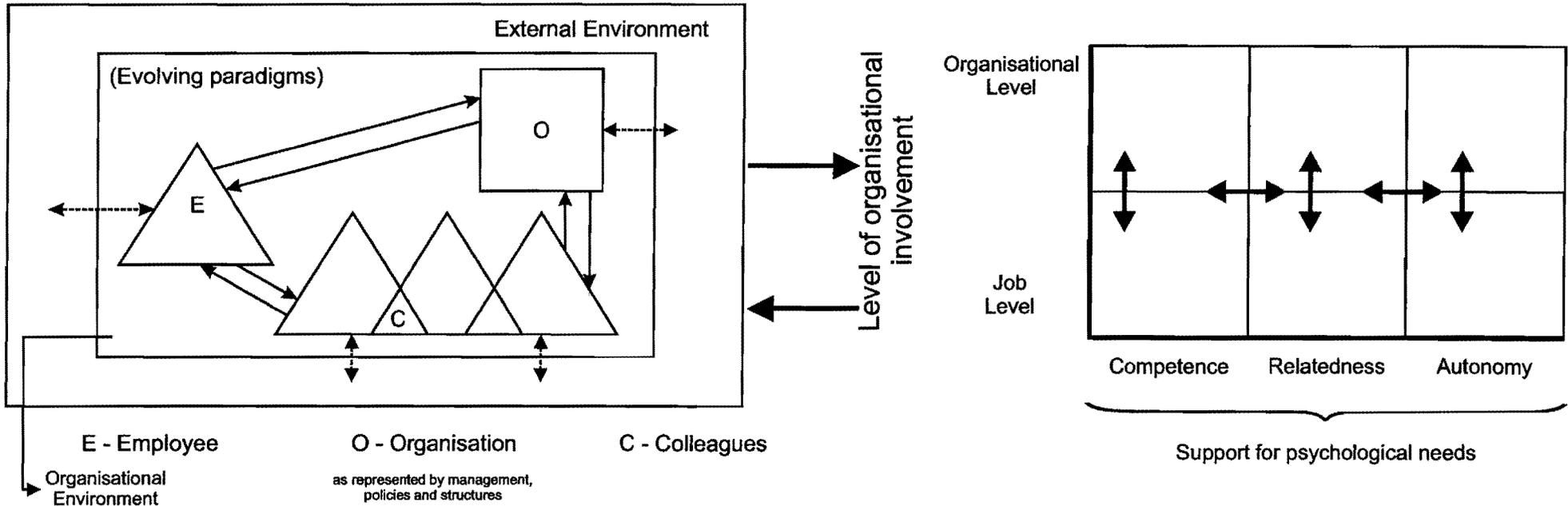
Apart from bargaining processes taking place that affect the web of relationships in an organisation, it seems as if the informal organisation (prosocial behaviour or OCB) (George, et al., 1992; Organ, 1990) is also affected by the process. It is argued that spontaneous or prosocial behavior is an integral part of the context in which transformation happens. However, Heike’s remarks, *baie van die gesprekke vind toevallig plaas....dis weg, dis weg*, and other references to the loss of friends and close colleagues lead to the conclusion that the previous spontaneous or prosocial behaviour is inhibited during the process. This argument is supported by George and Brief’s (1992) findings of aspects such as (increased) physical distance between the group, a decrease in positive affect and a reshuffling of the group in terms of new members with different opinions and beliefs influencing prosocial behaviour (there are more aspects but only those relevant in this situation are referred to here). The implication of this deduction is that employees have to adjust to a new situation without the spontaneous behaviour that is so important for their own functioning as well as the functioning of the organisation as a whole.

6.4 Model entailing a context, level of organisational involvement and psychological needs

Figure 5.5 shows the conceptual model for the description and understanding of employee experiences of transformation.

Stephan’s experience of the transformation is explained by referring to the proposed model as well as to the phases and dimensions of a transformation process. In a study exploring middle managers’ experiences of a downsizing exercise, O’Neill and Lenn (1995) found that managers understand the message to work smarter as actually communicating that they had been working “dumb” in the past. This message “trivializes the tradition of the company, and important component of the manager’s sense of professional identity” (O’Neill, et al., 1995, p. 25). The managers expressed their anger about messages and hints condemning the past. According to Stephan’s descriptions, the philosophy to which he ascribed was made irrelevant and he was personally blamed for the failures of the past. Following O’Neill and Lenn’s (1995) conclusions, the trivializing of the past tradition of the organisation contributed to his feelings of uncertainty and doubt about his professional identity and competence. This condemnation of the past also robbed him of his respected standing amongst colleagues, degraded his leadership role in the past and resulted in his feeling betrayed by the organisation and fellow colleagues (relatedness). His professional identity, his perception of himself as competent and his relationship with colleagues (standing in the organisation) were adversely affected. Thus, due to the way in which Stephan was treated in the process of motivating the decision to change, Stephan’s psychologi-

Figure 5.5 Proposed model for understanding employee experiences of transformation





cal well-being was adversely affected on the job and organisational level, as the organisation queried his competence and the applicability of his competence to the new organisation (on both levels). They furthermore contributed to his feelings of humiliation, which adversely affected his courage to relate to colleagues. Finally, it is clear that despite his rejection of "false accusations", he was in no position to exercise any control over what was happening to him.

In the changed context with different relationships and an organisational paradigm he did not fully understand or agree with, Stephan found it difficult to function on both the job and organisational level. He had little status, felt uncertain of his professional abilities and competence, and felt isolated from previous colleagues. Stephan indicated that he did not take any initiative during the transition period nor did he try to influence the process. It may thus be argued that with his feelings of incompetence and lack of trusting relationships in an organisational paradigm he did not agree with, he perceived himself as having little possibility of taking control of his personal situation. It thus seems that the trivialisation of the fulfilment of his personal needs in the pre-transformation period as well as the lack of support in the post-transformation period resulted in Stephan's experiencing little (if any) support for his psychological needs. This lack of support throughout the whole process contributed to his extreme negative experience of the transformation process in general. Rousseau (1998) argues that loss of status and information (certainty) as a result of a change process may be more tolerable to employees whose relationship with the organisation is characterised by organisational caring, support and concern for the well-being of the employee.¹⁴

It is thus concluded that individual employees' responses to or experience of any of the facets of a transformation process (eg, change in paradigm, transition, practical outcome of decisions) are facilitated by the extent of support provided by the particular context with respect to the psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy. Furthermore, the psychological well-being of employees can be affected by any of the phases or dimensions of a transformation process. It is furthermore concluded that some contexts may be more supportive to particular employees than others.

6.5 Conditions for the unlearning of old and relearning of new behaviour

Blumenthal and Hasperlagh (1994, p. 101) maintain that in order to qualify as a corporate transformation, "a majority of individuals in an organization must change their behaviour". According to Hennestad (2000, p. 316) "we do know that implementing change requires new understandings as well as the learning and unlearning of behaviors". Regarding transformation many references are made to the need to develop new skills, ways of thinking, new knowledge and change the behaviour of individuals and groups (Schein, 1999; Farias, 2000; Levine, 2001; Schein, 1993) as well as to the difficulty or lack of success in maintaining the changed behavioural patterns (Kotter, 1995; Beer, et al., 1990; Goodstein, et al., 1991).

Changing familiar behavioural patterns to new ones thus implies that individuals need to acquire new behavioural patterns. Ryan (1995, p. 405) defines this process, called internalisation, as follows: "internalization represents the active assimilation of behavioral regulations that are

14. Rousseau's argument that experiences of transformation can be moderated by the nature of the relationships between an employee and the organisation supports the proposed model that experiences happen in a particular context of a web of relationships.



originally alien or external to the self". According to the self-determination theory, individuals are proactive organisms who therefore have the natural inclination to internalise. This inclination is facilitated or impeded by the social context, however (Gagne, Koestner & Zuckerman, 2000). As discussed earlier, Ryan specifies support for autonomy (having a voice), felt competence and relatedness as the critical needs to be supported in the social context. Following this argument, it may then be deduced that employees have the ability to internalise the required behaviour but this ability can be hindered or facilitated by the extent to which the organisational context supports the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Ryan discusses the process by which individuals grow from the point where they conduct behaviour as a result of external motivators to the point where new behaviour is fully internalised and thus intrinsically motivated. Intrinsically motivated behaviour is seen as the desired state for behavioural conduct as in this situation no external forces are necessary to ensure the particular behaviour. Ryan demonstrates that if the social context supports the need for competence and relatedness, but supports the need for autonomy to a lesser extent (control is typically perceived and practised as managerial function), new behaviour will be performed in a less stable, persistent and well-performed manner and will subjectively be less enjoyable. Schein (1993) argues that in order to learn new (complex) behaviours and skills, employees need a psychologically safe environment in which failures are acceptable. However, he does not elaborate on the qualities or dimensions of the psychologically safe environment. Nicholson (1998, p. 142) supports this view and argues that employees will only act and think creatively, thus diverging from current, practised behaviours, when they are given the space, safety and support.

Although this study does not explore the issue of changing behaviour, it does seem relevant to link the objective of transformation, namely to change behaviour, to the psychological well-being of employees and the management of a transformation process. In the transformation literature, there is an identifiable trend towards "burning bridges of the past" to force people out of their comfort zones or push them into the deep end of the river to create a readiness for change and to motivate them to change. "If you want people to journey into the future, then you have to burn their comfort zones so they can't cling to the present" (Harper, 1998, p. 30). Arguing from the perspective of the self-determination theory (Ryan, 1995; Gagne, et al., 2000) and the contextual support for growth, internalisation of behaviour and well-being, the question arises to what extent such an approach facilitates or rather alienates employees from internalising particular behavioural patterns. This perspective of the self-determination theory is supported by the arousal theory. According to the Yerkes-Dodson Law, an inverted-U relationship exists between arousal and performance with increasing levels of arousal, first improving and then impairing performance (Weick, 1984, p. 41). According to Weick research on this relationship concluded that at high levels of arousal people often revert to dominant, first learned actions. Furthermore, recently learned patterns of responding are the first ones to disappear, which means that those responses most finely tuned to the current environment are the first ones to go. People at high levels of arousal also tend to miss clues indicating change (Weick, 1984). Cooper and Marcus (1995) warn that the strategy of creating a crisis or an image of a burning platform to motivate people to accept the proposed change may have two negative side effects: (1) it may fail to provide psychological safety, and (2) it may deprive employees of a place to master the required skills and behaviour. Thus, the learning and internalising of new behaviour and skills need to happen in a safe environment where employees receive support for their

psychological needs and where they can practise and make mistakes without fear.¹⁵

Another argument against making the present inaccessible and burning the comfort zones (with abrupt changes) is the break in employee identification that is vested in the past and the present. Change processes which values and practises continuity with the past are more likely to sustain employee identification with the organisation, which is expected to promote acceptance of change (Rousseau, 1998). Contact with the past not only takes the history of employee experiences at work seriously, but also provides the opportunity to identify best characteristics and practices of the past to be carried forward (Bunker, et al., 1992). Furthermore, acknowledging the past is a way of connecting people with one another and producing energy for the process ahead (Bunker, et al., 1992). In his delete design model for transitions, Albert (1984) argues that continuity or the link between the past and the future creates the possibility of transition. Linking the past with the future dampens the force of a large-scale change (Albert, 1984) and according to Weick (1984), maintains levels of arousal at such a level that employees can perform according to the new challenges and new behaviours.

A transformation process includes two side: the organisational side or management team and the employees. This study focuses primarily on the employee perspective. However, the reference to the social context that exists during a transformation process also incorporates the management perspective. It is logical that the organisation (as represented by management) contributes to the make-up of the social context before, during and after a transformation process. It is thus valid to argue that an organisation's "theory" or "paradigm" about employees' ability to grow (whether known or hidden) influences the characteristics of the social context. For example, if a management team supports the theory that individuals have an inner ability to grow and assimilate new behaviour, they would apply intervention strategies to facilitate, support and nurture the inner abilities. However, if the organisation doubts the existence of the inner integrative trends in the psyche, intervention strategies will be more orientated towards shaping, directing, programming and controlling (Ryan, 1995; Schein, 1993).

6.6 Mitigating factors

6.6.1 Participation

According to Foote (2001), participation of 5% of the workforce is necessary to start a process while 15% of the workforce, actively engaged and committed, is necessary for an enterprise-wide change to succeed. Nadler and Tushman (1989) also argue that success in a change effort depends on a broad base of support in an organisation — more than just the leaders. From the organisational perspective, employee participation has its advantages. Beer et.al (1990) point out that involving people in the development of the vision makes it easier to mobilise employees to work towards the vision while the flow of information is improved with broad participation. Furthermore, employees are more willing to discontinue the past if they are offered the opportunity to participate in shaping the future (Harper, 1998). Employees can also offer good

15. Manz and Keating (1990) describe a case study where a successful managerial transition was made to employee self-management through a process whereby the managers moved in a safe environment from the past conduct to the new required conduct. In this change process, the management team developed over time and in a psychologically safe environment. The psychologically safe environment provided the managers with the opportunity to practise the required behaviour with constant feedback until they had successfully internalised the required behaviour.

ideas for change, make a difference in organisational performance and are less likely to resist change ideas that they have proposed (Cooper, et al., 1995; Miller, 1998; Kanter, 1984). In a study on the implementation of TQM in a company, Coyle-Shapiro (1999) concluded that the greater the employee participation in TQM, the more likely the intervention will be judged beneficial.

It thus seems as if employee participation can, indeed, contribute to the success of a transformation process. Various participatory, networking or systems-wide approaches and models of transformation also advocate the valuable contribution of employee participation in change efforts (Bunker, et al., 1992; Schaafsma, 1997). The question is whether and why participation facilitates employees' experiences of transformation.

According to the self-determination theory contexts in support of the three psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy enhance psychological well-being and thus facilitate positive experiences of change. In their study Gagne, Koestner and Zuckerman (2000) concentrated on aspects that would support the need for autonomy during organisational change. They examined the three aspects of being provided with a rationale for doing a task (information), acknowledgement of the feelings towards the task, and being given a choice of how to do the tasks. They conclude that all three aspects supported employees' need for autonomy and hence foster acceptance of change. Spreitzer (1996) also concludes that a participative work climate contributes to feelings of having control and being empowered. The facilitative value of participation for employees is also illustrated in this particular study. Drohan commented on the value of allowing people to determine the direction of the transformation process. He was also extremely positive about the opportunity he had been given to influence the process. Anja's acceptance of a decision with a negative outcome for herself was mitigated/moderated by her involvement and participation in the decision-making. It may thus be argued that employees' need of autonomy is supported in a context where they can participate in and influence decision-making processes that will eventually affect their personal work lives and work situation.

However, the literature review indicated that to be experienced as supportive, participation needs to be qualified. In a meta-analysis on participative decision-making (PDM) Cotton, Vollrath, Lengnick-Hall and Froggatt (1990) conclude that not all forms of participation improve job satisfaction or productivity. They describe representative and short-term participation as the least effective forms of employee participation (see also Leana, Locke & Schweiger, 1990). Lawrence (1991, p. 80) stresses the importance of honest participation where employees' contributions are valued: "Participation is a feeling on the part of people, not just the mechanical act of being called in to take part in discussions". Participation under false or dishonest pretences can actually be dysfunctional and have negative consequences for both the employees and the success of the process. Thus, participation has a psychological mechanism of supporting the need for autonomy of employees and thus contributes to their psychological well-being, and also has definite merit in that employees' abilities (ideas, problem recognition, innovation etc.) can be applied for the benefit of organisational performance (Kanter, 1984).

6.6.2 Communication and sharing of information

As discussed above, Gagne et al (2000) came to the conclusion that employees' acceptance of change is facilitated by providing them with a rationale for doing a task. Providing employees



with information about the process contributes to their feelings of having the ability to exercise control in the situation. Spreitzer (1996) argues that access to information helps reduce the uncertainty that comes with change and provides employees with an understanding of their work environment which inevitably enhances the perceptions of having the ability to take control. In a study on the role of communication in a merger, Schweiger and Denisi (1991, p. 110) found that honest and realistic communication did help employees to cope with the effects of the merger and reduced the negative impacts of the process. Information thus provides employees with the opportunity to evaluate the situation, consider their options and prepare themselves for future happenings. Information thus provides employees with the power to take control (Bunker, et al., 1992), and hence contributes to their psychological well-being.

Cunningham (1997) remarks that in the absence of information, people tend to feel uncertain and ambiguous. However, due to people's strong need to feel in control (Greenberger, et al., 1991), they will actively seek for information that will contribute to their (perceived) ability of being in control. In the absence of information, rumours originating from tidbits of information from all kinds of reliable and unreliable sources and often based on fears rather than reality (Schweiger, et al., 1991) "provide that concrete something around which they can begin to construct an interpretational portrait" (Isabella, 1990, p. 17). In a study on communication during change in South African companies, Hamilton-Attwell (1997) found it a common trend that the information employees do receive about the changes comes primarily from the grapevine and not from supervisors or the formal information media. Thus, not only can the absence of information during a process of change have negative effects on employees' well-being, but it can also harm the organisation (and the process) as "rumours may be less flattering ... than the truth would be" (Cunningham, 1997, p. 480). Rectifying perceptions based on rumours also offers a serious challenge to the managers of the process, given the already complex "interpretative" involvement of employees. Delianne's reference to the rumours that were created and spread during the transformation process thus raises the question of the extent and quality of information that was available during the process. Rumours could have been created deliberately, as she indicated, to influence the process in a certain direction but it could also be the natural response of employees actively seeking for information to provide them with a better understanding and thus increased control of the changing situation. Information gathered from best practices in change management from literature and from surveying companies led Clarke and Garside (1997) to conclude that credible communication is one of five key cornerstones of successful change management practices.¹⁶ Kotter (1995, p. 63) remarks that "without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured". Studying the experiences of survivors after a downsizing O'Neill and Lenn (1995, p. 25) conclude that "top management cannot communicate too much with the organisation".

6.6.3 Sharing of feelings (emotion)

It is common for transformation or large-scale change to evoke some kind of emotional turmoil from employees (Hamilton-Attwell, 1997; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1991). O'Neill and Lenn (1995) found emotions of anger, anxiety, cynicism, resentment, retribution and hope in employees who

16. The other four cornerstones are (1) commitment from top management recognising change as an integral part of the business strategy, (2) addressing the social and cultural dimension, (3) selecting appropriate tools and methodology as well as acquiring skills in applying the tools, and (4) methods in the organisation to deal with (operational) interactions in the organisation (Clarke, et al., 1997).



experienced a downsizing exercise. One of the main conclusions of the present study is that, for various reasons, the transformation process was experienced as a emotionally taxing event for most of the participants. Contrary to another popular assumption that "Positive emotion is expected to be associated with tendencies to promote proposed changes whereas negative emotion is associated with resistance" (Mossholder, 2000), this study shows that negative emotions are evoked and experienced by employees irrespective of their agreement or disagreement with the notion of change. For example, Heike, Soonja and Pedro, who actively worked towards the transformation, expressed their disappointment with the process and feelings of isolation, of being marginalised due to the loss of the support of close colleagues. This particular experience of participants offers strong support for the argument that transformation should not be regarded as a phenomenon but rather as a process consisting of various dimensions that can elicit a variety of responses and emotions, irrespective of employees' opinion about the necessity for change.¹⁷

Albert (1984) argues that in the process of taking the decision to move from here to there (phase 1) it is essential to achieve a sense of psychological closure. This is done by acknowledging and doing justice to the nature and intensity of the emotions that are involved in the process — without that, the process is incomplete (Albert, 1984). Tampoe (1990, p. 347) comments that "Managing change in organizations is as much about managing the emotions of people as it is about managing logistics of change". Gagne et. al (2000) conclude that by acknowledging the feelings of employees towards the task at hand during organisational change, support is provided for their need for autonomy and in that way acceptance of change is facilitated. Ashford (1988) concludes that sharing worries and concerns, or simply "letting of steam" appears to be the most effective coping response during organisational transitions. However, she also indicates that without official consent or permission "individuals may be less likely to share concerns and more likely to worry about appearing confident" (Ashford, 1988, p. 31).

The findings of this study stress the "lack of sharing feelings and experiences" as referred to by Ashford (1988). Despite the emotional impact of the process and the need employees had to share their feelings, *probleme waarmee mense worstel lê op die vlak van 'n nood om met ander te praat*, colleagues and even close friends did not share these feelings. Moreover, Robert revealed that even management overlooked the idea of attending to the "potential" emotional impact of the process. As manager, Robert also indicated that he had a real need to share his anxieties and fears with someone. Thus, despite the reality of evoked emotions, the real need for sharing this with someone, no formal attention was given to participants' emotional experiences. Based on these experiences, it was deduced that a taboo existed with respect to emotions in the workplace. It was considered inappropriate to refer to and share emotional experiences.

The deduction on the taboo on emotions in the workplace (and thus also during a transformation process) concurs with other research findings. Nicholson (1998, p. 138) refers to managers who are often trained to "dispense with emotions in favour of rational analysis". O'Neill and Lenn

17. As argued, negative consequences resulting in negative emotions can be the result of the way employees are treated during the process (eg, lack of consultation/participation) or of poor planning regarding the practical outcome of decisions taken (eg, lack of access to administrative assistance due to restructuring). Thus, employees' emotional experiences emphasise the importance of differentiating between the stages or dimensions of a transformation that elicited a particular response.



(1995, p. 32) argue that “most approaches to thinking about organizations grant rationality a special prominence in organisations ... Adherents of the rational approach may discount emotion-laden observations, because they are not factual”. Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) indicate that feelings, whether emotions or moods, do not occupy a central role in current theoretical approaches to work motivation. They argue further that due to the focus on the dysfunctions of emotions (as opposed to the functions) a belief has been fostered that emotions are the antithesis of rationality. “This belief, in turn, may have contributed to a somewhat pejorative view of emotion and to consequent attempts to control the experience and expression of emotion in organizations” (Ashforth, et al., 1995, p. 98). Rafaeli and Sutton (1989) and Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) offer a comprehensive overview and discussion of organisationally approved or prescribed emotions. Rafaeli and Sutton (1989) contend that a clear distinction needs to be made between the emotions that employees feel and emotions that they are actually allowed or motivated to express. Usually the culture of an organisation has rules governing the emotions that employees are allowed to express — usually supportive of or in line with the preferred dominant culture (Rafaeli, et al., 1989; Van Maanen, et al., 1989). Thus, emotions are perceived as barriers to rationality, interfering with the rational approach to task accomplishment and therefore need to be controlled (Ashforth, et al., 1995).

However, this pejorative view of emotions seems to be challenged by recent rethinking of emotions. Affective experiences (emotions and moods) are regarded as potentially important aspects of work experience (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and the reconsideration of feelings, their origins and their combination with thoughts are necessary for an understanding of employees’ motivational agendas (George & Brief, 1996). The point is; “emotions are an integral and inseparable part of everyday organisational life. From moments of frustration or joy, grief or fear, to enduring sense of dissatisfaction or commitment, the experience of work is saturated with feeling” (Ashforth, et al., 1995, p. 98). Thus, “the validity of an emotion for those who feel it is a given, is subject to no known truth test, and is neither right nor wrong” (Van Maanen, et al., 1989, p. 53), and “ignoring the emotions neither obviates their influence on behavior nor provides any alternative for behavior or emotion” (O’Neill, et al., 1995, p. 32).

Ignoring the emotions that employees experience during a transformation process, will not make them go away but, as this study indicates, will rather contribute to the unnecessary negative experiences of the process. Acknowledging the feelings of employees during a transformation process, provides support for the need for autonomy. It may also be argued that acknowledging the feelings of employees can be to the benefit of the organisation as well as this can contribute to the employee-organisation relationship.

6.6.4 Producing and celebrating small wins (benefits) during the process of change

Robert commented on the positive effect of experiencing the benefits of the transformation process and Soonja highlighted the emotional impact of efforts and initiatives having no success. Studies stress the importance of obtaining and celebrating victories early in the transformation process. Harper (1998, p. 30) indicates “that it is important to produce early victories”, as visible benefits or success of the process motivate continued participation and effort in the process. In Kotter’s (1995) view, given the lengthiness of a transformation process, such a process can lose momentum if short-term goals are not met and celebrated. Nevis, DiBella and Gould (1995) argue that, due to the complexity of a transformation process that often requires an approach



from multiple directions and several points, the process of change can be maintained if people experience success in specific, modest areas of the process. Weick (1984) maintains that problems of scale (typically the scenario in large-scale organisational change) must be defined, or redefined, as several smaller and more manageable ones so that people can experience small wins. In her study on the process of change involved in the implementation of TQM in a particular organisation, Coyle-Shapiro (1999) found support for the assumption that employees who do not see interventions as beneficial in the early stages are unlikely to subsequently participate. She points out that this finding has implications for the management of a change process in the sense that steps have to be taken to ensure that employees progress quickly and that the likelihood of benefits increases.

It has thus been indicated that it is important to have small wins or successes during a transformation process as this seems to benefit the process through maintaining employee participation and motivation. However, it can be argued that benefits, successes or small wins also support the psychological well-being of employees and in this way facilitate positive experience of the process. According to Weick (1984, p. 46),

a small win reduces importance ("this is no big deal"), reduces demands ("that's all that needs to be done"), and raises perceived skill levels ("I can at least do that")...Deliberate cultivation of a strategy of small wins infuses situations with comprehensible and specific meaning (commitment), reinforces the perceptions that people can exert some influence over what happens to them (control) and produces changes of management size that serve as incentives to expand the repertory of skills (challenge).

Thus, obtaining small wins supports employees' need to have control over the situation as well as the need to feel competent in a specific situation.

Following the argument of redefining the process into smaller manageable units to obtain and celebrate small wins comes the argument to rephrase or redefine a change process as a challenge, an opportunity for growth instead of the end of an era. "Capitalizing on growth opportunities and developing innovative approaches capture the human spirit far more than efforts geared to downsizing and outsourcing" (Harper, 1998, p. 26). Harper argues that change is predominantly perceived as the cutting of costs, the focus on the bottom line and the slashing of the payroll with little reference to inventions or the development of new tactics. In their study of a successful organisational change process, Cooper and Markus (1995, p. 49) state that the manager succeeded in making the change fun: "he replaced a fearful perspective of change with a spirit of play, creativity and experimentation." The findings of this study support the view that change can and perhaps should be rephrased as an opportunity to be creative, a time for new ideas and increased freedom. The single most positive experience resulting from the process to which participants referred was the opportunity it gave them to develop new material, the freedom they had to move beyond previous borders and boundaries and the opportunity to be creative. It is clear that participants placed a high value on the notion of innovation and creativity.

7 REVISITING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The findings of this study reinforce the significant impact of a transformation process on the relationships in the organisation. Considering the themes identified in participants' experiences of the process, it is clear that the theme of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal dynamics was most frequently referred to. The process of transformation influenced the inter-



personal relationships noticeably. This study indicates that transformation is implemented in a context of a web of relationships between employees mutually and employees and the organisation. The evolving nature of the context during the process, as a result of the changing power and political relationships, has also been discussed as well as the impact of transformation on "products" of the relationships, such as psychological support (Ryan, 1995; Gagne, et al., 2000) and spontaneous behaviour (George, et al., 1992). Lawrence (1991) supports the notion that transformation impacts on the relationships among people (social context) and argues that it is precisely the changes in relationships (rather than technical changes) that people object to most.

Many studies on large-scale change or transformation highlight feelings of uncertainty, fear of the unknown and mistrust as dominant constituents of a process (Gagne, et al., 2000), but very few highlight the prominence of relationships and how they are affected by a change process. However, as Pascale (1990, p. 49) maintains, "Organizations are in the last analysis interactions among people" (Pascale, 1990, p. 49), and Isen and Baron (1991, p. 27) state, "All individuals who work within a given organization are interdependent, at least to a degree", then obviously one of the central issues of a change process should be maintaining the healthy or binding qualities of these relationships during the process. Relationships are not only affected by a change process, but in acknowledging and utilising their potential strengths, it can actively assist employees of all levels in their dealings with such a process. In the concerns-based networking model of change it is argued that "the competent change manager can deal with the complexities of the change process, not as an individual but as a member of various teams" (Schaafsma, 1997, p. 47).

Looking at organisations from a non-Newtonian way, perceiving people as conduits of organisational energy, Wheatley (1992, p.71) remarks: "I cannot describe a person's role, or his or her potential contribution, without understanding the network of relationships and the energy that is required to create the work transformations that I am asking from that person". Given the findings of this study in the context of the changed perspective on organisations as something more than a machine, it is argued that in the management of change and in the research of this organisational phenomenon, attention needs to be directed at understanding relationships in processes of change.

8 THE NATURE OF RESISTANCE

Hirschman, cited by O'Neill and Lenn (1995, p.32) remarked that organisation members have three choices, namely exit, loyalty, and voice:

Exiting members take valuable and disturbing information with them. Loyal members don't give voice to disturbing information, confusing blindness and silence with loyalty. This confusion naturally arises because those willing to voice disturbing information are often forced to exit, or forced to show loyalty by suppressing that information. Finally, some members take the trouble to voice concerns to the organization. Voice, properly heard within the organization, is the behavioral choice that affords the organization the best chance for adaptation. But voice is often ignored, suppressed or extinguished.

This statement suggests that voice, or the speaking of opinion or perhaps the resistance to a decision, can actually be to the benefit of the organisation and is not necessarily destructive and something to overcome. This statement is in contrast to the typical and rather general assump-



tion that resistance to change efforts is a definite negative, as the remark of Cooper (1995, p. 39), contends, "reengineering fails because people resist change", or that the first step of a change process is to overcome resistance (Goodstein, et al., 1991).

The findings of the present study support the view that resistance to change and, for that matter, participation in the process should not be judged on face value. Participation in a process of transformation is not the automatic consequence of agreement with the change, but can also be the result of fear of losing a job or fear of being victimised for having a different opinion or a perception of total helplessness (having no other option). It cannot be assumed, therefore that employees who participate in the change process are in agreement with it (or the particular phase or dimension). In the same way, it cannot be assumed that employees who resist the process or elements thereof disagree with the notion of transformation. Participants in this study who resisted the process openly at times were the ones who proactively persuaded the organisation in favour of the change. Resistance to change can be the result of an unwillingness to or fear of change, but it could also be the result of a high level of involvement and commitment to the process (Kotter, et al., 1991). "In fact, resistance can anticipate and bring to light flaws in intent, design, and implementation and can be a predictor of problematic and high-risk endeavors" (Levine, 2001, p. 27). Resistance can therefore be constructive, depending on the willingness of managers to listen to employees and their ability (character) to deal with criticism from employees.

However, when referring to resistance, it is necessary to distinguish or diagnose the resistance. As employees resist change for different reasons (Kotter, et al., 1991), it could potentially be destructive or negative, such as, an employee whose self-interest and position of power are more important than the survival of the company. Resistance can also be constructive where voice is aimed at warning about wrong decisions or directions. Furthermore, the phase or dimension of the process the resistance is aimed at should also be distinguished. So, for instance, Heike resisted the direction of the change whereas Anja resisted a particular decision taken during the transition that affected her detrimentally. Distinguishing the phases or dimensions resistance is aimed at as well as the particular reason for resistance is crucial in order to determine the appropriate action to take whether it be the provision of more information, increased involvement, support or acting on the concerns of employees (Kotter, et al., 1991). If resistance is not redefined as multifaceted and potentially constructive, it will typically be trivialised and resisters will be seen as people who need handling (Levine, 2001). Furthermore, it is argued that just as personal experiences of change happen in the context of a web of relationships, so does conducive behaviour or resistance happen in the context of the dynamic relationships between the employee, the organisation and colleagues. Resistance or participation cannot be explored or diagnosed without taking contextual conditions into consideration. So, for example, Delianne and Pedro described their resistance during the process as aimed at colleagues who felt negative about the process and tried to slow it down. In this case, resistance had little to do with the process of change as such but was in response to the conduct of colleagues with whom they had working or collegial relationships. It is thus clear that resistance needs to be regarded as multifaceted, aimed at various aspects, dimensions or conduct during a process and can potentially be as constructive as destructive.



Lawrence (1991, p. 79) concludes:

We are all, at times, resisters as well as instigators of change ... Resistance to change is by itself neither good nor bad. Resistance may be soundly based or not. It is always, however, an important signal calling for further inquiry by management.

9 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY AND TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The main purpose of the study was to gain an insight into and understanding of employee experiences of organisational transformation. Secondly, the study aimed at developing or proposing a conceptual tool or framework for understanding the experiences that are grounded in the life-world of organisational members through reviewing current literature and theory on this subject.

The study contributes to the understanding of employee experiences of transformation as an intricate interplay of positive and negative experiences of employees who support and resist the change, of people involving themselves intellectually and emotionally in the process and of people responding to challenges of a change process. This rich perspective on employees' experiences offers a counterbalance to the hackneyed statement or governing principle (sometimes undeservingly) that people generally resist change.

The second contribution of the study is the description of "experienced transformation" as consisting of different phases, dimensions, practical outcomes and multiple relationships. Thus, to understand a particular experience of an employee, it is necessary to distinguish which of the phases, dimensions, outcomes or relationships elicited the particular response. Not only will such an approach contribute to a better understanding of employee experiences, but it can also facilitate appropriate management responses in dealing with these experiences.

The main contribution of this study is the proposal of a conceptual model for understanding employee experiences of a transformation process. The proposed model furthermore identifies and offers a motivation for constituents that may mediate personal experiences of transformation. In this regard the study contributes to the understanding of the impact of a change process on employee well-being and potential mitigating characteristics of the person or the environment which Nelson and Cooper (1995) identify as lacking in existing literature. In addition, this model may contribute to management's perspective on employees and their efforts to minimise the social or human cost of a change process.

A number of comments have been made about the implication of the proposed model for the internalisation of new behaviour in a process of change. However, the issue of the internalisation of new behaviour patterns during change, is still (little less than) a mystery. It seems worthwhile to explore the applicability of the self-determination theory and the arousal theory (or others) in the context of management practices to ensure large-scale change. Such an endeavour would need to take cognisance of the large body of research on the change of behaviour in other areas of psychology as well as the interrelatedness of attitudes, perceptions and behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

It was also argued earlier in the discussion that research on change needs to explore the role of relationships in a process of change. Relationships need to be understood as a broad concept, including the close interpersonal relationships between colleagues, the relationships involved in



or leading to spontaneous or prosocial behaviour as well as relationships of power. Furthermore, relationships should also be explored from different perspectives, such as the impact of change on relationships or the potential role of relationships in facilitating change.

The concept of organisational commitment has only been referred to as a side issue as it fell outside the ambit of the study. However, recent literature on the role of deep commitment or deep identification with the organisation during organisation change warrants further attention (Rousseau, 1998). Unexplored findings of this study on the difference between job commitment and organisational commitment offer many questions for further exploration. Stephan, for example, justified his participation in the process of change by referring to his deep commitment to his job. It was concluded that despite his personal pain, his disillusionment with the organisation, he still stayed involved as a result of his commitment to his profession as educator.

10 CONCLUSION

Despite careful and intelligent management of a change management logic (Veldsman, 1995) or a best practice model, it is clear that "[i]n reality, even successful change efforts are messy and full of surprises" (Kotter, 1995, p. 67). Kotter's statement is a reminder that even with the best tools or conceptual frameworks to guide every step through a transformation process, one should never be complacent and forget about the fact that order and disorder are parts of the same universe. As transformation is about staying in business with people at the crux thereof, managing change seems to require a sense of responsibility as well as of innovation, openness, flexibility, and the willingness to learn.

The old struggle in psychology between the person in particular and the person in general (Allport, 1981) is also apparent in this study. In the process of gaining an understanding of employee experiences of transformation, the process of making sense started off in the particular experiences of an individual and went on to themes constituted of combined experiences. Individual experiences and combined experiences eventually contributed to a conceptual framework endeavouring to understand the experiences of transformation for the person in general. However, hopefully references to unique individual characteristics and unique individual situatedness in an organisation acknowledge and provide space in the conceptual tool for experiences in general to accommodate the person in particular. It is also true that many of the experiences of the persons in particular, slipped as a result of an inability to understand and an inability to interpret the meaning and uniqueness of the experience.

As the development of the conceptual tool iterated between the individual experience, the combined experiences (themes) and the fictitious person in general, trying to do justice to all, so perhaps do people who are responsible for other people during a transformation process need to iterate between the experience in particular and the experiences in general.

Having had the opportunity to share in the truly unique experiences of willing participants, feeling many times like Moses, who had to take off his shoes because the ground he stood on was holy, this study concludes with the words of William James (in Allport, 1981, P.66):

...in every concrete individual, there is a uniqueness that defies all formulation. We can feel the touch of it and recognize its taste, so to speak, relishing or disliking, as the case may be, but we can give no ultimate account of it, and have in the end simply to admire the Creator.