This section describes and analyses aspects of the company and its operations that give it its characteristic nature. It focuses on everyday organisational life and describes what happens when the company is in operation; what, how and with whom people work, what factors, present and past, impact on organisational activities (cf Britan & Cohen 1980:22), and the context in which this occurs. In this way it sets the scene for reporting on other aspects of the research.

2.1 Functioning of the organisation

Research participants' ideas about the functioning of the company and various rulings pertaining to their employment were ascertained. The information which follows incorporates aspects of their responsibilities as well as aspects of company operations.

The loading process, a key aspect of the marketing function, must be attended to very carefully, not only to ensure that the correct products are loaded, but also that the weights of the goods that are loaded are accurate. The pilots (cf 2.5 below) carry the goods from the storerooms to the scales, which are positioned on the platforms next to the open rear doors of the trucks, which have been backed up against the platform in the loading zone. Each item is weighed and a record is kept of the weight before it is loaded onto a truck. The driver of the truck is required to stand by and watch the loading process since he is ultimately responsible for the truck and its load. A large order can take from three to four hours to load, while in the case of smaller loads the loading time may be 20 or 30 minutes. The trucks are loaded in accordance with the tonnage that they are licensed to carry, and care must be taken to ensure that it is not exceeded. The average number of deliveries per truck is from eight to ten per day, sometimes twelve, depending upon the size and number of the orders and the size of the truck. Ideally each truck should be utilised every day, but sometimes this does not happen, whereas on other days there are not enough
trucks to supply all the orders. This, it was said, is in the nature of the business. The demand for the company's products is usually much greater at the end of the month than the middle, but drops considerably during school holidays. There are five platforms, which means that five trucks can be loaded simultaneously. There are 'between 23 and 28 trucks'. Some research participants regard the number of platforms as sufficient, while others believe that at least one more should be made operational, which would extend the business considerably. The drivers' routes vary, although a small number said they take the same route every day, for example to make deliveries in Pretoria. It was also said that the company deliberately makes sure that drivers do not have the same routes so that if a driver is absent, he can easily be replaced. The drivers prefer different routes, particularly if customers on a particular one are known to be difficult or 'rude'.

Orders are received during the course of the day and then sent to the traders in the afternoons in preparation for the loading the following morning. Loading is usually done in the mornings, but where many orders have been received, trucks may be loaded the previous afternoon. Ten pilots place the goods on a scale and then load them onto the truck. All this is done under the supervision of the predominantly white traders, who inform the pilots what goods must be selected from the storeroom for each order and ensure that a particular customer's order is met exactly in accordance with the 'picking slips' on which the details of the order are indicated. Once all the orders have been received and computerised, the routes of the trucks are determined so that a truck delivers to customers who are located approximately in the same area. Research participants said that the goods are never mixed up. The actual loading procedure must be observed very carefully. If there is any discrepancy between what has been loaded and items that must still be loaded, the truck must be unloaded and reloaded after the problem has been solved. Goods are marked and loaded to correspond with the route which has been worked out for the driver. At the first stop the driver therefore knows exactly what must be unloaded, since the clearly marked goods are positioned at the back of the truck. A truck can only depart once the 'picking slips' have been returned and the invoices issued. The invoices are checked thoroughly to make sure that no errors have inadvertently occurred before they are sent to the driver with the go-ahead to leave. Two pilots accompany each truck, consequently with each truck that departs there are fewer pilots and the loading process takes longer. The pilots are given clean overalls to make sure that they are neat, since they now 'represent the company'. Before it leaves, a truck is weighed on a weighbridge as a final means of checking whether the weight corresponds with the previously calculated combined weight of the truck and its load. (The trucks are also weighed after they have been filled with fuel but before they are loaded.) The total weight is recorded and the truck given a
seal to indicate that departure is in order. If the truck weighs from 10 to 20 km in excess of or below what was calculated before it was driven onto the weighbridge, it is unloaded and the goods reweighed before it is reloaded. Unloading a truck weighing between six and eight tons is very unpopular and great care is taken to ensure that a truck is loaded correctly the first time. At a customer's outlet an order is weighed again, but problems often arise because the company's electronic scales differ from the often older less accurate scales used by some customers. Should there be a difference, the customer must report this to the company and then, depending upon the circumstances, he is asked to reweigh the goods, which are either returned if the discrepancy is too big, or he receives a credit note for the shortage. Where discrepancies can be ascribed to differences in the scales, the customer usually benefits. If some misdemeanour is surmised or a particular item that is indicated on the invoice is missing, the driver is held responsible.

The traders start work at 7:00, but they do not have strict working hours. This contrasts with the hours of the office staff, who work from 7:00 to 15:00. Some days a trader can go home at 14:00, but on others he must wait, even until late at night, for a truck to return, since the traders are required to wait until all the trucks that they loaded have returned. The time of return depends upon how far a truck has travelled, its number of deliveries, and whether a customer delays a driver; hence there is no fixed pattern in the outward and return movements of the trucks. By implication this also means that the people involved in loading and deliveries do not have fixed routines at their homes. Although the employees are generally used to this, some maintained that getting up so early to be at work by 7:00 can be a problem and that 'the alarm clock does not wake' them.

When the traders have a few minutes break or in the afternoons while they wait for the trucks to return, they 'go upstairs' where they share an office with two of the office staff. Then there is time for bantering and drinking tea or coffee, while those involved in marketing take the opportunity to contact their customers, or take orders from customers who contact the company. This means that the traders do not spend the entire day separately from the office (predominantly white) employees. The informal gatherings in the afternoons, according to a trader, mean that 'they are all together', and it is not a matter of 'one group being located in one office and another elsewhere'.

Market prices of suppliers are monitored and recorded daily. They may be adjusted during the day, to the dismay of those who compile the invoices. This situation is compounded if an order is received for specific goods which are in short supply. Sometimes it may be impossible for the company to increase the prices it is prepared to pay a supplier and disagreement with suppliers may en-
sue, but this type of uncertainty is typical of the market in which the company operates and employees know how, and are prepared, to deal with it.

At times the drivers handle cash payment from a customer for goods delivered. Although an acknowledged part of the drivers' responsibility, there were participants who expressed concern about the matter and believe that expecting the drivers to handle cash represents irresponsibility on the part of the company. When a driver returns, he hands the money to the employee responsible for locking it in a safe, but the safe cannot be monitored 24 hours a day. What concerns the employee who provided the information is that it is general knowledge that the company handles cash and where it is locked away. While this does not mean that employees, and by definition the drivers who handle the money, would attempt to get hold of it, people talk, he said, and sometimes unknowingly divulge information which does not concern others. He expressed the fear of being trapped in his office in an armed hold-up, even though there are security officers on the premises. The money is banked every day and is fetched at the company by a security firm. Even so, the principle of dealing with cash is unacceptable to the informant and exacerbates the risk of hijacking and robbery which the drivers face every day. Also as regards handling cash, on occasion the company which employs the pilots sends their wages in cash with the request that the pilots be paid before they go home. The sum of money involved can be as high as R15 000, and again the information can be leaked deliberately or by accident to unscrupulous people. The money is placed in envelopes and stapled to a clipboard for anyone to see. The company is located on the perimeter of a poor black residential area where, it was said, gunshots are frequently heard. The location of the company is therefore considered to add to the risk of dealing with cash.

Two drivers are responsible on a weekly basis for filling the trucks with fuel early in the mornings to facilitate operations once the loading starts. When a driver arrives at work, his truck has therefore already been filled and can be weighed before it is loaded. The trucks are maintained and serviced by the company's mechanics after completing 15 000 km. Small mechanical problems are tended to immediately to ensure that they do not develop into bigger problems. The drivers are responsible for their trucks and must report anything irregular. The time that a mechanic takes to repair or service a truck is also monitored, since a truck that is out of service for too long represents a loss to the company. A driver keeps a record of fuel he adds during the day, and the kilometre reading is taken before the truck leaves in the morning and again when it returns. This is partly to ensure that the drivers do not take long routes or make private stops along the way, and partly to monitor the fuel consumption and kilometre reading of the trucks on a daily basis. The majority, ie about 75%, of
the trucks, are fitted with cellular telephones so that a driver can contact the company if necessary. When a driver travels a long distance and it is obvious that a single tank of fuel will be inadequate, he is given money to pay for extra fuel or for telephone calls if his truck is not fitted with a telephone. There is therefore no excuse for a driver not to contact the company if he requires assistance of any form.

Research participants were asked whether there are recreational facilities such as a waiting room with a television set for people who have to wait for incoming trucks, or for the drivers who wait until the evenings for company transport to take them home, but there are none. The company provides transport to and from the centre of Johannesburg for drivers for whom this arrangement is convenient. A problem arises when the transport vehicle must wait for a late truck to return and the drivers who make use of the transport have no option but to wait, otherwise they must go home at their own expense.

About once per month a meeting is held when figures for the month, which are confidential, are discussed. During the meeting stock is taken to see whether the company has met its target, while the target for the following month as regards sales and deliveries, amongst other matters, is also set. The drivers do not attend the meetings because it is felt that they 'do not understand the meanings of debits and credits' and other accounting matters.

In accordance with an agreement with the union, the drivers are entitled to compassionate leave for personal emergencies. It was said that without the agreement the company would not allow such leave and an applicant would have to deduct the leave from his annual allocation. The drivers know that if they apply for compassionate leave they cannot extend it on their own. A driver receives full pay for the time that he is away. Maternity and paternity leave may also be granted. Before an employee can be discharged, a disciplinary hearing is required, and an employee can only be discharged for very 'good reasons', for example theft, driving under the influence of alcohol, or for repeatedly being absent for two or three days per week without leave being granted or for no acceptable reason. As part of the maintenance of discipline, an employee who has disobeyed company rules is called to the manager, the matter is discussed, and then, as a last resort, a disciplinary hearing is held. The employee is first given a verbal warning, followed by a written warning if he/she repeats the action. After three such warnings and the disciplinary hearing, he/she will be dismissed. This applies to all categories of employees, black and white.

Among the office personnel, taking leave must be by mutual arrangement so that someone is always present to assume an employee's responsibilities when he/she is away. With the exception of the manager, office employees are only
permitted to take leave between January and November, depending upon who is present or away, and not in December, the time allocated for the manager's leave. Employees therefore arrange amongst themselves when they can apply for leave and then 'just wait to see' whether it is granted.

The responsibilities of an absent employee are shared between persons who are capable of attending to them. Otherwise, employees largely work alone. Employees in lower postgrades share an office and only people in management positions have their own offices. The fact that there is only one appointee per administrative and managerial position in the company was not identified as a problem, but there were instances when people complained about having more work to do than other people in similar positions.

The drivers are all members of a provident fund, but not of a medical aid scheme. This is because of the considerable costs of such membership and management feels that the drivers' wages do not justify membership, although the matter is being investigated. The drivers are concerned about their lack of access to a medical aid scheme and mentioned that this was a matter that they intend taking up with the union.

Financial assistance for employees who wish to improve their qualifications is available from the company. A white male who is busy with a diploma in business management is studying with the assistance of a company bursary. He regards this as a motion of confidence and an investment in himself, and believes that he was 'identified' as someone who should undergo further training in the interests of the company. For this reason it was not difficult for him to obtain a bursary. He believes he has a very good future with the company, which, he said, explains his loyalty. The drivers were also asked their opinions about further study, particularly those who are within reach of a matriculation certificate. There was some enthusiasm, but they said that they did not have either the time, or the financial means to study. They had never considered the possibility of approaching the company for financial assistance, not least because they did not know that such assistance could be applied for.

There are no specified times for tea or for lunch. People make tea as they wish and may perhaps take off a few minutes for a meal, but eating largely occurs while work is in progress.

Circumstances that were identified as not being conducive to effective functioning of the company were the pressure under which the people responsible for the loading of the trucks must operate and the danger that both the drivers and the traders face. Their work is responsible and to ensure effective functioning of the company, everyone's role is as important as the manager's role. One of the white employees said that he believed that the drivers deserve greater
recognition for their work in view of the dangerous circumstances associated with the high crime rate under which they perform their tasks.

Ensuring that a driver receives a private telephone message is not easy. Because of the apparent urgency of many such messages, they are recorded in a book and brought to the attention of the driver concerned by a white employee who is in regular contact with the drivers. The drivers have also been instructed to check for messages in the book themselves. If a message is not reported, particularly if it concerns an emergency such as a sick child, complications can arise, and the company will be blamed for not relaying messages to its employees. As a result everything possible is done to ensure that people receive telephone messages. On occasion there has been reason to believe that a message was not genuine and merely a ploy to get a driver to attend to a matter inside working hours. It has occurred that a driver’s wife has telephoned the company to find out the whereabouts of her husband if he did not return home the previous day. Black wives were said to be ‘worse’ than white wives in trying to trace their husband’s movements.

2.2 Relationships with head office

Characteristic of accounts of the relationship between the company and the head office in Pretoria were strongly contrasting ideas. On the positive side, senior managers said that contact between the company and the head office is good and that there is ongoing communication between them. Not only is there frequent telephone contact, but approximately every 14 days someone from head office visits the company, although later in the interview this was adjusted to every two to three months when, in the presence of the managing director of the holding company, a meeting is held to discuss financial and statistical reports, and any problems which require attention.

In his views about contact with head office, a senior male who first said that contact was ‘reasonable’, but later that it was ‘good’, pointed out that it is mostly the manager who is in contact with head office. As the link between the company and head office, he attends meetings called by the latter. The general manager of the holding company does not visit the company regularly and has only been once or twice, but other senior people visit more frequently, although not regularly either. The informant believes that because the company is doing well, regular visits by senior managers are not justified, and presumably they can spend their time more productively at other branches where matters are more problematic. He assumed that head office is aware that the crux of the business is located at the company, that this was where the money was being made and, similarly, where it could be lost. He also stated that at times decisions taken at
head office were not totally in keeping with what happened at the company, which made him wonder about the extent to which senior management are in touch with the situation at the company, that is, at 'ground level'.

Another male informant also regards contact with head office as 'reasonable'. He has no direct contact with senior managers himself, but is aware of contact between company management and head office. He maintained that should something serious happen at the company, senior managers from head office would have to come to the company, but currently they come as the need arises. He too said that he believed that head office is aware that this is where the money is made, but added that feedback from head office on the company's financial performance is inadequate. During a meeting, feedback from head office is reported by the manager, while it would be preferable for a senior manager to visit the company and report directly on the company's financial successes or otherwise.

It was also felt that there are times when senior management at head office should intervene directly in the company's affairs. To illustrate his view, a white male commented on an incident concerning contact with a competitor who was approached by representatives of the company with the request to reduce its prices to make the market more competitive. The informant interpreted this incident as having negative consequences for the company, since as the market leader it should set prices and not humiliate itself by dealing with a competitor on this level. By consulting the competitor, he believed the company actually handed over its market leadership to the other company. He felt that in such a vital example of bad business strategy, head office should have exercised its authority directly. Thus, by implication, the marketing strategy of the company in this case was bad and head office should have intervened to prevent a small competitor from taking over market leadership.

Other research participants were more outspoken about the relationship between the company and head office, and described it as 'problematic'. A white male employee said that it is difficult to please people at a distance, and they, ie the company, have very little contact with the senior managers in Pretoria, who almost never visit them. Decisions are taken by senior management without consultation and with little explanation to the company, for example when recently payment of employees' salaries was taken over directly from head office in Pretoria without the company being informed of the decision. This caused problems, particularly for the drivers' wages, but when the decision was queried, employees were merely informed that the problem would be rectified at the end of the following month. The perception therefore exists that head office is out of touch with the company, that is, with the people who actually do the work and produce the profits, and that very little recognition is forthcoming from
them for a job well done. In this regard a senior white male maintained that there do not seem to be any really meaningful ties between head office and the company, such ties constituting an important aspect of business activities. The company needs guidance and leadership from head office, but this must be coupled with a touch of humility. Senior executives are also human beings, not icons in offices in Pretoria. It was felt that there is a palatable social distance between employees at head office and those at company branches, and that the former should make a greater effort to get in touch with the people who are in the frontline of production. Besides usual reports, statistics and statements, what is required is a sound knowledge of production activities and ways in which matters are structured at company branches, as well as the establishment of more personal relationships between head office and the branches. On the single occasion that a senior executive visited the company it was said that he behaved as if it were unnecessary for him to meet the employees, and his attitude suggested that people should have recognised him from his photograph in the company's newsletter. Moreover, such visits should also be kept on a lighter note, rather than confirm the general perception of the excessive formality typical of some South African companies, and the associated perception of 'us in Pretoria and you out there'. Such a situation is not conducive to the establishment of a good working environment. There is also a perception that decisions which benefit the branches, such as salary increases, are a long time in the making and the information is slow in reaching the companies, even if the necessary preliminary work has already been completed. In contrast, if for instance a decision has been made that there will be no increases, the information is transmitted quickly without any indication of whether any real deliberation occurred with branch managers or even on what basis the decision was made. People are merely informed in a one-sided top-down manner. Such matters strengthen the 'us/them' perception and the separation between the company and head office. In line with the above there are employees who have virtually no knowledge of head office or the holding company, other than the names of some of the executives and their positions.

2.3 The shop stewards

Two of the drivers have been appointed as shop stewards, and function as mediators between the drivers and management on the one hand, and between the drivers and the union on the other hand. Both shop stewards were interviewed and both indicated that the drivers do have greater input into decisions that affect them than they had in the past, but it appears that this largely concerns work-related issues rather than input in decisions that impact on the company's
policies and business strategies. Their links with the union appear to be sporadic and tenuous.

In more practical and day-to-day issues concerning the drivers, the shop stewards do play a role. For example, when a driver has been reprimanded, perhaps rather severely, or when a driver does not feel comfortable approaching management about a matter, a shop steward may be approached and asked to consult the manager on his behalf. Alternatively, a shop steward accompanies the driver to the person who did the reprimanding. Most times, it was said, such matters are solved amiably. From time to time the shop stewards also call meetings to discuss important issues that affect the drivers such as wage increases, and during such occasions various other matters may also be raised. Some concern was expressed about the length of time it takes for a shop steward to report back to the drivers after a discussion with management about issues that involve them.

2.4 Union membership

Union membership was introduced as a forum for the drivers to air their grievances. The black employees relatively recently had joined the Food and Allied Workers’ Union (FAWU), but union activity is limited, emphasised by the relatively good understanding between the shop stewards and management and the few, if any, serious problems, making contact with and input from the union unnecessary. It appears that factors contributing to labour stability over the past three years are that black employees’ interests have been more carefully considered, incentive bonuses have been introduced, salaries adjusted, and general working conditions have been attended to. In addition, black involvement in decision making has also increased. An additional factor appears to be the relatively small number of black people employed directly by the company, with a large component of the workers corps being employees of another company contracted to render a service to the company. These workers, it was repeatedly stated, are more actively involved in union activities, although their behaviour and attitudes seldom impact upon the company’s operations in any significant way. In the past, when the company employed its own workers in this category, tremendous problems were experienced with union activity.

Union members do not hold regular meetings, nor do representatives of the union visit the company regularly. The shop stewards are responsible for overseeing issues that require the attention of the union, but this too appears to be a low-keyed matter.

It seems that although union membership is voluntary, employees are coerced into becoming members in the belief that the union will constitute an
unfailing support system for all their problems. This perception was given impetus by the general belief among black employees that, in the view of a senior manager, they are ‘being used’ by the company. Nevertheless, negotiations for annual wage increases appear to be the only time that union members meet with any regularity and union activity is really important. In the view of this manager, ongoing involvement with the union is not really necessary, since black employees realise that they can trust management enough to negotiate themselves, and therefore they no longer have reason to consult the union or call a third party to talk on their behalf. In addition, he said, that while previously the unions merely ‘negotiated’ with companies, they are now also aware of broader economic and business issues which impact upon their members. There is therefore a more balanced approach in dealings, when they occur, between the union and the company regarding matters that concern the members of the union.

Other white employees also commented on the low-key association between black employees and the union. One insisted that union activity is of no consequence at the company, and all problems are solved internally without any need for employees to turn to the union. This he ascribed to the supposed trust which he believes exists between the black employees and management. Similarly, another senior white male said that he was not aware that there ‘is a union at the company’ and he surmised that if there were one, the black workers would be members. There have been no incidents involving unionised activities. In emphasis of this idea, repeated mention was made of the influence of the union at a related company in the same area where unionised political activity developed into violence, which included a physical attack by workers on the manager. Although employees of the company did not participate in the strike action, on the morning of the incident no trucks were loaded, strictly not because the drivers were in sympathy with their ‘neighbours’, but because the four white traders were nervous of the situation and the gathering of approximately fifty black workers on the premises. Once the situation had stabilised, the trucks were loaded with the drivers assisting to hasten the process.

In line with general ideas concerning union membership, all the black participants were asked to give their views on the matter. They too confirmed that consulting the union is not a priority for them and that membership is largely on paper only. For instance, a driver was asked whether he would consult the union about a problem he identified concerning his wages. He answered that, as a member, he had considered consulting them, but first he intended to ‘read the instructions of the union’ and that he was ‘still fighting with the company’, meaning that he intended to solve the problem directly with the company before he turned to the union. Later he said that he ‘did not know any union’ because he only recently joined the company – he is ‘still a new person here’. As
an employee of the company, and because he does not ‘cause any problems’, he believes that he is entitled to have his problems solved by the company without having to turn to the union. In reply to the question where the union meetings are held, a driver said that he did not know. He also indicated that it has happened that a meeting date has been changed and the first the drivers hear about this is when they are told that the meeting is over. A black female office worker, who is convinced that she earns less than her white counterparts, was asked whether she was a member of the union, to which she could turn for advice to help her find a solution to her concerns. She said that she was not a member, although previously she had been one, but she had cancelled her membership because she earns too little money and could not afford the membership fees, which were automatically deducted from her salary. She did, however, want someone to ‘talk on her behalf’. The general view at the company, both among office personnel and the black employees, is therefore that currently contact with the union is largely insignificant, and that the union does not play a very important role as far as the drivers and their work are concerned. In 1998 management received a single letter from Cosatu during a time of nationwide strikes.

2.5 The pilots

There is general unhappiness about the position and functioning of the pilots, who are employed on contract by the company and are responsible for loading the trucks, accompanying the drivers on their routes, and offloading goods at the various destinations. They total about 40 and, although they are paid directly at the company, they are formally employed by a related company, which means that other than ensuring that they receive their wages, the first company has no responsibility towards them. Problems associated with the pilots were repeatedly heard from the drivers and, because of the extent of the problems, formed part of the discussions with white participants as well.

The reason for the pilots’ presence is historical. Formerly the company employed its own pilots, but they were said to have caused endless problems. On the basis of a financial decision, the management of the company at the time decided that it would be more cost effective to employ the pilots on contract from another company than employ them themselves, particularly in view of the problems they caused, such as intimidating the drivers, participating in strike actions and making incessant demands. One of the drivers described the reason for their presence as being that ‘somehow they are trying to stop maybe us from striking’. His reasoning was that because the pilots were always ‘ready to go on strike’, while the drivers had to ‘wait in their trucks’ for the strike to end, the company retrenched its own pilots and hired others on contract. Moreover, if
the drivers were to go on strike, pilots employed by the company could find people who 'know the job' to replace the striking drivers.

Two pilots accompany each driver, but they vary on a daily basis, which means that the drivers do not have a great deal of opportunity to get to know them. This constitutes a problem, since the drivers are responsible for them and ultimately their behaviour, and cannot exercise effective control over them or 'show them what to do'. The drivers do not choose their pilots; that is the decision of the employee who receives the orders. He selects the pilots who accompany a particular driver at random. The drivers insisted that if they could take 'their own people', that is, employees of the company, or if the same pilots could accompany them every day, there would be fewer problems. The pilots would learn the drivers' ways of doing things and that it is not their (the drivers') intention to 'look for trouble'. A driver, in turn, would learn 'their [the pilots'] manners'. If a pilot with whom a driver works regularly is not available, the driver would know that this person is on leave, or that he has been 'chased away'. Because the pilots know that they do not accompany the same driver every day, it was repeatedly said that the situation lends itself to exploitation and the pilots can get up to 'their tricks', knowing that whatever they do, it is always the drivers' fault. The drivers are aware of this and have discussed the matter with management, lodging a request that they must at least know the pilots who accompany them every day.

The pilots are physically very strong and it is known for a man who weighs approximately 62 kg to carry weights of up to 120 kg. They do this every day, and it was said 'they are used to it'. Not everyone thinks so. One of the older drivers said that they are not very strong, but 'make a plan' with their work which enables them to carry very heavy loads. If they want to finish their work quickly to make sure that they are on time for their homebound transport, they carry heavy loads and run rather than walk. This creates the perception that they are very strong. Because of their physical strength, most of the pilots were said to be Zulu, but there are also Xhosa and Tswana people among them. The pilots are instructed to handle the goods carefully because if they damage them through rough handling, the goods must be downgraded at a loss to the company.

The drivers expressed varying ideas about the pilots, but in general the pilots clearly appear to be a thorn in the flesh of the drivers and a source of much of their frustration and resentment. For example, an elderly driver said that he could discern from their attitudes that they dislike accompanying him, and are dissatisfied because they either do not talk or work slowly, apparently to aggravate him. There is nothing he can do other than make sure that his deliveries are on time or, if it is apparent that the pilots are delaying him, to ask them to work faster to ensure that they do not arrive at the next destination after it has closed.
Another driver described the pilots as having ‘naughty manners’. Although some of them behave well, others do not, and if a driver tries to show certain pilots what he wants them to do he makes trouble for himself. The pilots just ‘make a mess’ (‘maak ‘n gemors’) and cause trouble. Moreover, the pilots know that the drivers will be held responsible for the trouble they cause and are not in a position to do or say anything. Therefore, they do as they like. Pilots have also asked a driver to take them to places such as the bank, which poses a problem, particularly if it is late and the driver wants to go home. It is also against company rules for a driver to deviate from his scheduled route for private reasons. If a driver refuses to obey, the pilot ‘gets angry’, and the driver just has to, for instance, ‘drive by the bank’. If the truck should be hijacked, the driver will be asked by management why he deviated from his route. Another driver was asked whether the pilots could be trusted. He said he did not know because he ‘does not know them’, but he was prepared to say that ‘he trusts them’, even though over weekends they turn into tsotsis (criminals or gangsters). Yet another driver described the situation involving the pilots as ‘quite a lot who strike, quite a lot of fighting’. One of the drivers was more philosophical about having different pilots accompany him every day. This is an ‘instruction of the company’ and he was not in a position to say it is ‘right or wrong’, although he has experienced problems with the pilots.

Not all the drivers, however, have experienced problems with the pilots. Some of them cooperate well enough, and it was said they (the pilots) also have problems with the company that employs them and often complain about them. Some of these complaints were said to be justified. They affect the pilots’ work, and therefore production at the company is affected as well.

The problem concerning the pilots most frequently identified by the drivers is theft. From their views, a general pattern could be discerned in the drivers’ experiences with the pilots and the possibility of theft: when a driver arrives at a customer’s shop, he must deliver the invoice. This usually occurs inside the shop. Once the offloading of the order starts, a driver must leave the pilots to tend to the process. In the driver’s absence there is always a possibility that something might go wrong, but it is physically impossible for a driver to be in two places at the same time. If the pilots have ‘naughty manners’, they ‘steal something’ from the truck. The driver will not see this happen because he is inside the shop with the customer. Sometimes a customer may delay the driver, giving the pilots the opportunity to remove goods from the truck, or a driver may be distracted while talking to a customer, making it possible for the pilots to remove the goods without being noticed. One of the drivers said they ‘cannot see’ goods disappear: a driver can stand by and watch, but somehow the goods just ‘disappear’. Another said that if a truck is parked outside a shop, there are always people
around who identify the truck as a delivery vehicle. He described the situation: 'Het julle nie iets daar nie? Nou as huile kyk, huile sien die drywer is nie daar nie. Ons hee nie geld nie, ons gee julle – nou huile steel die boks. Huile gee bom die boks, huile sit bom in die kusr. Aas jy terugkom, jy wees nie wat gebeur bet nie.' (‘Do you not have something there? We do not have money, we give you – now they steal the box. They give them the box, they put it in the car. When you come back, you do not know what happened’.) If a driver is accompanied by the same pilots they can be controlled and, it was said, ‘the pinching’ stops. In this regard a driver said: ‘As ons elke dag aanmekaar loop, aan mekaar ry, ons sal nie van mekaar steel nie, ons sal nie’ (‘If we walk together every day, drive together, we shall not steal from one another, we will not’.) The possibility was also mentioned that in some cases the customers are corrupt and collaborate with dishonest pilots. Together they seem to be able to manipulate the weight of the goods that are offloaded.

If a driver notices the theft there is little he can do except question the pilot and reprimand him. In such cases the pilot may pretend to listen and take notice, but behind the driver’s back, he says the driver is ‘mad’. Management may ask the driver about the pilot’s behaviour, but if he reports him to the manager, he (the driver) is in trouble, especially if the pilot is fired or arrested. The pilot will say that it is the driver who informed the police or the manager, and may try to get his own back on the driver, that is, he will ‘fight’ and say that the driver is ‘not good’. The drivers therefore are wary of the pilots and are unlikely to report any misdemeanour. As a rule they do not discuss the problems they experience with the pilots among themselves. One of them actually said that he did not know about incidents involving the pilots and other drivers, because the drivers do not talk about such matters and may be afraid to do so. When asked whether the problems involving the pilots could be solved, a driver said that this was possible, but in effect the problems are too great (‘te swaar’, ‘too heavy’). Another driver maintained that he thought that perhaps the matter was receiving attention at management level. He said: ‘Die ding sit miskien nog by die tafel. Hulle kan bom uitsorteer. Nie ver nie, hulle sal ons sê hoe ons gaan werk.’ (‘This thing possibly still sits at the table. They can sort it out. Not far, they will tell us how we are going to work.’) As regards the drivers’ responsibility, one of them said that where a loss is reported, they are told by the supervisor: ‘Now jy is die drywer, jy weet waar die goed gegaan het; die drywer, nee wragtig ek bet nigse nie’ (‘Now you are the driver, you know where the goods have gone; the driver [says], no, really I saw nothing’) and as a result, ‘by trek vir jou geld af vir die ding wat jy nie weet nie’ (‘he deducts money for the thing that you do not know’).

Information about the pilots that was provided by management differed substantially from that obtained from the drivers. It was said, for instance, that the drivers ‘do not look after their pilots’ and that they ‘do not check’ that goods are
not removed from the trucks. Similarly, other white employees believe that problems involving the pilots develop because some of the drivers are not strict enough with them. A white employee, who seemed to be cognisant of the drivers' problems with the pilots, said that he was 'coming up for the company': most of the drivers have a cellular telephone in their trucks which they can use to inform the company if the pilots give them trouble. In addition, management has introduced a small bonus system for the pilots to encourage them not to steal, which he maintained 'was working'. Many of the drivers are much older than the pilots, who are young and strong and 'give the drivers problems', but the blame devolves on the drivers, since they are responsible for the trucks and the people who accompany them. This idea seemed to be the general perception among the whites, but they had no ready explanation for the way in which the drivers should control the offloading of an order and at the same time attend to a customer's demands inside his shop. The answer to this problem appears to be that a driver should keep his truck locked and not allow the pilots to offload unless he is present. The problems experienced by the drivers are therefore generally believed by the office personnel to be the result of their own actions, even though they acknowledged that it would be better for the company to employ its own pilots and that the policy of employing pilots from elsewhere is to the company's financial advantage and has no benefit for the drivers.

As stated previously, an additional benefit to the company of employing the pilots on contract is that it is not responsible for them. If a pilot misbehaves, a trader for example can dismiss him from his loading platform. In line with this, a trader said that the present system 'works', and if 'they' (the traders) notice that a particular pilot is not doing what is required of him, they are in a position to say that he 'will not be kept there', implying that he will no longer work at the company. This would not be possible, however, if the pilots were employees of the company. With the present system, if a pilot's services are no longer wanted, the other company must remove and replace him, and how this is done is 'not the company's problem'. One of the white employees was asked whether the drivers are in a position to say that they do not want a particular pilot to accompany them, and in contrast with what a driver had mentioned, he answered that this was indeed possible and that attempts are made to ensure that a driver is accompanied by the same pilots for two consecutive days at least. This system, he said, has both advantages and disadvantages, but he agreed that it would be preferable for the drivers to be accompanied by the same pilots every day. This would have the advantage that, in line with their own views, the drivers would have people with them whom they know and trust, and not people who remove goods for which they must assume responsibility. If a pilot is dishonest, the driver would eventually find out and be able to do something about the matter.
With such an arrangement it would be feasible to make the drivers responsible for the pilots, but not with the present system. The informant added that if he were to make such a suggestion to whoever was prepared to listen, it would not be heeded since people are afraid that the company would get into financial difficulties again and face the possibility of closure. The present system therefore benefits dishonest pilots.

Some support for the drivers’ position was forthcoming. A white male employee feels that it is unfair that the drivers alone have to pay for shortages on the orders, and that the losses should be divided among three, so that the pilots, who surely must know whether goods have been removed from a truck, share the payment with the driver. He said that he has suggested this to management but was told that the pilots do not work for the company. Yet, he said, the company ‘pays’ the other company for the pilots, which led him to believe that the pilots not being held responsible for shortages has more to do with union activity than anything else. On the other hand, on occasion drivers who were held responsible for large losses did not complain, thereby indicating their guilt and that they had already shared the goods with the pilots who stole them. This informant also said that the drivers do not complain about the pilots because they are afraid to talk. He too acknowledged that it would be better for the company to employ its own pilots, but in the past when it had done so, the company nearly went bankrupt (‘tot niet gegaan’) as a result of demands for wage increases and strikes by the pilots. The pilots are more militant than the drivers and if the company employed the pilots who currently work for them, it would no longer be able to exist because of their frequent demands for more money, ‘go-slow strikes’, and insistence on, for example, taking tea-breaks whenever they want to, rather than being told by management when they can do so.

2.6 The drivers’ interaction with customers

The drivers experience their greatest degree of autonomy in their interaction with customers and the delivery of goods. Here they represent the company and are subject to its key objective, namely the production and delivery of quality goods in the pursuance of profit. In some cases an amenable relationship has been established between a driver and a customer over a period of time if the driver regularly delivers orders to the same customer. One of the older drivers stated that the customers he serves are fond of him, and when he is on leave they ask where he is. He said he is ‘satisfied with his customers’. However, all does not appear to be well in this crucial aspect of the company’s operations, and repeatedly drivers commented on the problems they experience with customers they serve. The problems are primarily linked to shortages on orders and
the attitudes and behaviour of certain customers whom the drivers can identify as regular troublemakers and are therefore difficult to deal with.

Although the drivers can usually identify difficult customers, they are not in a position to say ‘leave that one alone’, i.e. avoid delivering to a particular customer. The general perception among the drivers is that a customer ‘can tell you anything’, and arguments with a customer are not permitted, since reports by a customer are taken into account in the determination of a driver’s incentive bonus. Certain customers want their goods prepared in a specified way, which means that the loading process takes longer than usual because the preparation must be attended to before the order can be loaded. If such a customer wants his order early in the morning, inevitably problems arise because the driver can only leave after his truck has been loaded. The possibility of late delivery becomes a reality and a customer is justifiably angry or dissatisfied. Late deliveries are therefore not necessarily the driver’s fault, yet it is the driver who must deal with an angry customer. As one of them said, if a customer arranged to have his order delivered early, but the driver leaves the company late because of delays in the loading process, he is ‘under pressure’ to make his delivery as fast as possible. He gets into trouble and is ‘shouted at’ by the customer.

As regards his interaction with customers, a driver said that he ‘is not free’, meaning that he experiences various problems with the customers, and that support from the company was lacking, an idea confirmed by other drivers who said that they (the drivers) ‘work alone’ with the customers, or that a driver is ‘alone with customers’. Thus one of them said: ‘... ons het gebaklei met die storie’ (‘... we fought with the story’), meaning that they (the drivers) have argued about the consistent shortages on orders but to no avail. Another driver described the problems associated with shortages which are discovered when a driver delivers goods to a particular customer as follows: as required, the driver telephones the company to report the matter, but is told either that there were no shortages on the truck when he left that morning, or the customer must write down the extent of the shortages. The customer, in turn, becomes impatient, insisting that he does not have the time to wait for the problem to be solved, and becomes ‘cheeky’ or ‘rude’, particularly if he arranged to have his order delivered early in the morning. In such cases the driver knows that he will be held responsible for the shortages and is likely to have to pay for them. With reference to management’s attitude if a driver reports a problem, he said: ‘They talk about it ... and say, no, tell that customer to write it down, that shortage. Then that customer write it down, then at the end of the month they take the money.’ When this happened to him, the driver said he explained to the company that he had reported the matter at the time that it happened, that the customer wrote down the extent of the shortages, and that he, the driver, was ‘innocent’, but to
no avail and money was deducted from his wages.

Another driver said: ‘The customers are just fighting, we got to be small’, meaning that a driver is obliged to be humble in the presence of a customer. Similarly, another driver described his interaction with the customers in terms of fighting: either a customer accuses a driver of fighting with him or a customer fights with a driver. He said that he finds it very difficult working with such people since he realises that if a customer is rude or fights with him, ‘jy moet net luister en kyk hoe maak hy’ (‘you must just listen and see what he does’). Some situations involving ‘bad’ customers are reported to management, who do ask about the circumstances of the incident, but many customers have the reputation of being ‘difficult’ and if they do not get their own way threaten to take their business elsewhere. Thus management may be hesitant to take action. A customer may also refuse to pay the driver for an order, insisting that he has other matters to attend to. The driver has no choice but to be polite and merely do what is required of him, comforted by the fact that certain customers are ‘always difficult’ and that the other drivers have similar problems. Some drivers can cope better with difficult customers than others, one of whom described his advice to other drivers on how to cope with a customer who ‘shouts’ as ‘just keep quiet or wait outside’. He added that he tries to ‘encourage’ them by saying ‘once you are from a place and you come to work, you said I am going to work, so you got to respect the job. While you go out, you got to pay respect to the customers. What can you do? You like the job.’

A driver close to retirement said customers make mistakes. Some want to ‘eat you’ because they insist that their orders are underweight. Sometimes the order is taken back, reweighed and the original weight is then found to be correct. The customer was wrong and ‘took a chance’. He added that most of the drivers complain about the customers, but they should make sure that when they make a delivery, they stand by when the order is weighed. If they do not do so, the customer will cheat, that is, ‘die customer gaan jou kap — die gewig saam met bom vat’ (‘the customer will hit you — take the weight with him’). One of the drivers said that in situations such as this he draws the customer’s attention to the fact that the weights on the delivery notes are the same as the weights on the invoices. Although customers may admit that the weights on the different documents are the same or that they differ from the weight measured by their own scales, they are nevertheless known to insist that their own scales are correct and that they cannot be told by an outsider, ie the driver, that this is not the case. (Many customers still use old-fashioned scales where the margin for error is much greater than that of the electronic scales used by the company.)
2.7 Overtime

One of the most contentious issues identified during the course of the research is the recording of and payment for the drivers' overtime work. According to the Basic Conditions of Service Act of 1997, Section 10, an employer may not require an employee to work overtime except by agreement and in such cases he/she may not work more than three hours of overtime per day, to a maximum of ten hours of overtime per week, or 40 hours per month. Overtime must be paid at 1.5 times an employee's normal wage or else the employee may take paid time off work rather than receive remuneration. These legal stipulations require careful monitoring of employees' overtime, which for a large company may be a cumbersome task, particularly if overtime is recorded manually. To facilitate the matter many companies employ a 'clock-in'/ 'clock-out' system, whereby an employee inserts a card into a recording machine which automatically records the time when he/she arrives at and leaves work.

The company basically operates from 7:00 to 16:00. At present the law prescribes that an employee may not work longer than 45 hours per week, which all the employees are aware of, but the drivers generally do work longer than this and are therefore entitled to 'overtime pay'. If they work in excess of the permissible 40 hours of overtime per month, they are paid, but this is not shown on their paysheets, although it does not seem that all the drivers are aware of this. If a driver must spend a night away while on a delivery or because his truck has broken down, he is compensated financially. In all the interviews with the drivers, recording of and payment for overtime were identified as matters which cause much dissatisfaction and resentment, and from their discussions it was clear that they have considerable problems with the existing system because of its implications for their wages. Overtime is permitted for wage earners, but not for salaried personnel, and because the latter are predominantly white, the 'overtime problem' is primarily regarded as a 'black problem'.

As regards payment and recording of overtime extremely diverse ideas were forthcoming from all categories of research participants, from which only one conclusion is possible, namely that employees perceive and understand the matter of overtime differently, depending upon their perspectives. The views of the drivers reflected their position as recipients of overtime, while the views of the whites were those of 'awarders and monitors' of overtime benefits for the drivers. One of the drivers who described the system as 'not right', added hopefully that sometime in future 'it would get better'.

The company does not have a clock system, but depends upon an employee who monitors and notes down the time of arrival of the drivers in the mornings. Each driver must sign against the noted time of arrival. Times of depa-
ture in the afternoons are monitored differently: the drivers are obliged to re-
port to the employee who keeps a record of their times, which are taken into 
account when overtime benefits are calculated. If a driver returns after this par-
ticular employee has left work, which happens if a driver has to deliver goods far 
away, he reports to the security officer on duty who notes the time of arrival and 
reports it to the employee concerned the following day. Details on overtime 
hours and payment appear on the drivers' paysheets, ie the number of hours, 
rates and payment. A driver is in a position to check whether the details are 
correct and, if not, he can query the matter with the employee responsible. The 
matter is investigated and the calculations are explained to the driver. If he re-
mains dissatisfied, he is entitled to ask for further explanations. Corrections are 
made to the driver's wages the following month. The times that a truck departs 
and returns to the company are also recorded, and although they do not overlap 
with the drivers' hours of work, these times are used as means of control where 
there is doubt about the time that a driver returned from his deliveries on a 
particular day. The drivers, however, insist that in the recording of overtime 
mistakes are made 'all the time' because the registering employee 'forgets', pos-
sibly because he is busy when a driver reports to him, or because he makes a 
mistake when calculating the number of overtime hours to a driver's credit. This 
person, it was also said, sometimes does not believe a driver when he informs 
him of his times, because on occasion when a driver returned late the relevant 
details were not reflected on his paysheet.

A means of coping with the situation would be for a driver to keep his own 
records so that the accuracy of the information can be checked against the 
officially recorded time of return of the truck he was driving. The drivers were 
asked as much, but with a few exceptions they do not keep records of their 
times. One of the few who do keep records of the time they spend with a 
customer and when they return to the company said that the drivers do not 
record their times because it 'is too much trouble'. He also alluded to the possi-
bility that the pilots influence the drivers to manipulate their times.

The problems associated with the overtime issue produced the perception 
among the drivers that overtime is not recognised, or, in the words of an elderly 
driver with many years of service, 'they do not give overtime', while if it is 
recognised, there are problems with the way in which it is paid out. The impact 
of the 'overtime problem' on the drivers' personal circumstances meant a diver-
sity in their views, reflecting individual experiences with the system. Three key 
problematic issues were identified:
recording clock-out times in the afternoons
recognition, monitoring and calculation of overtime and its payment, and
indication of overtime payments on paysheets.

2.7.1 Recording of clock-out times

In contrast with recording clock-in times in the mornings, recording the times of going home in the afternoon is a contentious matter. Although their views differed, the general idea forthcoming from the drivers was that recording of clock-out times, specifically that they do not sign any document, is problematic. In his discussion of overtime, a newly appointed driver said that he had not yet received a clock ticket, as had been the case at the company where he was previously employed, thereby indicating that he expected to be given one, but it did not appear to him that people actually clock out. They just walk out 'with the word', ie they merely report verbally when they leave. Another driver commented on the matter as follows: 'He [the responsible employee] does not check, he just checks you in the morning when you come; what time you come. He writes 7 o'clock, you come, you sign. You come 12 o'clock, he writes, you sign.' When a driver goes home at about 16:00, he said, 'No, they don't check you. When you go home in the afternoon you don't clock out, you just clock in the morning. You sign on the book. [In] the afternoon the book is not there where you sign, and tomorrow there is nobody even asking you what time did you "jaila (stop work at the end of the day) yesterday. Nobody can ask you. Tomorrow they need you on the job, not less.' Sometimes his deliveries take him as far as Thabazimbi or Klerksdorp and as a result he may return as late as 21:00 or 22:00, but if required to be at work at 5:00 in the morning he would be there. A third driver explained his view as follows: '[W]e sign in the morning ... later in the afternoon somebody who knows you, can see you when you go; he can see you again and then you know, and late in the afternoon he can see that you are off; [but] he would explain to you that he can't check all of us', and 'After that he will knock off ... and he [the driver] must come and speak to the man who's in charge, somebody whose office is that side ...' Thus in the absence of the recording employee, a driver must report to someone else, usually a security officer, and hope that the information will be conveyed to whoever calculates the drivers' overtime payments.

Only one driver commented that the situation is not as problematic as has been suggested from these views. Asked how the system of notifying the time of leaving by word of mouth or by informing someone else after the responsible official has left works, he said 'To me I don't see any problem. Sometimes he forgets, but to me if I had a problem, I explain to him you must fix that
problem.’ In reply to the question whether the person concerned listens, he said: ‘He listens, if I explain there is no problem.’ Although these were the only favourable comments about the overtime system, this information confirms the perception of the other drivers that there is indeed a problem regarding the recording of overtime. It also indicates that signing a form on leaving, even though this is company policy, is not apparently enforced with the required regularity, and that providing information by word of mouth could mean that people forget or inadvertently make mistakes.

2.7.2 Recognition, monitoring and calculation of overtime and its payment

At the time of the interviews, four drivers took turns to work from 5:00 to 6:00 from Monday to Friday, i.e. before their normal hours start at 7:00, to tend to the trucks before the other drivers arrive on duty, but one of them said that ‘when you come to the salary, the salary does not say so’, implying that they were not compensated for the additional hours, even though they had been told that the extra time, which amounted to ‘something like 30 hours’ per month, would be recorded as overtime. He added that they had queried the matter for the previous two months, but were told that they had received overtime payment, and that they ‘could call the union’ if they were dissatisfied. The driver who provided the details said he tried to impress on ‘them’ (the company representatives) that he works steadily, is on time every morning, does not give the company problems, does his job on time, yet he is not being paid adequately for overtime work. Besides not knowing what the hourly rate for overtime payment is, he was also concerned because he did not know when the company’s ‘month end’ is. Employees usually know that a company ‘closes its books’ for instance, on the 20th of the month and that they will receive their wages around the 25th, but here ‘no one knows’. One month it may be on the 15th and the next month on the 13th, which makes it even more difficult to understand how payment for overtime is calculated. A driver said that they must ‘just work and be satisfied’ and if they reveal their dissatisfaction, they are told that they ‘talk too much’. When asked whether he had consulted the union about the matter, he said that he had, but hoped instead to resolve the matter with the employee responsible for the overtime system. Another driver starts work at 4:30 am because he drives the vehicle that transports drivers to work. He arrives at work at 6:00, but he said he only gets paid for one hour of overtime even though in his view, he starts work much earlier. He said that the matter was in the hands of the shop stewards and had recently been discussed at a meeting.

A number of drivers remain at the company in the afternoons, that is, after
returning from their deliveries, because they are dependent on company transport to get home. Often they must wait for a truck to return before their transport leaves, which means that they spend time at the company after their working day is over. This time is not registered as overtime, although they receive an allowance for the period they wait. Payment of the allowance is cheaper than appointing additional workers who will basically sit around and do nothing during the day, since the volume of work generated by the company does not justify the appointment of additional full-time employees. The employees referred to above are then faced with the problem of having to be dropped off somewhere at night, but it was said that such employees do not constitute ‘a problem’ for the company and that their ‘hours’ are recorded and reflected on their paysheets.

2.7.3 Indication of overtime payments on paysheets

The white employee responsible for processing their paysheets maintained that the drivers understand the entries on them, but this was not borne out by the information they provided and there was a great deal of dissatisfaction about information regarding payment for overtime work which appears on the paysheets. A driver was asked whether the number of hours and the rate of overtime appear on the paysheets, to which he replied that he did not know. He said ‘they’, meaning the company, just write ‘by hand’ at ‘the top’ of the paysheet, so that the drivers do not understand how much they earn per hour for overtime work, nor can they check what they earn as overtime payment because the extent of the overtime is not specified either. From what was said, it seems that no differentiation is made between ordinary wages and overtime and that only a single sum is indicated on the paysheet. Tax deductions are indicated, but an informant said that ‘they don’t give you good information, how much they pay you. You can’t check anything. And when you go and ask, they say you talk too much.’ Also with regard to indications of overtime payment on his paysheet, another driver said that although ‘they’, the company, say that ‘they pay overtime’, he ‘does not see this’. Later he said that overtime payment is shown but that ‘income tax takes everything’. Possibly his earlier denial of any indication of overtime payment was because what remained after taxation was hardly worth mentioning. A driver who said that sometimes he returns home at 21:00, for which he does receive overtime payment, added ‘but what I will say, it’s nothing I can show, because I did not know even that overtime money. I can see its 56 hours for overtime you see, but how much for one hour they pay, I never know. They just write by the hands on top of the paysheet and that doesn’t mean they have write 40 hours and then that 40 hours they write R227 or R115. We can’t understand by one hour how much it means.’ Thus because of the lack of ad-
equate information and the way in which details appear on the paysheet, it is impossible for him to check the accuracy of his wages. The exact number of hours cannot be checked either, because there is no clock-in/clock-out system. The driver was asked whether he had ever queried the matter, to which he replied that he has tried, but has not received an answer. In fact he indicated a desire to bring his paysheet to the interview session so that it could be checked and the entries explained. Another driver said that sometimes the paysheets do not have the company name on them, which made him question where the paysheets came from. His wages also vary from month to month and, like other drivers, he did not know why, other than speculate that the variation could be linked to his delivery shifts. When he enquired about the matter, he was told that ‘it could be the overtime’.

The drivers’ complaints that for some months the overtime payments were handwritten on their paysheets and that there was no indication that they had been calculated by computer were correct. This meant that in the calculation of their wages human error was a possibility. This problem arose when a new wage system was introduced, but without the information being conveyed to the drivers, thus causing their confusion. They were clearly concerned about not having been informed about the changes. The matter was discussed at a drivers’ meeting and they were waiting for feedback from management.

In view of the these complaints, white employees who were perceived to be knowledgeable about the matter were asked for their opinions on the overtime system. The drivers’ claims that they do not ‘sign out’ in the afternoons were interpreted by a manager as ‘talking nonsense’ because when they return from their deliveries they must sign a form and they do so with the same person with whom they ‘sign in’ in the mornings. Similarly, a white employee who is closely involved with the drivers and their responsibilities maintained that control exercised over their times of arrival and departure is adequate, since security also notes the time of a driver’s return, which serves as a type of control of the times noted by the responsible employee. He said that it is possible that there may be about five minutes’ difference between the two records, but never an hour’s difference. The employee responsible for recording the overtime is employed from 5:00 to 13:00 and from 15:00 to 19:00 to ensure that he is available until all the trucks have returned to the company. It was also said that whatever adjustments are made to the hourly wages, ie to the overtime payment, would be irrelevant because the drivers ‘just want to see them’, that is, that they have indeed been paid for overtime work. From the foregoing it is clear that from the perspective of management the system of recording overtime work is both adequate and operationally effective.
2.7.4 Some explanatory comments concerning overtime

That there is a need for controlling registration of overtime is evident. This is apparent from, amongst other matters, the concerns of a white male that drivers are known to see to their own affairs in order to increase their overtime hours, or to take time off if they feel that they will return too early. He commented on ‘much controversy’ about the time trucks return, and finds it ‘beyond comprehension’ that a driver who leaves at 7:00 only returns at 21:00. While management is aware that a truck which has several deliveries to make could be late, that a driver may have to travel far, or that he only left the premises late as a result of problems with the loading process, in the main the informant believed that some drivers were not doing what was required of them. There are no second trips for drivers, as there are at many other companies where trucks do two trips per day.

The employee who controls the drivers’ overtime was asked to explain the system. He described it as follows: he introduced the present system whereby first of all an employee’s time of arrival in the morning is noted in a book, since the company’s auditors require a detailed indication of the number of hours worked by each employee. In addition, a law determines that for half an hour before and after work an individual is covered by company insurance. Thus, a method of recording times is essential, particularly in the absence of a clock-in system. The drivers’ times of arrival are entered in a timebook, which they confirm by signing against the details. In the afternoons when a driver goes home, he, the informant, completes a form when the driver brings him ‘his papers’. At that stage the driver may still be ‘in the yard’ and may already have been back for two hours for which he is given the benefit of overtime. The informant said that there are two or three specific drivers who complain about their overtime or who insist on overtime payment without having earned it. He called them ‘chancers’ (‘kansvatters’), but he said, he would not allow the overtime they demanded, because it is not possible to credit a driver for time spent idle. Drivers who actually work from 6:00 to 16:00 are awarded overtime, but those who remain longer because they wait for free company transport, which whites do not have, are not entitled to overtime benefits. If a driver works for 45 minutes ‘overtime’, he is credited with an hour of overtime; if a driver arrives at 6:00 in the morning and actually does some form of physical work until 7:00, he also earns one hour of overtime, but not if he arrives at 6:00, does nothing until 7:00, leaves for home at 18:00, and then insists that he has three hours of overtime to his credit. He only has two hours because the hour from 6:00 to 7:00 in the morning is not credited because during that time he does not work and may either sleep in his truck or eat his breakfast. Some drivers arrive early because
they receive free company transport, and since other employees who make use of the transport must be at work by 6:00, it is their (the drivers) 'misfortune' that they are at work that early – they are not entitled to overtime payment. If a driver arrives late, for instance at 7:20, no time is deducted from his overtime credit – in this case 20 minutes – or if a driver returns at 16:30, the 20 minutes that he was late in the morning are not deducted from the overtime that he earns in the afternoon. Such information, the informant insisted, the drivers who complain do not mention during the interviews. In addition, he said, if they so wished, the drivers concerned could call the union representative or shop stewards, one of whom had also 'taken chances' by arriving at 5:00 one morning, helped a white employee with one or two invoices, and then spent the rest of the morning doing nothing. Yet he insisted that he had accumulated 80 overtime working hours during that month. If the shop steward had assisted other drivers by moving trucks that morning, or filling them with diesel, he would have been credited with two full hours of overtime. By applying stricter rules regarding recording and payment of overtime, the informant said that he has reduced the company's overtime account substantially. The records, he said, are available to anyone who queries the details. He also believes that in the past the drivers had been 'spoilt', but now they would no longer be paid in excess of what they were actually entitled to. When asked whether the drivers understood his argument, he said they did not. To those who complain, he said, he shows his book and tells them that if they arrive at 6:00, fill a truck with diesel or do something constructive, they will be paid, but they regularly say that is 'not their work'. This, he stated, is how the drivers reason, and there is no point in pursuing the argument with them. He confirmed that a proper clock system would be better, but again an employee who arrives early with company transport, clocks in at 6:00 without being instructed to do so and only starts to work at 7:00, would not have worked overtime. Although it would have advantages over the present system, an automatic clock-in system would also have to be monitored closely.

When asked whether overtime payment for the drivers was a means of motivating them to work harder or more effectively, or to put greater effort into their work, a white employee partially agreed, but also disagreed. He argued that if a white person and a black person of the age of twenty do the same work and earn the same salary, the black person would be paid if he works overtime, while the white person's claim for overtime would be queried. This, he said, is incorrect ('verkeerd'), and he referred to his own situation to illustrate his view. At times he is unable to complete his work during the week and then works over weekends. For this he receives no overtime payment. Therefore, although payment for overtime can be regarded as a means of motivating employees and as
an incentive to increase their productivity, it is also a control mechanism and a means of exercising discipline, which, he said, is the ‘most important’.

In contrast with this person’s comments, not all the white employees expressed dissatisfaction about not being entitled to overtime payment. One of the traders said that they sometimes work until 18:00, but that this does not matter since ‘the one hand washes the other’. Some days they finish their work early and can go home, while on other days they may be required to work until 20:00. They do not complain and ‘take it as it is’ (‘dit is boe ons dit vat’). (Recognition for additional work is discussed in section 4.)

A black female office employee, who repeatedly commented on her poor salary, was asked whether she did any extra work for additional remuneration. She answered that she did not, nor, unlike the drivers, is she entitled to overtime payment. When asked how she would react if she were asked to work overtime, she said ‘There is no overtime. They tell you straight, you understand, we need you. There is no overtime. So nobody ever asks it, because they tell you, no overtime. It is only for the drivers, you know ... they get, I don’t know how they got that. But with me, I don’t get.’ When asked whether she would be paid if she were to work over weekends, she replied ‘I don’t know, because they never ask me, but I doubt it if they will ever ask me.’ Yet during a discussion, a white employee said that on occasion he has asked her to help him with some additional task for which she was paid accordingly.

2.8 Training and job specification

The company does not provide any formal on-the-job training for employees, although a driver who was transferred from another branch mentioned that he had received ‘a certificate’ after he had undergone in-service training at that branch. This standard procedure for all employees, which he called ‘job-guarantee’, consisted of a two-day training course, the aims of which were to introduce employees to the nature of the business, aspects of its activities, acceptable ways of talking, particularly to customers, personal cleanliness, and warnings against theft and discussing political matters with customers.

Part of the explanation for the absence of formal training programmes concerns the very low personnel turnover at the company. It would seem that where training is provided, it depends on the experience of the person involved. In most cases it is merely a matter of general orientation, with the newcomer having to become accustomed to a new working environment, participation in understudy assignments which focus on acquisition of appropriate skills to fulfil his/her task, and acquisition of a broader perspective of the section of the company where the person will operate. A newcomer is taken through the com-
pany, shown the set-up, informed of his/her tasks and told how to go about them by the persons with whom he/she will work. On relatively rare occasions the skills required by the newcomer are specialised and he/she must be trained properly, usually the responsibility of the newcomer's direct superior. One such occasion had recently occurred with the appointment of a black trader. His supervisor instructed him on what to do and showed him where he could expect problems to develop if he failed to attend to particular issues. As part of his training, a truck was loaded incorrectly and had to be unloaded, with the newcomer being shown how to deal with the situation. Since then he has been working alone, and his supervisor and the manager are both satisfied with his work. A member of the office staff said that he had been told by the manager what his specific tasks would be, which were also set out in a letter of appointment, although subsequently new responsibilities had been added to the initial list.

The drivers who were interviewed all have experience that they acquired elsewhere and all have an appropriate driver's licence (1.4 above). For them, training is primarily a matter of accompanying another driver to learn the routes, find out how to approach and deal with customers, read the invoices, and deal with the responsibility of overseeing the truck and its load. One of the drivers described the training purpose as 'we follow the other drivers', and another said that the transport manager had shown him 'about the driving, the trucks, the people and the products' that he would have to deliver. As a result, he has become a discerning buyer of the type of product which the company delivers, since his experience has taught him what to look for in quality goods. He passed this information to his wife, so that she too knows what to look for when shopping. It was also stated that because the drivers are responsible for the deliveries, they must learn everything there is to know about the products which the company markets.

A driver who was asked whether he was shown what to do when he joined the company said that he had only been told that he must 'do something' with the products supplied by the company and that he had to deliver them to customers. He was asked whether the information constituted adequate input to get him started, to which he replied that 'because I am looking for the job and I am hungry by that time you see, I have told myself, the others, I will learn it while I am still working'.

In response to the question of whether they had received some form of training to deal with emergencies such as hijacking, the drivers commented on the installation of the tracking device in the trucks, and said they had been instructed on how to activate it.
2.9 The satellite tracking device

In the dangerous environment of Gauteng, where hijacking of vehicles is a frequent occurrence, vehicle protection is extremely important to the company, particularly in view of the total cost of a fully loaded truck. In addition to the value of the truck, its load may be worth approximately R80 000. Satellite-tracking devices were recently installed in the trucks, although this is the second time such a system has been introduced. (The first time the company providing the service went out of business and for three months the trucks were without this type of security. During this time, a truck was hijacked. The truck was found but without its load.) Each truck is fitted with a device which makes it possible to monitor its movements on a computer screen throughout the company's delivery area in Gauteng. The device includes a 'panic button' which the driver can activate in an emergency to alert the company and call the security company which provides the service. At the time of the research most of the trucks were also fitted with a cellular telephone for the driver's use in an emergency. Such telephones are to become standard fittings in the trucks.

The satellite tracking device was not introduced for security only. In attempts to increase their overtime, drivers were known to follow circuitous routes or to deviate from planned routes to attend to their own business. The satellite tracking device makes it possible to monitor the exact route followed by a driver, ie street and town, the time he remains stationary at one place, and the time taken to drive between different points (the latter being more important in long-distance routes), while it also makes it possible to inform a customer who enquires more or less when he can expect a driver to deliver his order. If a driver is seen to spend too much time at one place, the company can contact him by telephone. With this system, management can also determine how long it should take a driver to return to the company once he has delivered his last load. In the past a driver sometimes took three to four hours to return to increase his overtime when the trip should not have taken longer than half an hour. The tracking device is therefore also regarded as a means of controlling the drivers' movements. The new system is said to be more sophisticated than the previous one, and a driver can be given a printout from the system of his precise movements. The system was very expensive to install but it is believed that the more effective delivery process which it has ensured, as well as savings on overtime payments, have made it cost effective. The initiative to reintroduce the system was said to be the manager's, although another employee with whom the system was discussed said of his own accord that the initiative was his as part of the money-saving efforts that he introduced for the company.

In spite of the positive aspects of the system, including access to a panic
button, senior members of the company’s management acknowledged that it does not safeguard the drivers. If armed hijackers see a driver press the panic button, his chances of being attacked are good, and there is in effect no real protection for a driver, even if he is able to activate the emergency system and alert both the company and the security company. The system was therefore introduced primarily to protect the company’s assets, that is, the truck and its load of approximately 6 tons of goods, and not as a security measure for the drivers. Although the loads are insured, each time a claim is submitted for a stolen load, the insurance premiums are increased. The insurance company will not honour a claim of R70 000 or R80 000.

When the satellite system was reintroduced, the older drivers reacted most favourably because they are keen to get home to their families in the evenings. Drivers who make use of company transport must wait until all the drivers have returned from their deliveries before they can depart. It has happened that drivers who finished early at around 17:00 or 18:00 have had to wait until 20:00 or 21:00 for one driver who took his time to return. This problem has now largely been solved, since the drivers know they can no longer ‘take any chances’. The drivers also emphasised the significance of the system as a security measure. With few exceptions they regard it as a ‘good plan’ because in the past a driver had to make his ‘own plan’ in an emergency. One driver described the introduction of the tracking device as ‘luck’ on the part of the drivers, that they have been shown what to do in event of a hijacking, and that now the drivers are ‘happy’ since they feel safer with the ‘satellite’ in their trucks. Some comments were less favourable. A driver said he did not know how the device works and that the company still had to explain this to him. In the event of trouble the emergency button must be pressed, but if the attackers see a driver doing so, they will ‘hit’ him. Clearly this is dangerous, so a driver must only press the button out of sight of the attackers. This idea was repeated by another driver, who said that the drivers have been instructed to press the panic button when they ‘see people behind’ them, but the danger still exists because hijackers are known to ‘tell people straight’ only to move when instructed to do so, otherwise they will be shot. Hijackers are usually armed, and following their instructions means a chance of survival. The hijackers take their victims and ‘throw them away’, meaning they dump them in some out-of-the-way place where there is no help or telephone, before driving away with the truck. If the driver does eventually find help and contacts the company or the police, half a day may have passed, and the truck and its load may have disappeared. In such cases it was said that the driver is lucky to be alive. Yet research participants also commented on the company’s reactions in such a situation and the driver would be asked why he did not press the panic button or telephone to report the danger. Such
questions would be asked without the circumstances of the hijacking being taking into account. A driver would explain to his employees, and they would probably understand, but, it was said, they would never again trust the driver because they would believe that he had been involved in the hijacking.

Another driver described the system as ‘a good plan but also not a good plan’. He did not think that a driver would find the time to activate the panic button if hijacked, since its position in the truck must first be ‘found’. Moreover, the security company which would send a rescue team is likely to be so far away that by the time the driver received help it would be too late.

2.10 Theft

Theft of supplies as well as of loaded trucks used to constitute a big problem, but according to employees it has decreased. Recently, however, before the installation of the satellite-tracking device one of the trucks had been hijacked (2.9 above). (Comments from white employees about the incident were that it was generally believed to have been an ‘inside job’ involving the driver, but this could not be proved.) On one occasion a driver said that he noticed in his mirror that he was being followed by a car and he escaped by moving across three lanes of traffic on the freeway. The occupants of the car clearly had malevolent intentions, since they followed him until he managed to get away from them when he arrived at the company. Their behaviour was deliberate, and they wanted to see where he parked the truck so that they could hijack it. When asked whether the name of the company on the truck was not a deterrent, he said, no, since the criminals want the truck and its load regardless of the name on the outside. This incident occurred before the satellite-tracking device was installed in the trucks and the driver was left to his own resources to ensure his own safety and that of the truck.

Employees all acknowledged that theft of goods does occur at the company, but they had different ideas about its extent, and some believe that it can never be totally eradicated. There are various ways in which theft apparently occurs. Products are loaded onto a truck in boxes weighing approximately 15 kg. The permitted discrepancy of approximately 10–15 kg above or below the calculated weight of a loaded truck makes it possible for someone to load a box of goods weighing approximately 15 kg onto the truck and thus remove it from the company without it being noticed. Although the traders and the drivers are required to watch the loading of the trucks, it is conceivable that an extra box can be loaded without them noticing if, for instance, they are called inside or turn their backs to attend to something else. In such instances they are supposed to close the door of the truck but, it was said, it is ‘easy to forget’. One of the traders
insisted that theft no longer occurs on his platform, although he acknowledged that 'one has only two eyes, but there are twenty others'. When theft occurs in this way, the trader is responsible since it represents inadequate supervision on his part. It is unlikely that someone who is aware of theft will report it openly, because people do not 'talk very easily', mostly out of fear of reaction from the one who is reported. If theft is reported, the whistleblower usually does so privately. A further incentive not to blow the whistle is the intense dislike of having to unload and reload a fully loaded truck. A frequently reported form of theft is removal of goods from a truck once it has left the company premises, resulting in shortages on orders.

2.11 Shortages and some implications

A frequently heard problem from all categories of employees was the large number of 'shortages' on customers' orders. As with many other issues, there were divergent ideas about the causes of and solutions to the problem, depending on the category of employee from whom the information was received. The extent of the problem is great and, it would seem, almost a daily occurrence.

There are different ways in which shortages become apparent. At a delivery point the goods which are offloaded are weighed, and it is common for differences to occur in the weights of the products registered at the company and the weights determined by a customer. The shortage is relayed to the company telephonically, where a decision may be made to credit the customer's account if the shortage is not excessive, but first the customer is requested to reweigh the goods, since it is company policy that goods should be weighed twice. If he does not oblige, the goods are returned. Alternatively, if in the view of the company the shortage is excessive, the goods are returned to the company for reweighing. It was pointed out, however, that many customers 'take chances'. For instance, it is known for a customer located at some distance from the company to report a shortage of for example, 2 kg on an order of 200 kg. It does not make financial sense for the company to have these goods returned, since this has implications for labour and transport costs. In such cases the customer obtains the benefit of the difference and a credit note is issued. Thus it is believed that some customers located far from the company falsely report shortages to receive a credit note on an order.

When shortages cannot be accounted for and theft is surmised, the driver of the truck is held responsible, and payment for the shortages is deducted from his earnings at the end of the month. Because the drivers are required to be present when their trucks are loaded (2.1 above), in management's view they know what is loaded onto their trucks, and should therefore also know what is
offloaded. Their responsibility arises because when they leave on a round of deliveries, they sign their responsibility for the goods, which means that they are obliged to deliver them correctly. Theft is investigated, although the drivers usually deny responsibility or suggest that the pilots who accompanied them are responsible. They also argue that it is impossible for them to attend to a customer and to watch the offloading process at the same time. In a counter-argument the company insists that the drivers should always keep their trucks locked so that it is impossible for anyone to remove anything. The drivers believe that the responsibility for the shortages should be shared by the pilots who offload the goods, that is, that they too should be penalised for shortages which are seemingly the result of theft. That this system is unfair and constitutes one of the main problems they experience with their work was heard from all the drivers, including those who have been in the employ of the company for a long time, and are loyal and conscientious workers.

Responsibility for the shortages is related to the incentive system whereby a driver is given a bonus at the end of the month for satisfactory work. The driver of a very large truck is responsible for goods valued at approximately one million rand over the period of a month. The shortages for which a driver is held responsible are determined in relation to the total volume of goods which he delivers in the period of a month. The costs of the shortages are deducted from his incentive bonus. According to a manager, the percentage of shortages is very low in relation to the total value of goods that a driver delivers, particularly if the large volume of goods that a driver is responsible for over the period of a month is taken into account. Yet, because the system directly influences their wages at the end of the month, the drivers regard it with resentment and anger. From discussion with white employees it was apparent that some of them acknowledge that the system has several inherent shortcomings, but from them too came the view that since the incentive bonus system was introduced, the extent of the shortages has dropped considerably. The comment was also made that shortages increase when the drivers are short of money.

2.12 Change

Change is an inherent part of any organisation, either as a result of internal factors or of influences originating outside the company. In view of the significant sociopolitical changes in South Africa, an attempt was made to determine their impact on the company and its employees as far as was possible. This was seen together with evolutionary changes of the recent past as described by employees, as well as changes which they believe, are adaptations that the company should make to increase its business and ensure its survival. Change was identi-
fied either in concrete terms, i.e., change which is or was discernible, or cognitively, that is, in terms of perceptions of present matters in relation to the past.

Using the elections of 1994 as a marker for some aspects of change in the company was easy. Everyone was aware that this date constituted a watershed in the country's political history; consequently it was feasible to ask them to describe the changes, if any, that had occurred in the company since this date. Responses, given mainly in political terms, varied from no change to substantial changes, depending on the way in which the person concerned perceived them or on his or her personal experience of change. Indications of change having occurred came primarily from white employees. The movement of the company from its previous premises also constituted a marker for change, particularly among older employees and those with long service histories. For them, change represented, amongst other matters, a contrast between current circumstances and those of their past experiences. The meaning of 'change' seemed to evade some of the drivers since they found it difficult either to identify changes, or to suggest future change which would facilitate the work process. Among the drivers too was heard that no changes had occurred, yet later in the interviews it became apparent that they were cognisant of change. Their original denial of change appeared to relate to changes they had expected in the company, mainly following the 1994 elections and the subsequent change in the government. It is also possible that change which had occurred took place in an orderly way and was not consciously identified as change. Although there were some references to factors that caused change, information provided by research participants primarily concerned the consequences of the process of change.

2.12.1 Current situations which constitute change from the past

A white male informant who has been with the company for three years pointed out that as far as the company's personnel are concerned there have been considerable changes. Persons who had been regarded as troublemakers were no longer with the company, and those who remain are people with whom one can discuss matters pertaining to the business. These apparently far-reaching changes relate to general changes in the company initiated by head office in attempts to get the company back on its feet after a period of business decline, and had nothing to do with political changes in the country. He also said that there have been considerable changes in the 'mode of communication' of some white employees, that is, persons who had habitually used foul language, and who, after he, the informant, had spoken to them, changed their way of talking to others.
One of the traders, who has been with the company for twenty years, said that when he was first appointed, about forty black people besides the drivers were employed by the company. Then (in terms of labour legislation) the compilation of a job description for each employee was required. When business was quiet, it was impossible to keep all the workers who were responsible for loading the trucks busy. Consequently many of the workers sat around idle, and when called to assist elsewhere, said that, in line with their job description, what they were called to do was 'not their job'. Problems developed between the company and the unions, and the workers were eventually retrenched. This was the origin of the procedure of contracting pilots from outside.

A black informant said that change has occurred but not equally for everyone. Some had been 'lucky' and everything had changed for them, but there are others for whom things have remained the same. When asked to be more specific, she said that this applied not only to the work situation but everywhere. She could not be more specific about the changes which had occurred in the work situation, but like the drivers, she maintained that blacks are still being discriminated against, for instance by being paid lower salaries than whites for the same work.

2.12.2 Change since 1994

One of the traders said that changes which have occurred since 1994 include the fact that a driver cannot be fired, that the drivers now belong to a medical aid scheme (which is incorrect), and 'all the other things' to which the 'people in Pretoria say they must belong'. He said that the drivers were being treated as always, that his relationships with them are good, and that he does not go around 'beating' people. He also mentioned the new black colleague that he and his co-traders have acquired, and that they must all 'help' him, implying provide assistance when required to do so. Change regarding the employment of blacks is inevitable and one cannot 'walk backwards'. People at the company had expected problems after the elections in 1994 and he referred to persons, presumably black, who had, as it were, 'worked themselves out of the company' by trying to insist that they had 'become the boss'. Also as regards changes in the attitudes of black employees, another trader said that since the new government had come to power, the black employees are no longer as 'obedient' as before, and no longer listen when they are spoken to.

A senior white male believes that the influence of the country's political changes on the company is apparent from the way in which the company now deals with its black employees, although he doubted whether strict separation between members of different racial groups was ever one of its features. He
said he was not aware of problems arising from attitudinal changes towards members of other racial groups which had constituted drastic changes elsewhere in the country since the elections in 1994.

Another senior male said that in the three years since the company moved to its new premises there have been considerable changes. First, relationships between black and white employees have improved considerably, and he did not think that there are still forms of discrimination on the basis of, for instance, salaries paid to whites and blacks for the same work. Second, in the past decision making was the responsibility of management, ie the drivers were not involved in decision making. This has changed, and meetings are regularly held at which the drivers are consulted about various matters. Third, incentive bonus schemes were introduced for the drivers which are said to 'work', and are accepted by employees as innovations previously unavailable to them. As regards politico-economic changes since 1994, the informant said that he did not think that there had been any since no one in the company has been negatively influenced by the external changes. Instead, blacks have been appointed to the same postgrades as whites (although there had only been one such appointment) which constitutes a change, otherwise matters have continued as before. He thought that in future one or two blacks should be appointed to office positions and he added that he did not know why this has not already occurred. He believes that the presence of one or two black people would serve as motivators to white employees who are not as productive as they should be. If they noticed a black person who is able to do their work, they would be motivated to be 'better than them', ie the blacks, and would therefore have a goal towards which to strive.

One of the drivers has experienced 'quite a lot' of changes since 1994, for example the introduction of the provident fund for drivers. In addition, as 'a responsible person', he has experienced many new things, although he was not specific about what he meant. He also feels positive about most of the changes which have occurred in spite of a lack of a solution to the 'main problem', namely that some employees (whites) 'resist change', mostly older people, because younger ones are more inclined to accept change. The only change subsequent to the political changes of 1994 identified by another driver is that black employees now earn more. Although an elderly driver said that much had changed, he could not describe the nature of the change because, he said, he does not often go to the offices of the white employees. By this he seemed to suggest that if there had been any changes, they would have been evident among the whites.

In the view of a white male, the 1994 elections had had a combined politico-economic influence on the company. Rather than the change in government
that followed the elections, it was the country's poor economic performance of the recent past which impacted directly on the business, although the change in government negatively influences the economy, which in turn, influences the business. He found it difficult to contemplate what the future holds, but a deciding influence on the country's future, he said, is the importance that blacks ascribe to large numbers of descendants. Large families are common among them, even though people cannot afford to have many children or fail to consider how they would pay for their children's education, perhaps even at tertiary level. Blacks do not plan ahead, he said, and the majority live from day to day. In contemporary society the future must be planned for, and people should not just live from day to day since this undermines financial wellbeing. With this must be associated the high demand for employment, i.e., the high level of unemployment in the country. It is not feasible for someone without adequate qualifications and experience merely 'to walk into a position' because of the colour of his/her skin.

2.12.3 Indications that no change has occurred

Some research participants were of the opinion that no change has occurred. One driver said that nothing has changed in the company. He has not found anything 'wrong' with either blacks or whites, implying that as always his relationships with both are good, and matters have remained the same. Later, however, he said that as a result of the political changes people of different racial groups no longer earn different salaries, and each person who knows and does his work properly is paid accordingly. A driver, who has been with the company since 1992, said that there have been no changes since 1994, although his ideas suggested that in the past it was more difficult to bring a problem to the attention of company management than it is at present. A white female also said that there have been no changes in the company since the elections, and thus the political changes in the country have had no impact on the company. Similarly, a senior driver said that nothing has changed since 1994, and with reference to white employees, said that they 'still [they] think the difference between people', meaning that people were functioning on the basis of perceived racial differences. Such attitudes were still apparent to him from the way in which people behave and nothing was apparently being done to prevent such behaviour, although it was also mentioned that some people in management positions were 'trying to change', and from time to time insist that all the employees belong to a single family or a single body, have one objective, and that people should not discriminate against others.

A driver commented that South Africa has not become 'the utopia' that had been expected before the elections, and that people are 'suffering in utopia'.
People's minds, he said, are not the same and when people do wrong this must be pointed out to them, as well as what should be done to set matters right. What he appeared to have in mind was that until people start behaving properly, South Africa would not turn into 'utopia' and people should be told what constitutes proper behaviour. He also maintained that the company had not changed in the past, nor is it changing at the present time. When asked what was preventing change from taking place, he replied 'apartheid', even five years after the general elections of 1994. To his 'small knowledge, here things have been waste[d]', implying opportunities for change have not been seized.

A white female stated that although financially the company has changed considerably for the better, she was unhappy about the general work situation, which had not changed. Her idea about the lack of positive change was echoed by another female employee, who said that basically the work situation had remained the same, neither had meaningful changes occurred in relationships across colour boundaries. She still treats other people in the way in which she has always done, and they do likewise.

2.12.4 Future change

All the research participants were asked how they would change the company to facilitate their work if they could, or whether anything needs to be changed at all. A driver said that he thought that they, the black employees, should change their ways by approaching the customers 'correctly', looking after the company's business, being at work on time, keeping things neat and tidy, and not stealing goods. He was therefore effectively referring to problematic issues that had been identified on other occasions as situations where change is required. He said that if the drivers fail to attend to such matters, their working conditions would never improve. One may therefore surmise that he was concerned about ensuring that the company's business does not suffer, and by implication that maintenance of the status quo or even change for the worse caused by the behaviour of some drivers is unacceptable, yet a possibility.

An important change that drivers want introduced is a clock system to address the problem of overtime recording and payments (2.7 above), as well as 'the right person' to whom they can direct their complaints. At present, one of them said, there is no one to whom the drivers can complain (although this is incorrect. It seems rather to be a matter of the drivers being hesitant to consult people whose credibility they question or whom they find unapproachable). A driver suggested that they, ie the drivers, should be allowed to select two people from among themselves who could meet and talk regularly with management so that the company 'can grow up'. His idea was that business matters should be
addressed in this manner, and that input from the drivers should be considered so that the company ‘can move forward and not backwards’. What he seemingly had in mind was the appointment of two people other than the shop stewards, to deal exclusively with the drivers’ participation in company operations. An older driver, also contemplating the possibility of change, said the company could decide to change something ‘in this week’, or things could remain the same ‘the whole year’. As regards the activities and functioning of the company, he said that he was not in a position to say that anything should be changed.

A senior white male employee said that the company’s ‘future looks good’. He referred to forthcoming changes such as marking goods with bar codes to ensure better control during deliveries. However, during a subsequent discussion he was less positive about the future and believes it will be ‘tough’. He identified the need for good asset management in a very competitive business environment, as well as more careful monitoring of the relation between costs and profits, which calls for greater motivation of employees and greater control of costs to ensure profitable results, otherwise the company ‘may go down’. He also referred to the development of what he called ‘a few product lines’. He believes that the structure of the company has always been ‘customer oriented’, but employees involved in marketing are not able to expand their activities and must rely on ‘traditional’ methods of marketing, namely maintenance of an established customer base and performing their activities by telephone. While there was nothing wrong with such operational methods, the informant believes that the company should ‘start working smarter’ and he repeatedly maintained that the main problem area in the company was ‘downstairs’, the area of service and delivery where change was becoming urgent.

Other views were more optimistic about the future, for instance that, despite going through a recent quiet period, business should begin to improve since, and in spite of increasing competition in the market, most of the problem areas experienced by the company in the recent past have been rectified or incorporated into other sectors of the holding company. However, the company still faces many problems, although it was said on more than one occasion that these are being addressed, as well as ways of improving business in general. Several incorrect decisions had been made in the past, with finalisation of the legal aspects of one of them still outstanding, but provision has been made for whatever the outcome of the case. Old trucks have been replaced with newer more modern vehicles, and in time general circumstances have changed for the better. Collectively, therefore the white employees in management positions believe that the future of the company looks good, even though concern was expressed about the general state of the South African economy. Their positive views were clearly shaped by far-reaching changes in the holding company, including clo-
sure of unprofitable branches, centralisation of various operations, and downsizing the workforce, specifically by retrenching unproductive workers.

Several white research participants referred to a programme that had recently been embarked on to develop a high-quality product that holds great potential once it is properly marketed and becomes generally available. Although it will be more expensive than standard products, it is being developed for the discerning consumer. Thus far the results of tests on the product have been favourable, and there is already a steady demand for it, despite its cost. Once consumers become used to it, it was said, there would be no other choice for them.

At the time of the research the introduction of electronic mail (e-mail) was in the pipeline, while the company's computer system was also to be upgraded to be operational in 2000 (about six months after the research). Related companies will be linked to a mainframe computer and have e-mail connections. This will mean that data which is inserted onto a computer will be directly available to people in other sections of the group who require it and as a result operations will be speeded up considerably.

When asked whether there was anything that he thought should be changed at the company, a white male replied that there was nothing that he could think of immediately, while on the same matter one of the drivers said that change would be difficult because the country's economy is 'still bad'. Suggested changes by other people included changes to the cold environment in which the traders work, but the nature of the company's production makes this impossible. The need for more office space was also identified as a necessary change, a matter already discussed with the manager. The office in question is shared by four people, with drivers frequently coming and going with their documents, or other employees fetching cheques and then standing around to chat. This means that there is much movement and thus interruption, in the office. The space behind the desks is narrow and if someone wishes to pass, employees must change the seating arrangements by drawing in their chairs in front of the computer to make way behind them. This happens frequently and interrupts the work of employees in the office. A change that drivers would like to see is the introduction of their own medical aid scheme (2.1 above), a matter towards which they are working.

To improve business, a white male suggested that to facilitate loading operations, an additional sixth loading platform should be added to the five which are in operation. He believes that there is scope in the market for increased output, which would allow the company to function at its optimum. When asked why the company had not already introduced a sixth platform, he said that there is
too little space in the loading area to manoeuver the trucks and that the present facilities are inadequate. He also thought that greater consideration should be given to the trucks as well as to the drivers, since they represent the company to the outside world. The image they portray of the company, the way in which this is done, as well as an investigation of possible scope for improvement in this regard should be considered in an effort to market and promote the company and its business more effectively.

Only one person believes that there are employees who are 'against change', that is, people who believe that things should be done in the way in which they have always been done, the best way of doing things. She referred to the introduction of the new computer system which would inevitably bring about change in the way people operate. Some employees oppose the new system but the company is not in a position to tolerate people who do not approve such change.

2.13 Language usage and communication

The effective transference and receipt of meaning among members of an organisation are essential for successful business operations. This process of communication becomes increasingly problematic within a multicultural context where people involved speak different languages as a result of different sociocultural orientations. In addition, since people's knowledge, attitudes and cultural background all directly influence the ability to transmit and to understand a message, and therefore can constitute barriers in the communication process, communication and the understanding of meaning become more complex in an environment characterised by diversity. The purpose in this next section is not to discuss the communication process, but first to describe language usage of employees and second, to highlight some problems pertaining to communication which were discerned during the research. The details are essentially superficial since researching cross-cultural communication and its implications constitutes a highly complex process which fell outside the scope of the research being reported here.

2.13.1 Language usage

It goes without saying that the target company is characterised by the presence of several of South Africa's official languages and can rightfully be regarded as 'multilingual'. In this regard it is primarily the drivers who either individually or as a group speak a variety of languages, including North Sotho (sePedi), South Sotho, Tsonga, Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Venda, Ndebele, English and Afrikaans.
General patterns regarding language usage in the company were discernible:

- With the exception of a single English-speaking employee, all the white employees are Afrikaans-speaking which means that the dominant business language of the company is Afrikaans.

- The drivers and one of the black office staff members speak Afrikaans to the white employees. The other black office employee speaks English to the white employees because her Afrikaans is ‘not too good’, although she can ‘hear’ (i.e., understand) Afrikaans.

- With three exceptions (whites who can speak an African language) the office employees use either English or Afrikaans when communicating with the black employees.

- As regards the ability to speak English and Afrikaans, drivers who were born and live in the Johannesburg area primarily speak English in comparison with the drivers from elsewhere who speak Afrikaans.

- Among the drivers, Zulu is the dominant language although Tswana speakers are in the majority, and the area where the company is located is predominantly Tswana.

- The Sotho-speaking drivers have the fewest problems in communicating with their co-drivers because of the similarity between the various Sotho languages (North Sotho (sePedi), South Sotho and Tswana).

The English-speaking employee was asked to describe his experiences as the only such person in an Afrikaans business environment. There are no problems, he said, and some of the younger people even call him Oom (Uncle), although he does not know why, because they are ‘not related’. If he has a document which must be translated into Afrikaans, someone is always willing to do so, just as he translates Afrikaans documents into English if required to do so. Sometimes he jokingly says to the other employees that they should bear in mind that Afrikaans is no longer the country’s official language. He believes that his ability to speak Afrikaans has improved considerably since he started working for the company, but that it would never reach the level of competence of the other employees because he does not think in Afrikaans. Occasionally when he deals with a serious matter he finds it difficult to express himself in Afrikaans, or he misses the meaning of a word in an Afrikaans conversation, but in such instances he reverts to English.

One of the senior managers said that he would like to be able to speak a black language to facilitate communication with black employees. During meet-
ings with the drivers he sometimes uses an interpreter to ensure that everyone understands him, particularly if the meeting concerns important matters such as the provident fund. Usually the interpreter is the company’s personnel manager (shared with a related company) who can speak more than one black language and was said to be able to make information comprehensible to people by speaking to them in a particular way. From information provided during interviews with other employees, it was apparent, however, that in spite of such care being taken, some of the more intricate details of such discussions evade many of the drivers.

All the white office employees said that they do not have problems communicating with the drivers because most of them speak English and/or Afrikaans. The comments of a white female employee who speaks English and Afrikaans but none of the black languages, namely that these are the languages she uses for communicating with the drivers, depending upon the inclination of the driver concerned, are common to all the office employees.

There is a general perception among the white employees that the majority of the drivers are Zulu-speaking. A trader said that he does not have any difficulty in communicating with them in Zulu since he ‘knows the Zulus fairly well’ and is able to make himself understood in their language, although the drivers can all speak Afrikaans. He and two other males were the only white employees who are able to speak an African language either fluently or superficially. About his experience in this regard, one of the latter said black employees greet him from a distance, apparently because of his ability to speak North Sotho, the language he usually uses when he communicates with them. Another white employee who can understand and speak ‘a little Zulu’ uses this language to communicate with Xhosa- and Zulu-speaking people.

Some of the drivers, mainly the non-Zulu people attempt to communicate with their co-drivers in the language of the person concerned or at least in a language that the other person can understand, including English or Afrikaans, if they discern that the person cannot understand them. Failing this, they speak Zulu, which is unofficially regarded as the dominant language of the black employees, an idea confirmed by the drivers, although they could not explain why. It would seem that perceptions that Zulu is the dominant language and that Zulu speakers are in the majority are remnants of the past when Zulus were dominant among the black employees. In addition, that most of the drivers are able to speak Zulu is apparently in line with the situation in the townships where they live, and the tendency among Zulu speakers to insist that people speak to them in Zulu also contributes to the perception among outsiders that the drivers are mainly Zulu.

The drivers had different ideas about the usage of Zulu. An elderly Tswana
driver speaks to Zulu people in Tswana and they reply in Zulu because they say they ‘do not hear him’, ie do not understand Tswana. In turn he tells them that he does not ‘hear’ Zulu either. He said it was not a matter of the people not understanding him, but that they refuse to speak anything but their own language, Zulu. They behave in this way deliberately because they want other people to speak their language. A Pedi-speaking driver said that he speaks Zulu and Xhosa when in contact with Zulus and Xhosas because they do not understand the Sotho languages, neither can they speak any of the other languages of the drivers. He emphasised that this only applies to Zulus and Xhosas, and that Venda, Tsonga and Sotho people speak all the languages. He said the former actually do understand the other languages, but answer in their mother tongue when spoken to because this is the way ‘those people live’. Similarly, another driver whose home language is North Sotho says that he mostly speaks North Sotho or Zulu with his co-workers. He confirmed that Zulu is the language which is most frequently spoken at the company even though it is not located in a Zulu area, but added that this was not strange since ‘with them’, meaning the blacks, ‘it is different’ because they ‘are mixed’.

One of the elderly drivers who is Tswana said he cannot speak any languages other than English and Afrikaans, but on closer questioning it appears that he speaks all the Sotho languages because they are similar to his home language.

A white employee said that it is important to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ when communicating with blacks. He finds them a strange ‘nation’ because when one meets a black person he/she must be greeted first. Doing so it is not a problem for him, unlike other whites who believe that blacks must greet them first as a sign of respect. He also believes that it is important to answer a person in the language in which he/she addresses one and that it is impolite to reply to a person in a different language. As a result of this and the implication of speaking to someone in a language in which one is not fluent, the informant was asked whether he had ever experienced any communication problems in a situation where people do not understand one another, but said he had not.

It would seem that the drivers generally do not have difficulty communicating with the customers, although one driver said he had once had trouble communicating with a customer who is Chinese.

### 2.13.2 Communication

As mentioned earlier, the communication process as it occurs within the target company is not discussed since it was not a topic singled out for in-depth research. Nevertheless several general comments are called for, particularly if the interviews can be regarded as opportunities for checking understanding among employees.
Although, without exception, all the research participants insisted that they do not have difficulties communicating with their co-employees, one can discern that the communication process *per se* in the company is not without shortcomings. This deduction was possible from the different perceptions and varying interpretations of particular corporate phenomena among employees, as well as from the sociocultural diversity evident among them. Thus, although employees say they understand others or believe that people understand them because various precautions have been taken in the transfer of information, it was apparent that this is not generally the case. To this should be added that the mere transfer of information does not guarantee that meaning will be understood and therefore understanding does not automatically follow the transmission of information. Two ideas provided by research participants confirm these comments: first, it was clear that the majority of the drivers do not understand the items of information that appear on their paysheets, yet the employee responsible for preparing the sheets insisted that they understand ‘everything’. Second, even though care is taken at meetings to ensure that the drivers understand important aspects of their employment, such as matters pertaining to membership of the provident fund, for example financial benefits for a family if a driver loses his life, this proved not to be the case from information provided by individual drivers and from comments such as the following: ‘You can talk, you can discuss with them now some other things, two hours later they don’t know what we were discussing, so you have got to explain it again. Every now and then they came with something ... I have explain(ed) to them.’ The concepts of taking out insurance, having provident fund membership and saving for the future are problematic in other sections of the group. As a driver said: ‘It’s a problem for some people ... somebody must teach them.’ It was also said that the drivers dislike the term ‘package’ as far as their general earnings are concerned, and want a basic salary instead. The meaning of ‘package’ and what it entails was explained to them in terms of a few elementary concepts, but, it was said, they do not understand the details. The transference of information as it was originally intended is therefore not entirely successful, particularly with so-called downward communication, that is communication from one level of the company to a lower level, here mainly in communication from management to black employees.

Thus it appears that greater distortion occurs at the lowest end of the line of communication, that is, with the drivers, since their knowledge, experience, attitudes, expectations, perceptions, language abilities, and lack of exposure to matters normally taken for granted within corporate environments, among other factors, can constitute barriers to interpreting the meaning of information in accordance with what was intended by the sender. Such factors are then pro-
jected into information that is communicated to them, thereby influencing the way in which they interpret it. This means that people do not perceive reality, but interpret what they perceive they have heard and then regard it as reality or the truth (Robbins 1998:323). This, in turn, forms the basis of their subsequent behaviour.

Problems were also identified with upward communication, whereby information passes to a higher level in the company. The general perception among employees in management positions is that relatively few problems exist as regards communication in the company, but this contrasts with what was said by the traders and drivers, namely that their provision of information to management is either disregarded or not acted upon. In addition, some employees in these categories expressed their disinclination to discuss problems with management which shows that upward communication is problematic (cf Robbins 1998:314, 315). However, what appears to be relevant here is less a matter of information being misunderstood than the influence of corporate structural factors, specifically status differences. People with lower status generally have difficulty communicating with people of higher status, and the wider the status difference, the more likely the communication is to be problematic (cf Smit & Cronje 1997:431).

Elements of defensiveness, that is, reacting to an apparently threatening situation and then verbally justifying one's views or behaviour (Kavanagh & Kennedy 1992:56) and being excessively judgmental or questioning other people's intentions were also discerned. The explanations for the overtime system (2.7 above) illustrate these points. When people behave in this way, the chances of mutual understanding developing are reduced. When a person interprets a message as threatening, he/she may respond in a way that inhibits meaningful communication (Robbins 1998:323).

The foregoing emphasises that it is impossible to totally eliminate human factors which hinder effective communication, but the details are inadequate to investigate the exact extent to which understanding of the meaning of information transmitted during communication approximate that intended by the sender, as well as the subsequent behaviour of the recipient as an outcome of the communication process. Such matters, together with the connection between communication and motivation and the development of attitudes within the corporate environment, are useful topics for future research.

2.14 Affirmative action and related matters

As regards the introduction of affirmative action, the statement was made that the company functions in terms of the legal requirements concerning the policy,
but at the time of the interviews no specific strategies had as yet been introduced. If a post becomes vacant and there is more than one applicant, all those who qualify will be considered, regardless of race. But to implement an affirmative action strategy, and before corrective action can be taken, more than one post of the same type is required. In a small company such as this, the structure does not permit more than one person per post in the office positions, although at the level of trader a black appointment had recently been made. This appointment was however, made on merit even though it is interpreted by some employees as 'affirmative action' just because the incumbent is black. It was mentioned that certain positions require specific qualifications, knowledge or skills, which means that affirmative action cannot be implemented if the people concerned do not at least have the appropriate qualifications or the required skills. At this stage there is no pressure from head office to introduce affirmative action strategies, but the possibility was expressed that there had been attempts to postpone its introduction, but this would only be possible up to a point before it becomes imperative to implement affirmative strategies.

As regards the above black appointee, employees had varying views about his position and the way in which he is treated by co-workers. A driver said that 'that position he is in, same position as the whites. You can see that some of them dislike him', associating his view with the discriminatory attitudes still found among certain white employees. In contrast white employees' opinions about the appointment varied from the idea that it had not produced any problems and that the person concerned is 'doing well', to the fact that his appointment did not constitute a threat to his white co-workers. Instead, one of the office personnel who is in regular contact with the traders said he thinks that his appointment actually constitutes a means of motivating them to work more accurately and more effectively.

All the research participants were asked their opinions on affirmative action. While white employees were mostly in favour of its introduction, they nonetheless were hesitant and suggested that such appointments should be made conditional to certain criteria which apply universally. Thus, it was repeatedly said that whoever is appointed must have the appropriate qualifications. One of the white employees said that he would not have a problem with affirmative action appointments, but thought that some of the other employees would feel uncomfortable, while others suggested that the trend which is occurring everywhere in the country is likely to be introduced here as well, although no one could say for sure when this would happen. Some were afraid and said that the idea causes a great deal of anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity because it means that many people will lose their jobs. One of the female employees commented that each time black appointments are made, regardless of where, other people (ie whites)
must be retrenched. Another employee expressed concern that the majority of affirmative appointees elsewhere are disloyal to their companies, and in this regard it is impossible to compare white with non-white. He associated his idea with the notion that white managers tend to manage a business as if it were their own, while "die nie-blanke bestuur die besigheid maar net om te bestuur" ('the non-white manages the business just to manage'). If one follows what is often said on national television, then it is apparent that most of the corruption in the country occurs among non-whites. Accordingly he could not be totally in favour of the introduction of affirmative action. He illustrated his view by referring to the Springbok rugby team and the introduction of legal requirements that a certain percentage of the players must be non-white. This means, he said, that the decision must be taken by the authorities either to play to win the forthcoming world cup, or to comply with regulations that ensured that the majority of the players would be non-white. The 'culture' of the blacks is to play soccer, and although rugby is probably an 'apartheid sport', the same can be said about soccer. He added that everywhere blacks 'want to be in the majority'. If the black people who participate in any sphere are the best available, their appointment is appropriate and correct, but with new legislation regarding the South African rugby team, some of the best players would be replaced by people who are not up to standard, which the informant said, constitutes a problem.

A senior white male was unsure of the meaning of affirmative action and wanted greater clarity. Once this was done he indicated that no such appointments had been made at the company, although an affirmative appointment had possibly been made at head office. Another white male, who was not entirely sure of its meaning either, said that affirmative action is not relevant at the company, although he too believed that it plays a role in the group as a whole. Other research participants confirmed that such appointments have been made at head office, but that this does not constitute a problem. The general perception is that the introduction of affirmative action is just a matter of time: '... dit sal kom. Dit is deel van die lewe. Wat sal dit my help om te gaan baklei daaroor?' ('... it will come. It is part of life. What will it help to fight about it?') One of the traders said: 'Ek sê as by die werk beter as ek kan doen, gee hom die werk, maar moet hom nie die werk gee nie en ek moet hom wys hoe om die werk te doen.' ('I say if he can do the work better than me, give him the work, but do not give him the work and I must show him how to do the work.') One of the drivers believes that affirmative action is 'OK' because 'it feels the right thing to do'.

Earlier it was mentioned that concern was expressed that because the white traders are relatively close to retirement, consideration should be given to training people to ensure that there are individuals who can take over from them once they retire. The specialised nature of various aspects of the functioning of
the company means that new appointees must be able to perform from the time they are appointed. Such a situation is seen to lend itself to the implementation of an affirmative action strategy whereby a black appointee can be trained by highly skilled whites while the possibility still exists. A black person who has been trained to prepare the company’s products in the prescribed way, but who is employed by a related company, has been involved in the industry for very many years, so he too is ‘an old hand’. No one is being trained to take over from him when he retires. The seriousness of the problem was viewed differently by the employees, with a manager regarding it as ‘very serious’ because the nature of the company’s operations is not attractive to many young people and many of its activities are very specialised, while a trader said that it would not be too much of a problem to train a black person to take over his tasks when he retires.

In a ‘reverse’ appointment, a white male was appointed to replace a black male who held an office position, something which ‘gebeur nie maklik so nie’ (‘does not happen so easily’). This move was because the black employee was incapable of mastering the work he was required to do. He is still employed by the company in a parallel position, but the informant who discussed the matter said: ‘Hy doen nog sy werk, by is nog hier. Hy doen net die voordele en ek doen die nadele.’ (‘He still does his work, he is still here. He just does the advantages and I do the disadvantages.’)

2.15 Financial matters

This section provides an overview of some financial matters concerning the company and the employees. The holding company is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. During the previous year the value of the company’s shares dropped considerably and as a result annual increases in salaries as well as annual bonuses were described as ‘not so good’.

While the office personnel, that is, the white employees and two black employees, are salary earners, the drivers are wage earners. Several differences pertaining to remuneration result from this differentiation. As far as salary earners are concerned, different postgrades apply with different salary scales. An employee is appointed on a specific postgrade which carries a particular salary, and then he/she receives annual increases. In this system promotion is usually only possible if an employee retires or resigns, making way for promotion within the company, or for promotion to a senior position in another company in the group. Consequently, because employees are aware of limited possibilities, it was apparent that the idea of promotion is not particularly significant and in some cases hardly considered, except among white males who are relatively young and ambitious. The general idea is therefore that once appointed on a particular
postgrade, an employee remains at that level and depends upon annual salary increases for betterment of his/her position. Salaries are paid by head office and all the recipients are members of a pension fund and a medical aid scheme, and are also entitled to benefits such as a housing allowance.

In contrast, wages are calculated and paid by the company. The wage earners are members of a provident fund, but not a medical aid scheme, since their low wages do not justify the high monthly premiums. The drivers are not entitled to a housing allowance either, although they are encouraged to buy their own houses. The company has a scheme according to which an employee can use the benefits of his provident fund as a guarantee to obtain a housing loan. Employees are also encouraged to pay off their housing loans and not to wait until they are old and then use their pension payments to do so. In addition they are told not to depend upon their children when they are no longer able to work. Such input from management was said to be accepted by the drivers who buy their own homes or improve existing ones, or buy their own motor vehicles. Nine or ten drivers own their own vehicles. Drivers who do not live near enough to walk, or who are unable to make use of the free company transport, must pay for their own transport to work. Depending upon the distance he travels, a driver who, for instance, lived in Soweto at the time of the research paid R16 per day for taxis. All the drivers were asked whether they had any additional form of income, for instance by doing extra work over weekends. No one did, although one said that he used to drive a hearse for a funeral parlour over weekends. Like their white counterparts, the drivers receive an annual bonus, which amounts to a month’s wages and is paid at the end of the year.

Besides discontent over indications of overtime payment (2.7.3 above), the drivers were also concerned about entries relating to other aspects of their wages on their paysheets, which one said look like ‘ordinary pieces of paper’ and one would never know that they are paysheets. On occasion the drivers have asked why bonuses and overtime payment are taxed, and they were told that this is not ‘management’s fault’. An informant’s words with reference to the company were that ‘they eat our money’. He added that the drivers have little option but to work until they are no longer needed, and even then they would still have nothing. This informant owns a car. When asked whether his vehicle is insured he said that it is not, because he earns too little to afford the premiums. He has to eat, pay his rent at the end of the month, support his family (a wife and four children), and go home to Limpopo Province at the end of each month. He also said that he does not drink because this makes one’s money ‘disappear’ very quickly. If he drank, he would be wasting his money. He does smoke, however. Another of the drivers described his wages: ‘The salary doesn’t come in at inflation. It is too far from inflation rate. It is below inflation.’ Previously he had
worked as a driver for another company, where he earned R2 700 per month in comparison with the R1 635 he earns at present, and felt that in view of his years of experience as a driver, he is entitled to bigger wages. He was asked whether he had been informed of his wages before he was appointed, but he said that had only occurred when he was ‘registered’. A senior driver commented that the wages of the blacks are ‘too low’, and even if a driver has matriculated or can work with computers, what he earned would always be less than the salary of a white person, merely because he is black. He said that management had been approached to discuss the wage issue, but the drivers were told that if they did not ‘like’ the job they could leave since there are many other people who ‘could do the job’. Most of the drivers therefore appear to live from month end to month end and, it would seem, not one of them is in a position to save any money. As one said, he just waits until the end of the month to receive his wages since by then nothing is left of the previous month’s wages. There is never any money to save. He hires a room and buys what he needs, but he must also support his family who live in Polokwane (formerly Pietersburg). Another driver commented: ‘The little they give, you use it all. It is not enough’. (See 1.4 above for the average number of persons supported by black and white employees respectively.)

Because of the problems the drivers mentioned with items that appear on the paysheets, the employee responsible for processing the drivers’ paysheets was asked what information is entered on them. She listed the following items: basic wage, overtime, bonuses if a driver was entitled to any, and any leave that must be paid out. She was also asked whether the drivers understand this information, and she said that they understand the various items on the paysheets very clearly, and they know precisely how the different components of their wages are compiled. If they have a problem, for instance if they believe their overtime has not been calculated correctly, they complain either to her or to someone else.

The black workers are aware that they are members of a provident fund. When asked whether it would not be preferable to have this money at the present time, the answer from research participants was a categorical no. The black female employee commented that she did not know how long she would live and wondered what would happen to her if she used all her money. She expressed considerable dissatisfaction with her salary, and regards herself as a ‘loser’. In the time that she has been working for the company she has considered looking for another job, but then she thinks about ‘what is important’ and ‘keeps her head down’. She meant that she was aware of the massive unemployment in the country, and if she resigned there was no guarantee that she would find another job. She receives an annual increase and bonus but, she said, considering all her years of service with the company, what she received was not enough.
Not all the white employees were satisfied with their earnings, even though it was apparent that they earn much more than the drivers because of the nature of their work and responsibilities, and the postgrades on which they were appointed. One said that the previous year the annual increases had been very poor while the cost of living had risen by about 50%. Financially, therefore, people actually move ‘backwards rather than forwards’. Moreover, in the previous eight months medical premiums had risen twice, first by 10% and later by a further 15%, while the petrol price was also about to increase. The cost of living rises but in real terms salaries decrease, so people feel ‘down’ rather than ‘up’. The informant thought that this situation was because of the ‘poor economy’ of the country, rather than the company’s performance because during the previous financial year, she maintained its performance had been good.

An elderly driver facing retirement was asked whether he knew what his pension would be. He said he did not, and that the company’s personnel officer had said that he would inform him. He had ‘looked for him’ and not been able ‘to find him’. When asked if he thought it would be ‘enough’, he said he did not know and would have to wait and see.

2.16 External factors, including personal problems, that impact on the work situation

There was consensus among research participants that ideally people should ‘leave their personal problems at home’, particularly if these impact negatively on the work environment. However, inevitably this does not always happen and from time to time the company must deal with personal problems which, if allowed to persist, would introduce problems of their own. In some instances this is possible in terms of the programmed structures of the company, including rules and regulations for employee behaviour. In other instances, non-programmed responses are required, which are generally more difficult to deal with. Moreover, while certain employees can deal with their personal problems without them having negative consequences for the working environment, others are less able or even unable to do so. Research participants stated that the company is sympathetic towards such people, but that it is necessary to distinguish between those with genuine problems and people who merely look for sympathy. When it is difficult to tell the difference, an informant believes that the particular case must be dealt with on merit. A female employee maintained that although people are generally happy at work, there are exceptions, that is, employees whose personal matters make them unhappy, which in turn, influences their work. On occasion someone else has interfered and said that personal ‘matters should be left at home’, which only aggravated the situation.
Various types of problems were described by the drivers. A driver who supports eight people, still mourns the death of his wife. This situation has been exacerbated because after his wife’s death he acquired another partner, who has caused him serious financial problems. He is therefore always short of money and as a result borrows from white employees. Although none of the latter saw this as a problem because he regularly repays his loans, the driver is very anxious because he believes that the woman involved does not look after his young school-going children properly. They live in Limpopo Province and he is only able to visit them once a month to see to their wellbeing.

More than one of the drivers commented on the crime and violence in the area. One described how he takes his young daughter to school himself every morning since he is too afraid to allow anyone else to do so because of the high incidence of rape and child abuse in his neighbourhood. As a result he has been late for work and consequently got into trouble. In a discussion of the crime and its influence on the country, another driver mentioned an incident when a policeman was shot in Kempton Park merely for bumping the murderer’s car. He said that politicians were trying to ‘get the country right’ but were not succeeding. Now because of such incidents, he is afraid that when he reverses his car out of his yard the tsotsis will be waiting to take it from him. This situation affects his ability to work since he functions under the ongoing threat of being hijacked.

A driver had to inquire about his stolen vehicle and asked for permission to take time off from work. Permission was granted, but although he arrived at work at 6:00 and only left later, he was signed in at midday, which meant that his actual number of working hours was reduced. He felt that this constituted unfair practice. (He said he had queried the situation and had been told that the matter would be rectified.)

2.17 Regular meetings (‘ritual behaviour’)

In this section corporate activities which are performed regularly and in standardised ways are briefly described. In a sense they constitute ‘rituals’, since underlying them are the norms and values of the company which give them their meaning and significance. Usage of the concept ‘rituals’ of course excludes religious beliefs or ideas, although the function of corporate rituals is similar to that of religious rituals in that they give expression to matters which are important within the context of the organisation. Rituals generally have two functions: a manifest function, which is obvious and apparent to everyone who participates in them; and a latent function, which is not apparent but can be determined by investigating the meaning of the ritual in the context in which it occurs. True rituals of the company are the social gatherings held every second
month, the year-end functions, and company meetings, and these are categorised in terms of purpose and involvement of employees. This manifests along racial lines, since with the exception of the two black office staff, the drivers do not participate in the gatherings of the office personnel.

Once approximately every second month the office personnel gather socially in one of the offices. Previously, the function was a monthly arrangement, but because it became routinised, it is now held only every second month. The purposes of the function are, first, to provide an occasion for social interaction among employees (manifest function) and, second, to encourage the establishment of sound interpersonal relationships outside the immediate work context, as well as an *esprit de corps* among employees which it is hoped will be transposed to the work situation (latent function). The functions are arranged by a committee of two or three people. Personnel belong to a club ('die koekklub', 'the cake club') to which they contribute a sum of money monthly that is used to buy snacks and drinks. One of the white traders said that 'everyone is there', but this refers to the office personnel only and excludes the drivers. Most of the drivers are on the road at that time so they cannot attend. The presence of the two black office personnel does not 'cause any problems', implying that this could be a possibility. Attendance at the functions is not compulsory, but employees are encouraged to attend. Nevertheless, it is clear that these functions are not well attended and the comment was made that many employees regard their own interests as more important than those of the company. Different reasons were provided. Not everyone contributes to the costs of the functions or is particularly interested in them; a senior white male, for instance, said that he did not know what the 'set-up' is, except that he was aware that the functions are held on a Friday afternoon at around 14:00 or 15:00. From one of the female office staff came the idea that one can actually see that people are tired of the functions, which have become predictable: they are held in the same place each time and basically the same foodstuffs are served. One cannot even try new foods because what is served has been tried on previous occasions. There is therefore 'nothing new' about the functions to make them attractive to the staff. As a result of the routinisation, those who do attend are inclined to leave early. Only a few remain to chat with other employees. To provide impetus to the poorly attended gatherings, they are now held when a few people celebrate their birthdays in a particular month which, according to a senior white male, is the only reason that the functions are still held. By implication the functions have now acquired the meaning of birthday celebrations. A white male said that he attends but is concerned about the impression that is created if white employees drink alcohol when the drivers return from their routes. He believes that it is unacceptable for the company to reprimand drivers who drink, while office
personnel spend office time socialising with alcohol. He was asked whether it would be acceptable for the drivers to ‘join the party’ as it were, when they return, and he said that he did not think that there would be a problem, but he was sceptical about whether this would be good company practice.

Another reason for not attending the function is a dislike of alcohol. One of the female employees said that her father had been an alcoholic and for this reason she does not like alcohol or occasions where alcohol is served. Her behaviour has been criticised, however, and she said she was told that if ever other females are employed at the company, they would have to be ‘more sociable’. She also stated that her working day ends at 15:00 and she is prepared to attend the function until that time, but after that she wants to go home. Another of the female employees was also concerned because when alcohol is served, some men lose their inhibitions and their ‘mouths become loose’. On the following Monday those who did not attend or who left early are informed about what happened at the function. It would seem that the female employees are less favourably inclined towards the functions because they have matters to attend to at home after work. They therefore appear to attend the function out of a sense of responsibility, but as soon as the normal time for going home arrives, they leave. One of them actually considered the possibility that her non-attendance was held against her when annual increases were awarded the previous year because her increase had been very small.

The polarity between employees in the company (3.1 below) is also evident at the functions. A trader commented that he does not attend specifically because of the differentiation and separation between employees. People in management do not socialise with the others, which was said to reinforce the perception among the traders that they are in effect ‘the outsiders’ in the company, positioned somewhere between the office personnel and the drivers.

More positive comments about the functions were also forthcoming. Some employees find the functions very enjoyable; they are occasions for socialising when work is not on people’s minds and are ‘good’ for the company. Employees ‘break away’ for a while and can learn something about their co-workers outside the work context. For these reasons the functions are a ‘good thing’ and beneficial for the company.

The year-end function, again only for office personnel, is a more elaborate occasion. A venue is chosen where people can spend the night and spouses also attend, but not children. It would seem that this function is better attended than the social gatherings and was described as ‘most enjoyable’.

Meetings are usually held monthly and according to a specific agenda, although it was stated that currently the meetings are held more regularly than before. They are held in the raadsaal on the same floor as the offices. Important
matters which are discussed at the meetings include the annual figures received from head office, the company's performance during the previous financial period, and its profits. Such matters are conveyed to the staff so that they know where the business 'stands financially'. The length of the meetings varies from one to two hours, depending on the type of meeting and the agenda. Work that is not done as a result of the meetings must be caught up afterwards. If the meeting is announced early, staff know that they need to work harder beforehand so that there is no backlog in their work. Any employee who has a matter which he/she would like to have discussed or brought to the attention of the other members of staff can add it to the agenda, although it is not necessarily discussed in detail. The announcement of an unusual meeting is circulated to all the office staff on a memo. Unless the meetings actually concern the drivers, they are excluded. As with the social functions, this arrangement was explained with reference to the varying hours which different categories of employees work. Many of the drivers do not return to the company until late, while the meetings are held during office hours. The monthly meetings are therefore strictly-speaking, for the office personnel only, and accordingly, this is the perception that employees have of them.

The drivers hold meetings in the discussion room on the ground floor as the need arises, primarily to discuss matters which affect them such as annual increases, or problematic issues for which they require an explanation from management, for example the overtime issue, deliveries, and the treatment and attitudes of customers. These meetings are organised by the shop stewards and take place with the approval of management. They were said to be well attended. After a meeting the shop stewards report to management, who, if necessary, must eventually come to a decision about the matters which were reported. On more than one occasion dismay was expressed at the length of time it takes to receive feedback from management. A driver commented: 'Actually most of the time when we got meetings we try by all means to, actually most of us, we explain to them our problems, but we are still having problems. They are trying to solve it.'

2.18 Symbols

A symbol is defined as an object, event or abstract phenomenon such as a word that represents something of value to those who recognise it. If the organisation is regarded as a corporate cultural entity, particular symbols can be identified within it that exemplify important features and communicate significant messages to those who recognise them. Recognising and interpreting a symbol are only possible if the observer of the symbol has the means to do so, that is, if he/she shares or understands the values and norms of the group which identi-
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fies an object as a symbol. Symbols also mean different things to different people, and among those who recognise the symbol, no one remains emotionally detached from it. Although people do not necessarily identify an object as a symbol, they are likely to be able to express the meaning of the object, thus its recognition exists on a subconscious level.

Some symbols are relatively simple and convey easily recognised messages. The drivers can be identified by their navy blue overalls with their first names embossed in gold on the pockets. The trucks bear the name of the company in blue and yellow, as well as the company logo for everyone to identify as the producer of quality products. Employees involved in the loading action wear white overalls which, more often than not, bear recognisable markings of the goods which they load onto the trucks. Their position and status are therefore clearly identifiable by the clothing they wear.

Other symbols are more subtle. Names and titles are symbols of identity. The drivers' first names on the pockets of their overalls represent their personal identity, their position and status as 'driver' and as black, and membership of a particular category of employee. In contrast office staff, particularly people in managerial positions, are called 'Mr' or 'Mrs' as an indication of their elevated status as office personnel, and, in all but two cases, of their whiteness. 'Wages' and 'salaries' also have symbolic significance. The drivers earn 'wages', while office personnel earn 'salaries', a distinction which incorporates the differences of medical aid being included in the packages and membership of a pension fund for the latter, and membership of a provident fund for the former (cf 2.15 above). A pay package is also symbolic of a person's ability to work, earn a living, of financial independence, and of his/her position within and membership of a particular organisation. Because of this, it is possible that employees who are dissatisfied with their work and involvement in the company may express their resentment by complaining about their financial position when the source of the problem actually lies elsewhere (cf Mead 1998:200). The layout of the building symbolises group differentiation among the employees, and conveys to them the differences in status and functions that are appropriate to each group.

2.19 Traditional sociocultural orientation and impact on organisational behaviour

An important issue in sociocultural diversity is the extent to which people's sociocultural orientation impacts on behaviour within a multicultural environment. The multiculturalism relevant to the target company arises from the presence of and interaction between persons with different frames of reference
within a western-oriented business environment (1.1 above). Given the dominance of western business norms and values in the company, attention was turned to the traditional orientations of the drivers and their influence, if any, in the corporate environment. Consequently, questions were asked about the extent to which aspects of culture of a more traditional kind impact upon people's behaviour in the corporate environment, and influence their decision making, and their attitudes and perceptions of other people. The term 'culture' was used during all the interviews, but not all the drivers were familiar with it, and if they were, they did not necessarily understand its meaning. The term was therefore paraphrased to facilitate understanding of the line of questioning. Even so, despite explanations, the meaning of 'culture' evaded some of the drivers, such as the elderly driver who interpreted it as referring to the violent crime situation in the country, which would only be stopped if the death penalty were reintroduced. Another driver said that he is familiar with the term, but did not really know what it means or what his 'culture' is, although he interpreted it as 'traditions', which he said means 'going to the veld' (*mashoboro*). There young boys must 'look after the cow and milk it, plant the mealies, so it is not done here'. People's 'culture', implying attending an initiation school, is still important, that 'we make it important ... but now we make new culture. Then we carry on.' Another driver had a clearer idea about the meaning of culture. He described it as 'how you grow up, how your attitude is like, how you go up, how your personality is, you yourself and how to approach the people. Culture means plenty things.' He said that he had received his 'culture' from his parents. To other research participants culture is what 'makes one feel comfortable' and people acquire their culture as they grow up. White research participants tended to interpret the concept as meaning quaint or exotic practices of black people.

Mixed responses were received from all categories of employees about the relevance of traditional aspects of culture in the work environment. In most cases they were said to be irrelevant. For example, a driver said they were not important because people did 'those things', ie perform rituals, at their homes, and another that 'Nowadays people just follow the top', ie people in Government. A female employee said she leaves her culture at the gate of her home when she comes to work where she must do what the company expects of her. There were several instances however where research participants mentioned that such issues do impact in some way upon their working lives. From their ideas could be deduced that the impact varies from superficial (although this may merely have been the impression gained from the information provided) to profound, in the sense that traditional beliefs or behaviour directly influence aspects of their work.

A driver interpreted the meaning of the influence of culture in terms of the
time when he has had ‘to do something’, that is, perform a ritual. He said he walked around with the knowledge for a week or two before he spoke to his employers, but all they said was ‘what about your job?’ He added: ‘So it is not like, let’s say whites with all their advantages. Just phone here and what, what. See, even then, what I can say, money, that is ... the whole thing ... it is difficult.’ He meant that having to arrange a ceremony was far more difficult for black people than for whites with all their money and conveniences. To arrange a funeral or a marriage, he must obtain a loan, whereas whites could ‘just use the phone and maybe go to an undertaker, choose a coffin; all right, funeral tomorrow’, and then ‘phone the other people.’ For a black person to make the same arrangements would take a week and he would have to ask his boss who would in any case not understand and merely ask ‘What about your job?’

The drivers are confronted daily with the dangers of road accidents, hijackings and armed robberies. They are acutely aware of this, and stated relatively frequently that they take precautionary measures to protect themselves or to ensure ‘good luck’. These measures primarily entail calling upon the ancestor spirits, or obtaining strengthening and protecting medicines from a traditional practitioner or from the Zion Christian Church if the driver concerned is a member.

An important aspect of indigenous African religion is belief in the ancestor spirits (badimo in Tswana) and invoking them for protection against danger. The extent of the drivers’ belief, as derived from their comments, varies, but those who did indicate belief maintained that their ancestor spirits accompany them in their trucks. One said that he believes in the ancestor spirits, but not to the same extent as his parents who ‘had that belief too much ... Now you see we go a little bit down, not like them’, but when he drives his truck: ‘I say they go with me because there is nothing bad happening to me.’ Another driver said the ancestor spirits are present at work and they go ‘where you are’. They ‘help you ... You see one day it is so, they will help you ... [but] every time you can’t be told that today you are going to die, never, never, never. And if you are going to get an accident, there is a difference. You will get a sign. For that sign badimo are trying to talk to you. Yes. Sometimes you go into your car, the car is ugly, you see something is like this ... and from then you make like this for five minutes, and you open your eyes and then you say what is wrong now ... the badimo are talking to you by that time. You must notice this thing. Maybe when you go out you see something that is going wrong and then you say that time when I see coming black on my eyes, they were trying to show me this.’ He added: ‘Sometimes I go inside of my truck, for the people put something wrong in my truck. When I go inside I hear, maybe sometimes my head – it wants me to make like this, scratch my head, what is wrong? I have washed this morning. If they tell me something, I must look at where you are, it is not a good place so I go out looking, so I go
out maybe in the truck, and they call me and say take this road to Krugersdorp. Why, when I am on that truck, my head makes like that? I start to notice what is happening. *Badimo* are talking to me at that moment. But what the *badimo* can’t tell you is when you are going to die, because that is from the Lord.’ The ancestor spirits can therefore warn a driver of danger and then he should pour ‘plain water’ inside the truck. The ancestors will then know that what they said has been considered. The driver was also asked whether the ancestors are able to help their descendants in any other ways at work, for example when talking to management about a sensitive matter. He said that they do not help one to talk to the manager, but they can help one ‘see the problems before they arrive’, and that they actually try to prevent problems before they develop (‘see the problems before they come’). For instance, the ancestors could warn someone if the manager is angry, and they would ‘show him the way he is going to fight’. Thus, before meeting the manager, the driver ‘already knows how the manager man is going to be cross with me. But now I will talk to him, now I will apologise if I have done bad.’ The ancestors can also warn someone who is about to be fired.

An elderly driver also said that the ancestor spirits accompany their descendants everywhere they go. When a driver is on the road they are with him in the truck; when he works, they go with him; when he sleeps they protect him, provided he does not ‘throw them away’, that is, ignore his ‘grandfather and grandmother’. If one prays to them at night, they stay with one. Some of the drivers, he said, do not believe this, but insist that ‘those people are dead’. On the subject of consulting a traditional practitioner for strengthening medicines, the informant said this is possible, but the ‘old people’, that is, the ancestor spirits, ‘have feelings’, and such information would reach them. The practitioner’s medicines can be taken, but the driver should actually be told not to do so because ‘that thing’ does not work. Someone can try to bewitch a driver, but if the ancestors are present, nothing will happen to him. Therefore, even if someone wants to put the medicine of sorcery in a truck, it would be to no avail because the driver’s ‘old people’ are with him. They stand above him and watch, and the sorcerer can do what he likes, he will not be able to ‘do anything’, that is, harm the person concerned. The informant was asked how he knew that the ancestors accompany him, and he replied that if he does not pray to them early in the morning, something will happen on the way to work to tell him that he made a mistake by not praying — if one prays nothing will go wrong (‘alles loop sommer’, ‘everything just goes’).

Another driver said that he believes ‘much’ (‘*baie*’) in the ancestor spirits and trusts them. He knows that they ‘work’ with him because for a long time he had to drive a truck with faulty brakes and never had an accident. The ancestors could see that he had to drive a truck that was not entirely roadworthy and
accompanied him until the company mechanics eventually repaired the truck. Now every day when he rises, he talks to his ancestors about ‘the whole problem’ of being on the road, and he asks them to protect him, and from being hijacked. The informant was also asked whether there was anything else he could do to strengthen or protect himself against danger, to which he replied that he did not know, except that he liked going to church and perhaps he should ask God early in the morning to help him to work properly, not meet any trouble along the road, or any tsotsis until the day’s work is over. He added that he trusts God very much because he has been working at this place for a long time and has never been hijacked. He is poor. God must keep him until he is ‘finished’, and ensure that he does not wake up one morning to find that his car has been stolen and all that he has left are his keys.

When people drink or wash with strengthening medicines to enable them to see clearly, or as protection against robberies and hijackings, they do so without anyone knowing about them or seeing them. When mention was made of the usage of medicines, comments mostly referred to other people doing so and not the informant himself. Thus, a driver would say he is aware that people obtain medicines to ensure good luck on their routes, but would not identify who they are, or he would simply say that ‘other people’ do this. One of the shop stewards said that although he ‘could not encourage people’ to do so – as a chief would not say to people ‘let’s speak to a witchdoctor’ (by which he was probably referring to a sorcerer and not a diviner) – he was aware of ‘about three’ drivers who consult traditional practitioners for protective medicines.

Instead of using medicines as a means of protection, a driver said he attends a Christian church every Sunday, where he prays and obtains water with which he washes himself. Protection is necessary because if ‘someone wants to do something to you, then they hate it’. The water is obtained at the church and is used every morning throughout the week. Its effects last the whole day. That it is effective is apparent because nothing dangerous has ever happened to him. He said: ‘I did not see that thing happening to me.’

Medicines obtained from a traditional practitioner or water obtained from the ZCC also protect people against ‘danger that has been planted’ in the work situation so that ‘even if you go through it, it does not affect you’. On occasion a driver became aware that someone had tried to plant something dangerous in his truck because he had seen ‘the fat’. ‘It’s been shining, shining. You check it, you call someone, you suspect something, you say no man this is not ... with us, some of us ... we’ll maybe be given muti [medicine] for protection. So you see the truck, you check, you see something strange.’ A foreign object must be removed by someone else, preferably a senior white man, but always someone older than the victim. If a black person is called to help, he may not be a member of the
ZCC because the church does not condone the use of medicines.

Another driver said that he has heard people talking about witchcraft. For instance, people have said that they cannot see clearly or that a truck’s brakes do not work. But he has never had an experience of this nature. Yet when he was asked what people do in such circumstances, he first said there was nothing, but later added that when he drives and he feels there is something wrong with his feet (‘ek voel my voete wil nie reg kom nie’ ‘I feel my feet do not want to come right’), he rubs them and then he does not ‘hear’ anything any more, meaning that his feet have recovered. However, if he applies the brakes and feels that his feet are not doing what they are supposed to do, then it is possible that ‘something’ has been strewn in the truck. Black people, he said, use many things to harm others, so when he stops he rubs brake fluid onto his feet. Then he ‘hears’ nothing. About other people’s behaviour in similar circumstances or whether they talk about such matters, he said that he did not know. People do talk, but not about driving their trucks. What would happen, he asked, if he should drive someone else’s truck, get cramps in his feet or has to scratch them continuously, and then talks about this to other people? How would they look at him? They would look at him strangely, and ask why he got into a truck that is not his own. It is therefore better to remain quiet, otherwise people would think that he placed medicine of sorcery in the truck. Thus, when he cannot see clearly or his feet do not function properly, he is not concerned; he just rubs a little brake fluid on his feet when he offloads and then there will be no problems. This procedure works because he has never been involved in an accident.

If situations such as those described above are a reality to the drivers, do white employees know about them, and if they do, what are their thoughts about them? The drivers were unanimous that whites are unaware of or not interested in the customs of blacks and gave this as the reason that drivers do not discuss such matters with them. More specifically, some said that they do not think that management knows anything about the traditions of the black employees or their ethnic affiliation. The black female employee said it would ‘be nice’ if people, particularly at head office, recognised her culture (North Sotho). Nobody really wants to know about such matters, she said, and people say they have their own, more important, matters to which they must attend. It was also said that blacks do not believe that whites ‘have traditions’ because none are ever seen. The traditions of the blacks, that is, where the father ‘made the traditions’, can sometimes be seen on television, but this does not apply to whites. Going to church is not ‘a tradition’ since blacks also go to church.

One of the drivers maintained that the whites should be made aware of the way of life of the blacks so that they can understand why he may get hurt or be shot because he did not do ‘certain things for my amadlozi’ (ancestor spirits). He
related an incident that occurred after his father died. A 'prophet' told him to go and visit his deceased father at his grave. He had about R2 000, which he put down somewhere before he left. The following day he could not find the money. After work he had to look for something else that he had forgotten about, and he found the money. He believes that the ancestors prompted him to go to the place where he found his money. Thus, it is the reality of the ancestor spirits' presence in the lives of their descendants which whites should know about to enable them to understand why blacks behave in particular ways.

Mixed responses were forthcoming from white employees regarding aspects of behaviour such as those described above among the black employees. A white male said that he was aware that 'their culture', including church affiliation, was totally different from that of whites, which should be taken into consideration in the workplace (although he did not say how), and he added that if people did not know what 'his', implying a black person's, culture is like, they should remain quiet and not comment on it. Where issues of a more traditional kind do emerge at the company, they are dealt with if necessary and, if it is really essential, brought to the manager's attention. If a black employee often attends a funeral of a deceased relative, for example an aunt one week, then shortly afterwards this mother or an uncle, and there is some doubt about the person's integrity, the matter is discussed with the shop stewards. Few people exploit a situation such as this, but there were one or two in the past who had done so. The informant referred to them as 'die belhamels' ('the ringleaders') since their behaviour encourages others to act in the same way.

A senior white male was asked whether he was aware that such behaviour was relevant among the black employees, to which he responded that he believes that people are entitled to their beliefs, and that traditional matters are being revived by black empowerment groups who practise 'their traditions', for example slaughtering animals in the townships and not at an abattoir. In the work context, however, such matters are unimportant, and are not taken seriously. Conditions of employment are the same for all employees. Occasionally, for instance, one hears about a funeral and the contribution that a black employee wishes to make to meet the costs, but this is not unusual, since whites have funeral policies for the same purpose. Where such issues have occurred, it has never been a matter of the culture of the black employees becoming an issue in the workplace to the extent that other employees have become aware of it. Company regulations make it possible to deal with such matters in the interests of the person concerned and the company.

In discussions with a white male about the possibility of aspects of traditional culture impacting directly on the work situation, he said that he believed that such matters are an influence, but employees should prioritise important
issues: it is therefore a matter of weighing up the relevance of traditional beliefs and behaviour against attending to business matters. At the end of the day, it is the latter which are important. He believes that knowledge about the way of life of other people could help solve certain issues or conflicts, but if there are no conflicts, there is no reason to know anything about the lifestyles of other people.

As regards the desire among black people to consult an indigenous practitioner, it was said that white employees fail to understand why they should wish to do so and that this should be explained to them. After a meeting of the drivers at which sick leave was discussed, it was explained to management why some black people prefer to consult traditional practitioners, but management 'did not understand', and in fact some managers 'refuse to understand' a black person's desire to consult one. The hope was expressed that if the drivers do join a medical aid scheme, it would include benefits for consulting a traditional practitioner. A driver pointed out that the need for a young man of some 'other culture' to attend an initiation ceremony for about three to six months has important implications for the work situation and the person concerned. There is no agreement between the black employees and the company about leave being available for this purpose, so one may surmise that the need for such leave had never arisen in the company. In general, the black employees believe that whites are not aware of the conflict that arises in black workers who must attend to the obligations of their culture, namely that in full awareness of the scarcity of employment black men are obliged to attend initiation ceremonies. The black female employee asked what people are supposed to do in such circumstances. In fact nobody really cares, she said, and it is unimportant to other people, that is, whites, whether blacks do the things that 'black people have been doing all their lives'. Thus, if someone is absent from work, nobody worries where he/she is, why he/she has been away for so long, or what the person involved learned in his/her absence. She added that if the funeral of a relative must be attended, special leave will be granted for one day only. If the employee must be away longer, vacation leave must be taken, but then, of course, it is unnecessary to 'explain the long story' to the company. The amount of leave taken depends upon how far away the funeral is and how closely related the deceased person was to the employee. If the deceased was a close relative and the employee is obliged to attend, he/she takes leave according to the circumstances. Transport to the funeral must also be paid. Ultimately, for mutual understanding to take place, she said, people's attitudes towards ways of life which differ from their own must change.