

Cognitive and affective phenomena and implications for behaviour

Introductory remarks

In this section some ways in which research participants think and feel about work and the work situation in general are addressed, and an indication is given of the thoughts and emotions that underlie work-related behaviour. Workplace behaviour is highly complex, and the purpose of this section is to shed light on the complexity by describing some work-related phenomena such as attitudes, perceptions, and motivation, as inferred from views expressed during the interviews. Like section 3, it therefore focuses on the tertiary dimensions of socio-cultural diversity in the organisation.

4.1 Perceptions of organisational phenomena

4.1.1 Perceptions and their importance in the context of an organisation

Perception, as defined by Robbins (1998:90), is 'a process by which individuals organise and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment'. Because there are usually substantial differences between what is observed and what actually exists, a perception is not a reflection of reality, but rather a mental picture of circumstances or a particular object (De Villiers 1993:98). Various personal factors influence perception, including experience, sociocultural frames of reference, expectations, attitudes, and personality. These factors are internal to the individual and contrast with external factors that are part of the concrete reality of the work environment, the context in which perception occurs. Each person's perceptions are influenced by a configuration of such factors which, together with physical make-up, make people perceive phenomena differently (Singer 1987:12). This means that an individual's perceptions are unique. Consequently, one cannot generalise about the content of people's perceptions (De Villiers 1993:98). Perceptions are therefore relative and there are no right or wrong perceptions. People also tend to perceive selec-

tively, perceiving some aspects of the object of the perception and disregarding others. This, together with the idea that what people perceive is usually very different from objective reality, and because their interaction with the object of perception varies, explain why, within the context of the company, employees perceive phenomena differently and why their perceptions correspond with their direct interests in the company. The implication is that because people perceive what they want to perceive in a subjective process of observation and interpretation, they may draw unjustified conclusions about the object of the perception. Consequently people tend to make value judgements about what is perceived, particularly about why people behave in specific ways, which has important consequences for interaction between employees and hence for the company. And since people's behaviour is based largely on their perceptions (Robbins 1998:90, 94, 98, 100), this emphasises the relevance of an evaluation of perceptions in a study on diversity.

In this section research participants' perceptions of work-related phenomena, including the company, the manager and co-workers, are described. The information should be read in conjunction with the discussion on the meaning of and attitudes towards work (4.2 below). Like other cognitive phenomena such as attitudes and values, verbal expression of perceptions of particular phenomena is often difficult. The details reported here are therefore inferred from views presented by research participants in response to particular questions. The information provided in several instances shows that the participants equate the company with its management, which is of course feasible, and in some aspects of the following discussion, perceptions of the company and its management merge. For the purposes of interpretation, a distinction is made in the report because factors involved in 'person perception' differ from those relevant to perception of inanimate phenomena (cf Robbins 1998:91-103).

4.1.2 Perceptions of the company

Various factors were identified as shaping employees' perceptions of the company. These factors are categorised in terms of the perceiver, specifically his/her experience and expectations of the company, the target of the perception, that is, the company itself, and by extension head office, and the context in which perception occurs, which concerns the work environment and various problematic issues emerging within it (cf Robbins 1998:91). Perceptions of the company among the research participants were primarily favourable, but more so among white than black employees. The words of a female employee that '*dis 'n lekker maatskappy bierdie*' ('this is a nice company'), and another who said it would be difficult to leave because employees here are almost 'like a family' summarise research participants' generally favourable perceptions of the company.

Inherent in employees' perceptions of the company are expectations, specifically as regards fulfilment of certain work-related requirements. Although the general perception among all categories of employees is that the company treats its employees well and fairly (in one case 'just fairly'), certain people expressed expectations of the company beyond what employees actually experience. Some of the drivers, for instance, expect greater feedback from management on issues they raise concerning their position in the company, and maintained that management does not show the required willingness to address them, leaving one of the drivers to comment that this is necessary 'so that the company can grow up ... now here, did you know that you [ie the company and its employees] are going back?' Similarly, white employees want greater say over matters that influence them directly and expect to be consulted before a new ruling or arrangement is implemented. One of them commented that when a decision is imposed upon employees, they 'live with it', since it has already been made, but it would be more appropriate if a matter were first discussed with the employees who would be directly affected by its implementation. Instead of being subjected to such an autocratic approach, the informant felt that employees expect to have more say about matters which affect them directly in the work situation. They would inevitably be more accepting of such decisions, and it is likely that tensions which result from the occasional top-down approach of management would also be eliminated.

A white employee believes that the company's ruling that whites are not paid for overtime work constitutes a discriminatory measure against them, and that what applies for one group of employees, ie overtime payment for the drivers, should apply to others as well. The company should therefore provide a thorough explanation for whites being excluded from this benefit and their expectations not being fulfilled. Exclusion constitutes unfair labour practice and the informant ascribed the decision to management being unafraid of the whites because they are unable to stand together as a group, whereas blacks readily form pressure groups. Management knows that whites will not strike if their demands are not met, but that blacks do.

Experience was a key factor in shaping employees' perceptions of the company. The comments of an elderly driver who emphasised his long period of service, namely that the company has been 'good' to him, and that he would recommend to others to work there if this were possible, were applicable to other research participants as well.

A white male with 25 years of service with the company was asked whether he had ever looked for a position elsewhere. He said that he had considered leaving when he was offered a much higher salary by another company, but when he indicated his intention to resign, his salary was adjusted. He was concerned about the implications of this action, namely that the company does not

always recognise employees' worth in terms of the salaries it pays, and people must show that they intend resigning before the company adjusts their salaries. The onus is on the company, he said, to discern when an employee is worth more than he/she earns.

From experienced white employees with many years of service came the strong view that the early replacement of people who have acquired special skills over years of specialised work should be a company priority. A potential replacement should be sought a year or two before someone intends to retire so that he/she can be taught what to do and acquire the skills and experience from the person who had developed the position over many years.

Among the drivers, perceptions of the company are frequently associated with the problems they experience with the overtime/clock-out system (2.7 above). The only way in which this problem can be solved, they believe, is for the present system to be replaced with a proper clock-in/clock-out system that operates on the basis of a clock-in card. The problem was extended to include the employee responsible for the system, who some of them felt, should be replaced by the 'right person', that is someone who is prepared to listen and to act on their complaints. Some of the drivers also perceived the company as having high-handed attitudes towards them, described by one of them in the following way: '[They] ... ignore me ... when they talk it is the final word, you can't say yes or you can't say no. You can't negotiate. When they say yes, it's yes, then its *klaar*, finished, *klaar*.' This idea was repeated by another driver, who maintained that the company, meaning the white managers, do not listen to the drivers, nor are the problems they report attended to. Although they work together, 'they', the whites, say that the blacks 'don't talk right'.

As far as the company as the target of the perceptions is concerned, perceptions were either generalised or more specific. Among their generalised perceptions respondents stated that over the years employees have experienced 'good feedback' from the company; the company treats its employees as they want to be treated; employees are very happy among the people with whom they work; the employees are all relatively satisfied and happy with their positions; they would recommend to other people to work for the company if they could; the company is 'very good'; it is not 'temporary' (ie likely to close down) and things are better here than at other companies where business is 'going down'. The company was also described by drivers as 'big' and *vas* (tight), which meant that it is sound and unlikely to get into financial difficulties, that it does not retrench workers like other companies, and therefore it is a good company to be employed by. More specific perceptions included ideas about the extent to which the company is interested in employees as individuals, that is, the extent to which their interests are looked after by the company. It was said that the company shows personal interest in the employees (although the informant who pro-

vided the information was referring to whites) and does not 'forget its employees' because the birthdays of each employee, his/her spouse and even children appear on a noticeboard in the secretary's office. This was interpreted as a token of appreciation for employees' contributions to its operations, such actions not being found at other companies. That the company 'looks after' its employees well was also illustrated by the awarding of substantial long service bonuses every five years. One of the research participants who said the company treats its employees well qualified his idea by stating that employees also need to work hard to justify the company 'looking after' them.

In some instances research participants were reluctant to express their opinions of certain matters pertaining to the company, particularly if they concerned sensitive issues such as the pilot system (2.5 above). For instance, a decision was regarded as 'the instruction of the company. I can't say it is a right thing, I can't say it is the wrong thing - it is the company', or it was said that 'you do things, you must be careful. You promote your company', and 'I can't say [the company] is cruel, meanwhile I am working [here]'.

Although black employees generally indicated that they were happy at work, examination of their perceptions of the company show that there is some dissatisfaction among them. Comments to the effect that the company is all right, but that it must 'grow up', or those of an elderly driver with many years of experience who stated that in his view the place is not yet right (*'die plek is nog nie reg nie'*) illustrate this idea. The driver added that he has heard other drivers say the same, although he did not know why they said so. In some cases ideas such as these were related to interaction with other employees, that it is the 'people [who] must change' and not specifically the company, since the research participants involved all said they would recommend to others to work there if a position becomes available. Thus, it was said: *'Hierdie company is goed, dit is net die mense, hulle kan nie met mekaar saamwerk nie, maar hy is reg die company, baie reg.'* (This company is good; it is just the people, they cannot work together, but he is right the company, very right.)

A further issue which poses problems for the drivers is their notion that the company is concerned about them being on time for work in the mornings, but is not concerned (in view of the clock-out system) about the time they go home in the afternoon. Thus as long as a driver reports for duty on time in the morning, the company is unconcerned about the time he goes home, even though he may have been required to deliver goods far away.

A number of drivers regard 'the mechanics of the company' as a problem. Company trucks should not be idle for more than 24 hours, since this means a loss to the company, yet it was said that when a truck has a mechanical problem that supposedly has already been attended to by the mechanics, the drivers are blamed for incompetent driving or for failing to report the problem in time. The

drivers believe that the mechanics who tend to the trucks should be able to find problems when they 'repair' a truck, or when they see 'it is serious'. The more a truck is kept off the road, the more working hours are lost, and the more potential or even existing customers are lost. Consequently, it was said that the company is prepared to use trucks that are not entirely roadworthy merely to maintain its business. The drivers who provided this information said that they have discussed the situation with management, but that it was not attended to, even though there could be serious complications for the company if a truck breaks down.

One of the drivers was ambivalent about whether the company treats its employees fairly; in some instances he said this is true, but not so in others. For example, if a driver leaves the company late and gets caught for speeding, he is responsible. The informant believes that the fine should be shared by the people who loaded the truck because the cause of the driver leaving late is their slowness. That the driver alone is responsible is interpreted as 'unfair', even though it is a company rule that drivers who are caught speeding are responsible for paying the fine.

Older drivers as well as younger experienced drivers seem to believe that they can be fired at any time if the company is dissatisfied with their work. For some, this means 'going on pension', and for others being retrenched with a financial package consisting of their contributions to the provident fund. For instance, one of them said that the company could tell him 'the work is finished' and then give him two or three months to leave. When asked to explain, he said it was because the company 'works with money' and that 'money is poison'. In the case of shortages on a delivery, he could be told that he knows where the 'f ...g goods' are, that he did not deliver his load correctly, and that he refuses to listen to instructions, therefore he is responsible for the company's losses. Then he is required to sign a form, and money is deducted from his wages as the company decides. Yet, the informant said, he would not leave, not even if he were to earn more money elsewhere. He knew of other people who had worked for the company and left because of the poor wages, believing that they would earn bigger wages elsewhere, but he has 'never seen a paysheet'. After a short while, he said, the new company '*is broke, by het geval. Hy kom weer bierso, by kom vra weer die werk.*' ('The company is broke, it has fallen. He comes here again to ask for work.') He would be wasting his time if he goes elsewhere, earns R2 000, but after a few months or a year at the new company is told 'straight retrenchment'. New employees are always retrenched first, and if he were retrenched, he would not find other employment. If the company became 'tired' of him, he would leave, but the company would have 'to pay all his money' which he has accumulated in the provident fund. Until such time he would stay.

There were indications among the drivers and office staff in lower postgrades of the belief that the company does not reward them adequately for their work. Without directly saying so, one of the white employees hinted that after almost three decades of service, during which time she has never received so much as a warning for neglecting her work, her salary was disappointing, particularly in view of the ever-increasing cost of living. As regards the drivers' wages, one of them said that they were expected to work for poor wages which do not 'come in at inflation', but they remain hopeful either that they would find employment for better wages elsewhere or that their situation would improve because their present employment is all that is available. The idea was also expressed that the company does not adequately recognise work done by all categories of employees which is not part of their job description (see 4.3.4 below), either in monetary terms or merely in expressions of gratitude. For instance, a driver said words of gratitude are never forthcoming, and he referred to an incident when the drivers loaded the trucks because the pilots were on strike. Management did not bother to thank them for their effort and merely took it for granted.

At the time of the research there were frequent media reports of labour unrest, retrenchments, and disregard for the rule of law in various fields of employment (1.5 above). Such reports left an impression of turmoil in the country's labour market, with the situation being exacerbated by the government's labour-friendly rather than economy-friendly labour laws. Yet at the company the atmosphere was one of stability and hard, conscientious work among all categories of employees, low absenteeism and low staff turnover. Research participants were asked to comment on this situation and all of them confirmed that the stability at the company contrasted very strongly with the situation elsewhere in the country. When asked why this should be the case, different responses were produced, depending on employees' perceptions of the company and the outside situation.

One of the white employees with 25 years of service with the company ascribed the stability to the mutual trust among employees and between the company and its employees. He said there was no theft and no discord, factors which contribute significantly to the stability, and which led him to conclude that the company's future looks promising. Unlike a senior male employee, who maintained that the company's stability was because of its white management, another maintained that he did not think that this was true because the appointment of a black manager would have to be accepted by all the employees, and he would be required to produce the results which were expected of him as manager. Later, however, he said that the present stable situation at the company could be ascribed to the white management who exercised firm control over business activities and evaluated sales figures daily. These factors, he believed, justify the continued presence of white management who were doing a good

job, as it were. He also attributed the company's good performance to open discussions between management and the employees, in contrast with what occurs at other companies. Here ordinary employees, black and white, have access to the general manager and do not have to be content to deal with someone at a lower level of management as is common at large companies such as Anglo American Corporation. He questioned whether managers at companies where labour unrest occurs have ever taken the trouble to talk to their employees. Other white employees also believe that the company's stability and success should be ascribed to its white management and the manager's 'open door' style of management, although they too suggested that this is partly because of the company's size, since at larger companies it is impossible for the general manager to be 'available' to everyone.

About the apparent stability and effective functioning of the company in comparison with what was happening elsewhere, a senior driver said he did not know the reason and perhaps he should look more deeply into the matter for an answer. He was prepared to speculate on the quality of management, however, and believes that in situations where management is corrupt the problem inevitably permeates to other sectors of the company. No one will know until an auditor finds out since 'nobody knows what's going on in that business. But I am telling you, in most of the companies, management are pinching money.' The implication of his views was that corruption is the cause of the instability at other companies, and that here management is sound and a contributing factor to company stability and success. Similarly, another driver, contemplating the smooth operations at the company and the absence of strike actions, commented that the drivers are not in a position to strike, as is possible at other companies. Here people work; each driver works alone, and has the responsibility 'for a truck'. The drivers seldom group together, and are therefore not in a position to organise a strike, but also as a matter of principle, they do not strike, preferring instead to 'talk nicely' (*praat mooi*) with management to solve their problems.

Other factors include stability in the staff composition, well-planned and far-reaching changes within the holding company, individual choices and stable personal circumstances among all categories of employees, and the company's strong financial performance.

Inevitably employees' perceptions of the company were also influenced by their ideas about the holding company and the head office (cf 2.2 above) in particular. A white male described the employees at head office 'as competent', with the recent changes in the company being because of their good planning. This view was shared by other employees. Some of them believe that head office 'realises that the crux of the business is located at the company' (cf 2.2 above). Other employees were more sceptical, believing that this is not so and

that people at head office merely take the work at the branches for granted. In addition, various decisions taken at head office were regarded as not being directly in accordance with conditions at the company, so that at times employees were left to wonder about the rationale behind them. As regards listening to new ideas or suggestions, head office was said to take some seriously, but others not.

Senior employees were asked whether there is any sphere within the company where operations can be improved to increase business. Marketing was identified as one such area, but the personnel numbers are too small to expand the marketing and promotions aspects of the business. What is required is someone who is familiar with the particular type of product which the company markets, which is sensitive to price fluctuations, since such a person would be required to deal with dynamic marketing aspects and should be able to make decisions almost immediately in line with market factors which influence prices. Such people are 'impossible to find' however – the company advertised a position but was unable to make an appointment. In fact if a suitable person were to be found, he/she is likely to be 'too expensive' to justify the appointment. An additional area where business can be improved is operational planning, since it was said that what is stated on paper and what is done in practice do not always coincide, hence operations do not always proceed as smoothly as they should.

In the poor economic climate in the country at the time of the research, it was said that it was not possible to evaluate the company's productivity adequately, although it is addressed by management from time to time. It is generally acknowledged that the volume of work generated by the company is handled by a relatively small number of people; thus productivity and turnover are very good in relation to the number of employees. In the previous financial year the company's economic performance had been very good, but this had not continued into the present financial year. In the type of market in which the company operates, June (the interviews were held in July) is identified as a 'poor month', but it was expected that business would begin to improve from the following month.

As regards competition in the market, it was stated that prices of competitors are generally lower, but the company's continued existence would ultimately be determined by the quality of its products. Thus, from an economic point of view it was said that the company has a very rosy future, which an informant ascribed to recent initiatives introduced by top management, and to the company's consistently good financial performance. He believes employee motivation and their desire to ensure the company's continued existence are causative factors. At the present time the company is bigger than its competitors and also the market leader, but to maintain these positions will require dedicated hard work from all the employees. Although obviously not everyone at the company felt

this way, it was clear to the informant that in view of the successes of the recent past, the company has the potential to remain the market leader. With regard to maintaining its good business reputation in a very competitive market, another white employee emphasised the importance to the company of giving suppliers good prices to maintain them and to ensure that their supplies are consistently of a high quality. Various employees said that the company was indeed meeting these criteria.

4.1.3 Person perception

Employees' perceptions of inanimate objects differ from their perceptions of people (4.1.3 above), so-called person perception, primarily because in addition to mental images of people, the latter entails making judgements about others and providing explanations for their behaviour (Robbins 1998:94), thereby influencing interaction between them.

4.1.3.1 Perceptions of the general manager

The general manager's central position as the key figure in the company means that he is known by all the company's employees. For these reasons, some ideas were ascertained about employees' perceptions of the manager, which result from a process of 'sizing him up'. Research participants were therefore asked to express their ideas about the manager, which inevitably were extended to include other people in managerial positions. Discussing the manager was clearly a sensitive issue and it is acknowledged that research participants are likely to have been careful about their responses to questions about him for fear of criticising the most senior member of staff. At times the impression was also gained that perceptions of the manager developed spontaneously in response to specific questions posed during an interview. It is therefore likely that employees have views of the manager other than those they were prepared to express at an interview (cf De Villiers 1993:112). Nevertheless, it was possible to form a general picture of employees' perceptions of the manager, and hence of management at the company in general. Such perceptions are primarily formed through experience or interaction with the manager and ideas about the way he performs his tasks, but they may also be influenced by personality traits of the perceiver.

To a large extent perceptions of the manager can be seen as a type of performance evaluation in that ideas provided by the participants constitute a general assessment of aspects of his functioning and style of management based on his personal traits, and less so of his management of the company in terms of job-

specific behaviour and its outcomes. Such views are subjective and therefore also judgmental, although without necessarily implying that they are unfavourable. They may also be impressionistic. Nevertheless, they have important consequences for the organisation, since employees' work-related behaviour and performance, motivation, confidence in, and attitudes towards the manager, the company and work in general are largely influenced by their perceptions of the manager. Moreover, employees' perceptions of the manager shape their relationships with him.

It goes without saying that the manager is regarded as the most authoritative person in the company by all its employees, and hence as a figure of leadership and legitimate power. There is also the knowledge that the manager has the ability to influence people as well as company matters, the right to delegate tasks, and awareness that he must assume responsibility and accountability not only for his own actions, but for company operations as well. This impacts directly on employees' behaviour, which for one of the older drivers, for instance, means that instructions from the manager may not be questioned, just as children should not question their parents' instructions. For him, it is a matter of doing what he is told, that is, carrying out instructions, since this is why he is at the company.

In the main, research participants had favourable perceptions of the manager, epitomised in the indirect comments of a trader to the effect that if a company has the 'right management', it must 'do well'. Comments on more than one occasion indicated that in relation to the situation three years previously, when the company had not prospered under the previous manager, under the present manager matters have changed for the better at all levels of operations, and the company's financial performance has improved steadily. To the manager's credit as well were comments from a driver that, he, the manager, is trying to change the general climate at the company by insisting that the employees form 'one family', perform 'one job', that everyone forms part of 'one body', and that people should therefore try not to discriminate against others.

A young white male was particularly positive about the manager and his style of management. He said there is always something to be learned from him and this is the type of manager that he would like to become. He ascribed the closure of the branch where he had worked previously to poor management. The manager, he said, never makes a decision in a hurry; if a matter does not work out properly, he does not try to justify his actions by insisting that he did not have all the facts at his disposal; he takes his time before making a decision, and is able to determine beforehand whether a decision will have the desired consequences. He said that others in the company do not share his views about the manager, and that they regard him as too strict, but if he were not strict, discipline could not be maintained, leading to greater problems.

This employee's perception of the manager as not being strict was shared by a single driver. Other employees described him as strict, but fair. Fairness, for instance, was relevant in a driver's view that the manager understands if an employee wants 'something' such as a loan, but he is unlikely to approve an application for 'something' from a driver with a poor work record; one who consistently arrives late for work, fails to deliver properly, returns with part of his load, or is 'cheeky'.

Emerging from their interaction and experience with the manager, employees said that he 'does not mix his words'; when he provides instructions he does so directly without involving a third person, and once he has issued instructions, he checks that they have been carried out. If not, he personally addresses the person concerned. Moreover, the manager is consistent in what he says and does towards all employees, and once he has given instructions, he does not deviate from his decisions, nor will he relax a rule if it happens to be inconvenient to someone. The manager was also said to be 'a negotiator' who does not impose his ideas on other people, although it was also said that at meetings he is inclined to behave in a top-down manner when conveying information to employees and does not consult them first. These favourable perceptions of the manager were said to be traits which employees expect from people in managerial positions.

White employees generally maintained that the manager is always available and has time for everyone. In his involvement with employees, the manager was said to maintain a type of 'open door policy'; his 'door is open' to anyone who wants to talk to him, including the drivers. However, two white employees were ambivalent about this. Although the first agreed that the manager is generally available to anyone, there are times when this is not so, he said, and the manager behaves 'unreasonably'. He did consider that such behaviour could be associated with a particular person, day, or circumstances when the manager was very busy, thereby indicating some distinctiveness in the manager's behaviour in different situations. The second employee questioned the possibility of ever finding a manager whose 'door is always open'.

Among some employees the manager is regarded as the final person to turn to when assistance is required. For instance, a female employee said that although she is used to solving her own problems, if she needs assistance, she will consult the manager, who is usually able to help those who seek his assistance. It is not difficult to obtain an appointment with him. Similarly, white males said that if they have problems which they cannot solve themselves, they go to the manager, who helps as far as possible. The availability of the manager was illustrated by a white employee, who said that when he started working for the company, he was responsible for vehicle control as well as his present tasks, but

found the work load excessive, and consequently neglected certain aspects of his job. He discussed this with the manager, and his request to be relieved from some of his duties was heeded. He also said that in the nature of the company's business, it is important that the manager be readily available, because when his attention is needed, it is usually 'immediately'. For this reason it should not be necessary to wait two to three days for an appointment. He carries a cellular telephone and contacts the manager whenever necessary. If the manager is not busy or is not in a meeting, he assists immediately, and requests that he be telephoned again if the problem is not solved, or, even if it is solved, merely for report-back. A trader also said that the manager is approachable, as are other people in management positions, but he added that on occasion comments have been made that an employee who brings certain matters to their attention is complaining unnecessarily and he should 'go and do his work'. The perception therefore exists that people in management do not always listen to other people, and a problem is left until it becomes 'so big' that it is difficult to solve. Another white male's opinion about the approachability of the manager was that as the senior representative of the company he must be available, but this does not necessarily mean that one would obtain satisfaction from a discussion with him.

Some of the drivers also expressed favourable ideas about approaching the manager. A driver who was asked whether he would go directly to the manager if he experienced problems at work replied that he does so, that is, he goes to 'the person who remains in the office' and he knows he will help. A younger driver, who had recently been employed by the company, had not had reason to consult the manager, but he felt that if the need arises, it would be possible to do so. One of the drivers has extensive personal problems which on occasion he has brought to the manager's attention. The manager's opinion was that such problems are part of life and very little can be done about them. Beyond that, the driver thought that the manager is interested in him and concerned about his problems. The manager was described by another driver as having 'a feeling for them' (the drivers) and what happens to them, therefore he is the 'right type of person' for the drivers. A single employee stated that the manager is supportive of the drivers as regards the difficulties they experience with 'rude' customers (cf 2.6 above), although seeking such support constituted the only reason for consulting him that was shared by the drivers. Some of them said they were 'trying to' consult him about other problems as well.

About the manager's position as chief representative of the company, a senior driver, who regards management of the company as effective, added that if someone becomes the manager of a company, this inevitably affects the entire company and its business. He considered problems which were being reported in the media, for instance corruption at other companies, which he believes are

the result of poor management. It would appear that in an indirect way he was expressing a favourable view of the manager inasmuch as corruption is not known at the company. He also maintained that unlike what other people are inclined to believe, the shop stewards share responsibility with the manager for explaining important matters to employees, for instance why bonuses fluctuate. In this way he was expressing that it is wrong to generalise about someone's actions regarding sensitive issues if all the details required to make a feasible assumption are not available or taken into account.

Despite these favourable perceptions, among the drivers in general the manager is regarded as less approachable. If they have problems, they turn to the company's transport supervisor, another white employee whom they trust, or a shop steward, who, depending upon the problem, may encourage them to accompany him to the manager. Thus less favourable ideas were also forthcoming that reveal relatively consistent negative perceptions of the manager, based on employees' expectations of him, and not only from black employees. The manager was said not to listen to the shop stewards if they approach him with a problem involving the drivers, nor does he 'do anything'. He is perceived as too distant from black employees, but if he took the trouble to talk to them more regularly, matters would improve. A white male commented that he finds it problematic that employees should be told by the manager at staff meetings how well or otherwise the business is performing. Instead employees should be told monthly or even weekly whether the company has achieved its objectives. There is also a general perception among employees that the manager does not trust many people (see 4.4 below).

As regards distinctiveness, that is, manifestation of different behaviour and attitudes in different settings (Robbins 1998:95), the views of a female employee who was very concerned about her relationship with the manager are relevant. She said that he does not understand certain decisions she has to make involving her work; he does not 'take no for an answer'; and employees dare not make an excuse about any issue to him. He was very angry with her when on occasion she made an excuse for her actions. Sometimes, however, he is kind and friendly, but with him there are no 'half measures': a matter is either right or wrong. He is unsympathetic, and before even mentioning anything to him, one is already wrong and in trouble. He does not listen very easily and gets angry quickly. She also suggested that he 'hears everything' that goes on in the company, regardless of how quietly people speak. On occasion when he called someone to his office to be reprimanded, he did not close the door, and other people heard what was said. After an incident in which she was involved, visitors commented on the way in which the manager spoke to her. She said that she is not the only person who has had such experiences, and at least two other females have also complained, yet she was the only research participant to describe her involvement

with the manager in this way. While she may have been the only employee willing to express such ideas about the manager, there were no other suggestions of irregularity in the manager's behaviour and attitudes to this extent. In general the employee ascribed the problem to the manager's 'attitude'.

In contrast with these perceptions of progress in the company under the manager, it was said that since his appointment matters have changed for the worse because payment for overtime work used to be better. (See 2.7.3 above for explanations for reductions in payment for overtime work.) One driver believes that the situation in the company would improve if the manager were replaced, not the conditions under which they work, because people are afraid to do anything in case the manager becomes angry. Without explanation, an informant alluded to the manager's apparent favouritism for people indirectly linked to the company, with resultant neglect of the company's employees. A driver who took the opportunity during the interview to discuss a personal problem was asked whether he should not consult the manager about the matter, to which he replied: 'The man does not have a chance for us.' (*Daardie man bet nie kans vir ons nie.*) He was implying that the manager does not have time for the drivers, and does not want 'to see them' if they have problems. He did not know why this was so or why the manager does not smile at employees when he looks at them. This unfriendly attitude is typical of the manager, but not of other white employees, and as a result he said: *'Ek skrik om na hom te gaan.'* (I am frightened of going to him.) It is best therefore not to consult him. As regards management's attitudes towards the drivers, a driver said that although in general it is 'OK', it is also 'still difficult'. The managers are all white, and the 'workers', that is, the drivers, still experience that they are being discriminated against. If one of them suggests something to the manager, he says he will 'sit down and think' and come back with an answer so that 'they can talk', but this does not necessarily happen. Then a month or two later, one finds that the new idea, that is, the idea which 'comes from your mind', has been implemented, but has been adopted by someone else, usually a white person, who gets credit for it. In addition, there is a tendency among the managers to say that 'unlearned' people, white and black, who make good suggestions 'are trying to get clever'.

Since ideas such as these were largely individualised, it would seem that there are times when experience narrows an employee's focus. What emerges is a one-sided subjective perception of aspects of the manager's being and functioning. In such cases selective perception (4.1 above) is likely, with the perceiver not taking into account the total situation which forms the context of the perception, disregarding aspects because of personal bias or skewed attitudes, or because of a lack of adequate knowledge to construct an informed opinion about the manager. In some instances and strengthening these possibilities, the views

expressed were in direct contrast to favourable ideas about the manager.

4.1.3.2 Perceptions of co-workers

From information relating to the 'person perceptions' of the research participants, their perceptions can be categorised in terms of general perceptions, which concern all the employees of the company; perceptions of people across colour boundaries; and what may be referred to as a type of 'self-perception', namely perception of people of the same racial group.

The most significant of the general perceptions were those emanating from senior managers as a result of their holistic view of the company and its employees. In some cases their views were confirmed by employees in other postgrades, but frequently there were direct contradictions in the perceptions of employees on different postgrades because of limited involvement with the target of the perception, the context within which the target is located, and individual experience and attitudes towards other people.

According to a senior manager, employees of the company are all regarded as 'human beings', treated accordingly, and are expected to behave in appropriate ways towards one another. The company has never really had any problems, with the apparent exception of the small number of female employees who occasionally are a problem, but 'not too serious'. It was said that the female employees have all 'had their things' and some of them have even shouted 'ugly things' (*lelike goeters*) about others in the offices. Such behaviour or 'fighting' is distasteful and bad within the office environment. In fact an employee insisted that in the presence of a stranger (the researcher) matters were much quieter than usual.

In view of the small number of employees and the volume of work generated in the company, the idea of conscientiousness as relevant to all the employees, but particularly the office personnel, was heard several times. For the same reason, cooperation was reported as typical of the office personnel, an aspect of their functioning which was confirmed by observation. Cooperation between employees was said to be one of the company's strongpoints, and a white male believes that there is no other company where employees cooperate so well. It is not possible to run a company where there is conflict between employees and then expect the financial performance at the end of the month 'to be successful'. He ascribed the success to cooperation and good relationships between all categories of employees. Employees regularly communicate with one another and are at liberty to ask others for information or assistance, not only with a work-related task, but also if for instance, someone must attend to personal financial matters or consult a doctor, with the exception of manning the tele-

phone switchboard (according to a female employee), a task which members of staff generally dislike. People do not stay away from work for no reason, the number of resignations is extremely low, and accordingly staff turnover is very low, contributing to a stable workforce. It was also said that employees 'know' what their posts require of them, work accordingly, and there are no indications of 'social loafing'. In this way the company has an advantage over larger companies where two or three people are involved in the same position, and one individual could 'disappear' in the group. A white male employee described the employees as 'self-motivated', and said that most of them would 'go the extra mile'. Generally nobody says this is 'not my job', although there have been situations where people have been asked to help, but have insisted that the matter was not their concern. These situations applied to persons who had not been involved with the task from the beginning, or lacked appropriate experience. Such matters could also be explained in terms of a combination of other factors, such as the quality of an individual employee and the general circumstances under which everyone works.

Without identifying the person they had in mind, two of the younger white employees referred to a manager whom they admire and respect. Both described the person as someone who communicates very well; treats others with respect; is a good listener when one has a problem; does not shout, and is not impatient. He attempts to understand others and does not turn an issue into an argument. It is not known whether they were referring to the same person, but it is clear that their descriptions reveal their perceptions of an ideal manager.

One of the white employees believes that the drivers deserve greater recognition for their services in view of the dangerous circumstances associated with the high crime rate under which they work. He was asked how the drivers deal with the uncertainty of their situation and said that there is a great deal of fear of highjackings and armed robberies. A driver's comment to him that he may not be able to complete his deliveries because once he leaves the yard he may be shot dead and his truck stolen illustrates this perception.

Some less favourable perceptions about co-workers were also evident. From time to time conflict has developed among employees. For instance, after a power failure one night the company's computer system went 'off-line'. A customer called for an early delivery, but as a result of the power failure his order could not be met, and an altercation developed between the employee responsible for the order and the computer operators. Once the problem had been identified and solved internally, the customer was contacted and the matter explained. The occasional conflict evident in people's behaviour and attitudes towards others was also explained by referring to the small number of employees, because if one person is absent, someone else must stand in for him/her since there is only

one person per post. This situation is exacerbated by pressure generated by the volume of work. A female employee also said that some employees 'shout' and 'make a noise', supposedly people who do not understand others, or who easily 'become very excited' about something. She also said that sometimes people come to work in a 'bad mood', and 'moods are contagious'; the bad mood affects everyone else, and eventually everyone becomes depressed. The same applies when people start swearing at others; eventually everyone is angry. Consequently, at times the atmosphere in the company is strained. Employees were said not to talk openly about such incidents when they occur. A white male was concerned because in general white employees 'do not stand together', which makes it possible for them to be exploited.

A number of drivers commented on the possibility of people being friendly and treating others with respect, but when their backs are turned, 'you don't know what's happening'. In spite of this, one of them believed that 'I take it they are respecting me, like me'. About the same matter, another of the drivers said that people appear to listen to what the drivers have to say, but when they (the drivers) 'are outside', 'they' (management) talk among themselves and exclude the drivers. So, too, a white employee said that people watch to see where they can 'bite', that is, harm, one another, and he questioned the validity of the information they provided during the interviews. Even though he works well with other people, he regards them all as hypocritical; people say one thing, but do another, or they chat amicably with someone but in a different context say that that person was 'talking nonsense'. Superficially everyone gets on well with everyone else, but this is not the true state of affairs. He did not know whether the reason was jealousy, but one of the first things he noticed soon after he joined the company was enviousness among white employees.

On an individual level, a female employee commented that she feels sorry for the traders, and for one of the older men in particular, because of the cold conditions under which they work. The man she identified has a chronic chest problem and has spent a long time in a hospital undergoing treatment. She described one of the other traders as very kind-hearted and a 'fantastic' person, someone with whom she has established a good working relationship. She also mentioned that on occasion some of the employees work very late but do not receive overtime payment. As far as she can tell, the male employees also get on reasonably well together.

White research participants were far more outspoken in their views, favourable and unfavourable, about the black employees than the reverse. Most of the white employees regard the drivers as responsible people with very good attitudes towards the company. One said that '*bier is fantastiese drywers by ons*' (there are fantastic drivers with us), and as illustration he referred to a driver who had

been involved in an argument with a customer, who insisted that the weight of the goods he had ordered was incorrect. The driver hung on the customer's scale and told him to write down his weight. Back at the company, he weighed himself on the company's scale to determine the accuracy of the customer's scale. Similarly, one of the traders said that the company has 'good drivers', even though from time to time it is necessary to assist the black employees in various ways. Like other research participants, he said that mutual assistance among the drivers is good, and that they are aware that if matters do not proceed smoothly, this is not only to the company's detriment, but to their own as well. Because they have been working together for so long, many of the drivers regard the company as their own. Similarly a white employee who has daily contact with the drivers regards their attitudes towards the company and work in general as 'very good'. About occasional dissent, he said that there are always a few individuals who would never be satisfied, and that the more things that are done for them, the more they demand, but since the company moved from its previous premises he has become aware of a marked improvement in the attitudes of the black employees. The drivers were also said not to be 'interested in the word "striking"'. In the past when the company experienced financial difficulties, a number of employees were retrenched, which made a great impression on the drivers. As a result, they are aware that if the company does not do well and business suffers, they too will suffer. Thus they are also concerned about how well the company does. They earn a reasonable salary and are 'not of the type of worker' who strikes 'for any reason'. A manager described the drivers as 'relatively educated' and 'well brought up'. They are not merely a group of labourers, but are a 'different type of person', that is, people with whom one can talk, rather than unschooled workers who are still overly concerned about their 'culture' (ie traditional way of life). White employees were aware of the different identities of the drivers and that the majority speak Zulu, but were not aware of any conflict or problems between them because of these differences. As a result, matters at the company were said to proceed very smoothly. (*Dit gaan eintlik baie lekker hierso.* 'It is actually going very nicely here.')

A trader who justified his views about the drivers on the basis that he spends most of his time among black employees, implying that he was in a position to be knowledgeable about them, said that they are positive about their situation, which has improved over time, but he did not know whether other whites shared this idea. People might say everything is 'OK', but not really believe this, or they were hiding the truth. A black employee, he said 'is a person.' (*Hy is 'n mens.*) Commenting on his relationship with the black employees, another of the traders said that years ago he used to hate blacks, but as he has got older he has adapted and believes his own children 'would find their way more easily'. The

Bible says that everyone was made by the Creator, good and bad, and one finds whites who are also bad. In fact a bad white person is worse than a bad black person. About their recently acquired black colleague, the traders said he is 'pleasant', 'a good soul' ('*n goeie siel*'), someone who 'does not give problems', is 'polite', but was still 'being helped' by his white colleagues.

One of the managers said that the drivers understand 'every detail' about matters that concern them, including issues such as how overtime payment is determined (see 2.7 above), the company's profit on the products it markets, and basic principles of business operations. Nothing is hidden from them. Management speaks directly and plainly to them and therefore they are aware of the costs of their transgressions and mistakes to the company. In contrast, as regards the drivers' understanding of the business or whether they merely work to earn a salary, a white male informant said he thought it was a matter of 50/50 – 50% to work for money and 50% because of an interest in the company, what it comprises and the nature of its business operations. There are one or two who do not 'get on' with the other drivers, including people from their own ethnic background, but, he said, he 'takes care' of them. He ascribed the situation to a clash of individual personalities. The lack of disturbances at the company is because the drivers are responsible people and there are few instigators among them. Instigators, he said, currently constitute the greatest problem in labour relations. He has noticed that lazy people, or poor workers, cause the most problems because they want to earn money in 'an easy way'. The informant, who regards himself as knowledgeable about 'black people's manners', said that in the past if a black person sat down while talking to a white person he would be beaten, but now he knows that such behaviour is part of 'their culture'. He acquired his knowledge from working with people from Mocambique, and 'Zululand', among other places. He knows that one group behaves in one way and another in a different way. Now, when he sees indications of typical behaviour, he deals with it according to his knowledge, while other whites are bothered by it and say that the blacks are 'becoming white'.

One of the managers indicated that he is aware that there are a number of drivers whose families live elsewhere, which he regarded as 'probably an old fashioned tradition' (*'dis seker 'n outydse tradisie'*). Some of them, he said, 'must have a woman' in the urban area and one at home. He said he did not understand why their 'heads worked in this way'. Some of them still talk about the 'homelands' and have tribal affinities, and 'traditions and values'. In fact their wealth was situated 'there', that is, at their homes in the rural areas, although a number of drivers have bought houses in an urban area.

The drivers were said to play a very important role in portraying the company to the outside world, since it is they who are in direct contact with the

customers. Their appearance, the way in which they handle their deliveries, and the neatness of their trucks are very important since they represent the company to the outside world and are part of the company's general marketing and advertising strategies. Cooperation from the drivers is therefore essential for the company to function effectively. One of the white employees said that in view of recent results achieved by the company, he believes that the drivers were providing the necessary cooperation.

Yet in spite of the predominantly favourable comments about the drivers, other more negative views about them were also forthcoming. One of the traders based his negative view on the fact that some drivers always have shortages, to the extent that this constitutes a pattern. It was also stated that since the new government came to power, matters at the company have changed. Black employees are no longer as obedient (*'geboorsaam'*) as before, and readily talk back. At the same time it was said that the law has changed and one 'must tolerate their nonsense'. Another of the 'traders' said that although he has never experienced any problems with black employees, some of his colleagues have, particularly with the pilots, who refuse to listen to them (*'sukkel met bulle, bulle luister nie vir bulle nie'*). Some of the drivers are irresponsible, less conscientious and less concerned about the interests of the company than others. For instance, they make their deliveries at their own pace, or return to the company with part of the load undelivered because it was late, and as a result a customer does not receive his order. Such behaviour was regarded as a form of tit for tat, with the drivers concerned spiting their white supervisors for providing instructions that did not appeal to them, such as having to make a second round of deliveries. In such cases the customer is the loser, but the company also faces the possibility of losing a customer if he/she is dissatisfied with the service. It was also said that there is an element of 'carelessness' among some of the drivers, particularly as regards paying attention to the loading of the trucks and making sure that there are no shortages in their deliveries. At times, though, it was also said that the drivers do have legitimate complaints, for example when one truck is not fully loaded, while another cannot contain the full volume of the orders, making it difficult for the driver concerned to deliver the orders in time. The orders should have been more evenly distributed among the trucks, ensuring an equitable distribution of work among the drivers.

Perceptions of the drivers as 'careless' are also based on information received from customers. Occasionally a customer has reported that a driver does not do what he is supposed to do, for instance by deviating from his scheduled delivery routes.

One of the white employees maintained that the drivers expect that each person's individual circumstances be taken into account and the company to

treat him/her accordingly. He said he would like to be able to do so, but such an approach is only possible within limits. To illustrate his meaning he referred to problems he experienced with a driver who was often late for work. This driver owns two cars. The informant's argument was that because the driver can afford two vehicles, he must have the money to drive them. If they break down, he cannot be permitted to arrive late because he spent work time fixing his vehicles. It is therefore unavoidable that eventually money will be deducted from his wages. The informant was asked whether the type of reasoning that he had just described, namely that by consistently arriving late, as a result earning less money, and finding it ever more difficult to fix the vehicles, was lacking in such an employee, and he said he thought so. Similar incidents involve two or three other drivers who 'just think about themselves' and have no concern for anyone else or for the company. Part of the informant's argument is the existence of a perceived 'work ethic' among whites that is absent among blacks. As a result, to motivate blacks to work hard and to put greater effort into their work, payment for overtime work is awarded. Such payment, he said, may also be regarded as a means of disciplining the drivers, 'keeping them in hand', because maintaining discipline is 'number one', and should be applied to all categories of employees. Without discipline, the company would not be able to function adequately.

From the same informant came the idea that each driver has ways of behaving which are problematic and it is difficult to keep track of them all. Some complain to him about their low salaries, to which he responds that he too earns very little, but has learned over the years to be satisfied with what he receives. Others are 'chancers' (*kansvatters*) whom, in a nice manner, he said, he very quickly 'puts in their place'. He referred to a driver who did not return to the company after completing his deliveries. Everyone thought that the driver and his truck had been hijacked and the matter was reported to the police. The driver returned the following morning at 9:00 and as a result of his behaviour money was deducted from his wages. The informant said that it is essential that the drivers should be responsible people, and if they were not, it is his duty to make them responsible, since they cannot be permitted to leave the company with a load worth between R70 000 and R80 000 if they are irresponsible.

A white male said that blacks are afraid to talk to whites because of the history of domination in the country. He said that he has found that from working with both blacks and whites the quality of work has improved even though the amount of money generated has decreased. He added that in the past in political terms he had been 'far right', but this is no longer the case and he treats 'his' blacks (those with whom he works) as they currently live, that is, in accordance with the current changes in the country. He said that if a black person works well, he must be paid accordingly. An employee who does his work is 'not

a problem'. When there is time for play, employees play, but during work time they must work.

Although not to the same extent, black employees provided some ideas about their white co-workers. One of the drivers said that there are a few white people who 'shout', ie speak aggressively, rather than 'make peace and love'. People are not the same, and it is possible that those who 'shout' are just short-tempered. The longer one works with them, the easier it is get to know them.

Another driver said that as far as black-white relationships were concerned, nothing has changed since the end of apartheid. The whites still think there is a 'difference between people'. One could see this because they do not try to hide their attitudes. Although they were trying to change, it is difficult for them to do so, consequently 'separation' enforced by the attitudes and behaviour of certain white employees is still present in the company. Sometimes the drivers discuss the situation among themselves and they all feel the same, but acknowledge that things are changing slightly, and that it might take 'two or three years' for proper change to occur.

Either in response to specific questions or as part of a discussion of various other issues, perceptions that black employees have of other blacks were also forthcoming. A senior black employee said there are no problems among drivers of different ('mixed') ethnic groups. They are all responsible people and share a sense of common purpose for the good of the company. In line with this idea one of the drivers said that he 'takes them (the drivers) as brothers'. They can swear at him, but this does not bother him, because they have been working together for a long time; he knows them and they know him. Among some of the drivers there is also a perception of positive changes in the attitudes of their black colleagues since 1994, and black employees are no longer inclined to view the company as the sphere of whites only. Consequently relationships between them and white employees are greatly improved. It was also said that the drivers realise that jobs are scarce and therefore tend to look after their work. If the company is profitable, they know that they too will benefit. One of the drivers said that when they meet to discuss their complaints, they act like 'gentlemen' and are not there to 'fight' with their employers. In addition, once problems between different drivers have been solved, they 'start to be friends again', and 'start to be happy', although not all of the drivers feel that way - 'only half of them'. The 'other half' are different, but it is not known exactly who they are or how they feel.

More negatively, one of the drivers said that he and the other drivers were 'working like a stranger', meaning that in his view the drivers are not regarded as 'full' employees of the company by certain of the other (ie white) employees. He also maintained that a small number of the drivers are irresponsible because

they do not look after their jobs, although he was not the only driver to express this view (cf 4.2.1 below). Not looking after one's job is relevant when, among other matters, 'somebody came late every day for work; if somebody came late, you know they must start at 7 o'clock, they come at half past 7; you can come late, but not every week'. He was aware that many other people have transport difficulties and may not be on time because buses and taxis often run late, but they also struggle and are unable 'to make ends meet', yet they are at work on time, so why not the company's drivers too? As regards the need for drivers to observe the loading and off-loading of their trucks, an elderly driver said that those who fail to do so are unconcerned about their behaviour, but when matters go wrong, they are the first to complain: '*Hulle worry nie, maar altyd as bulle hier kom bulle huil 'so short, so short', maar bulle staan nie by die customer nie.*' ('They do not worry, but always when they come here they cry, so short, so short, but they do not stand with the customer.')

Interviews with the drivers often left an impression that they are reluctant to refer to their colleagues particularly about problematic issues, and frequently their comments were in line with 'they do not talk about it', implying that the drivers do not discuss certain issues among themselves. For instance, a driver who was asked about other drivers' experiences with the pilots said that he did not know 'because they don't talk about it'. While the reason might be that the drivers are afraid that if they complain too much about the pilots, they could place their jobs in jeopardy or perhaps they do not wish to discuss their co-workers, this seemed strange because of the seriousness with which the drivers view the problems associated with the pilots (2.5 above).

4.2 The meaning of and attitudes towards work

4.2.1 The meaning of work

In this section the emphasis is on the significance and value that work has for employees in the sense of what they hope to accomplish by working or what, in retrospect, they have accomplished by working in a particular way. There is no clarity on the absolute meaning of work, except that it concerns activities which people regard as gainful activity, which means that work has different meanings in different contexts. In general terms, work constitutes a central issue of life, is frequently more significant than other activities, is separated in time, space and purpose from people's other roles and activities, particularly leisure-time activities (cf Gamst 1981:8), and is followed by various rewards which are rated in comparison with rewards for other activities. The meaning of work is also unique to an individual and is therefore personal and individualised (cf Brief & Nord 1990:2-3, 12, 13, 15; Salaman 1997:237). In the context of the work situation,

'meaning' is therefore used as a general term for people's values, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs associated with work, but to simplify matters in this study the meaning of work is regarded as people's purposeful activities with the objective of earning financial rewards to ensure a living. The meaning that work has for an individual is accordingly determined primarily by economic and subsistence needs, which also means that wealth is a contributing factor in determining the meaning that work has for people (Brief & Nord 1990:9). In addition, the more an employee perceives a link between his/her efforts and attainment of company objectives, the greater the meaning that work will have for the individual concerned (Carrell, Elbert *et al* 1999:122).

In the company work is broken down into occupations which transform into specific but related tasks. These in turn (see 3.1.1 above) constitute the basis for group formation in the company, involving functions, roles, techniques, knowledge, and patterns of behaviour which are appropriate for particular types of work (cf Applebaum 1984a:2). As a result the occupations are more than just a way of earning a living. In spite of theoretical compartmentalisation, which primarily serves the purpose of analysis, within the company each type of occupation or work complements every other (Wallman 1979:8), so that no employee's tasks are isolated. It is therefore not feasible, for instance, to consider the work of the drivers and the meaning it holds for them without seeing it in relation to other work processes.

Against this background, the meanings which research participants ascribe to work were ascertained, and in doing so, they were asked, amongst other matters, to explain the importance that work has for them, and to indicate what it would mean if they lost their jobs. It appears that there is a difference between what may be regarded as predominantly 'white' perspectives of work and 'black' perspectives. White perspectives may be described as an orientation towards work in terms of time, turnover and 'getting the job done' to achieve the objectives of the company, perspectives which emphasises that 'time is money'. This is related to the long-term time perspective of business operations which finds expression in regulations regarding time of arrival and leaving work, concerns about the time taken to deliver a consignment of orders, preparation of vital sales information at the end of the month, the existence of a clock-in/clock-out system, and meetings to discuss figures relating to a particular period of time. All these factors imply that employees are organised on the basis of time, and suggest a strict time orientation towards work in the company in general. This contrasts with the apparent perspective among black employees that work consists of tasks that must be or have been completed daily, in line with a more short-term or present orientation towards time, although this does not mean a lack of awareness of the significance of time in regulating company operations.

While recognising the possibility of forced interpretation of research data, the following discussion is nonetheless presented to provide some indication of ideas and beliefs which point to meanings employees ascribe to work. This is followed by an indication of attitudes towards work. The distinction between meaning and attitudes, and therefore the presentation in the text, are arbitrary, since it is virtually impossible to distinguish between them in any significant manner. However, details such as those presented can facilitate understanding of work-related behaviour and its impact, for instance, on productivity and staff turnover.

Several factors were seen to shape the meaning of work for employees, the first of which was the purpose of work. In response to the question of what work means to a particular employee, it was indicated among all categories of research participants that it is a gainful occupation and that people work to earn money to support themselves. For example, an elderly driver said that his work was important because he needs money and if he loses his job he would establish a *spaza* shop at his home. To a trader work constitutes his 'bread and butter', while another driver indicated that the importance of his work arises from the fact that people who do not work turn to crime, do not have money to buy food, clothing, a house, or cannot afford to get married. The purpose of work was also specified in terms of being in a position to make a contribution to the company and its particular form of business, and on more than one occasion of supporting a family, specifically that it gives 'children their food and pays for their schooling'. When they are 'unhappy', the drivers 'just work' because of their children and their needs.

Work also acquires meaning as a result of an employee's participation in the operations of the company and involvement in life in general. This relates to the 'concrete reality', which refers to the work environment and factors within it, that is, factors external to the individual and controlled by someone else, as well as to realities of employees' lives which help shape their ideas about work and the meaning it has for them. These factors together constitute the context in which work is undertaken. When a driver said: 'It's part of my life. I got to take care of my life, so meaning, I take care of my job', he was expressing the existent nature of work as a central factor in his life. For a number of research participants the meaning of work is related to job scarcity, being unemployed and hence the security of fixed employment. To a driver, for instance, the desire to live a good life means one must look after one's work. There are many people 'on the streets' who are looking for employment, but cannot find any. Someone who has a job but 'plays' with it is looking for trouble. It is very difficult to find work, so he said, he 'prays to Heaven to help him to look after his job'. His work keeps him and his family, and if he loses it, he loses everything. There are people

who do not feel this way. These are people with 'naughty manners' (*stout maniere*), who steal and break things at work and move from place to place without considering the consequences of their behaviour. Since he started working eleven years ago, he and his family have 'never known hunger, not even for a single day'. To him therefore it is vital to look after his work.

In line with this view on the importance of looking after one's job, there was general agreement among research participants that there are people who neglect their jobs, not only at the company but in society at large. These are people who are only interested in being paid at the end of the month and who tend to neglect their work as well as other aspects of their lives. A driver commented: 'To get a chance in life you got to understand what are we going to do in the new South Africa. Some of my colleagues they don't realize that.' To encourage his co-workers to look after their jobs, he tells them: 'You see we are working here in this company. It is a big company. We got problems here. We got responsibility of work here. We got to tell them look after your job – we are working against time here; we start at 6; we start at 7 o'clock and end at 5 o'clock; some of us start at 6 o'clock and work till 4 o'clock. But I have to explain to them, we are working nine hours a day, so if you start at 6 o'clock you must put up nine hours; you must know that we can't go off in that time, the company we are on and off – so I got to explain to them ... that look, you have got privilege ...' They should not abuse it, for instance by going shopping in working hours.

About the same matter another driver said that he tells his co-workers: 'Once you are from a place and you come to work, you said you are going to work, so you got to respect the job. While you go out, you got to pay respect to the customers.' Not every one feels this way and some of his 'people', implying blacks, do not take their work seriously: 'What is it that makes them not to be concerned about their work. Maybe a lot of money or maybe no children or one child. So find another job or maybe to get money or something, forgetting that he is getting up, he is getting older. It is that thing that can fire him or [he thinks he] can get another job in the meantime.' Pursuing the topic that people know that jobs are scarce, he said: 'We don't think like that. We don't think like that. See, I have got a driver's licence now, ... they can hire me.' His argument was therefore that there are people who believe that because they have a qualification, whether it is a driver's licence or a BA degree, they will find a job easily. They believe they can leave one company, go to another and be hired. He said that 'with us people, they have got that thing. We don't think about our lives and how important losing your work is. At least we (including himself and the researcher) are thinking how important it is, I mean, let's say a retrenchment from here. I am going to feel painful. Where am I going to buy meat? You see – am I

going to get the right stuff or what? With me I can see it is not nice.' If the company were to close down, he wondered whether he would find a similar position elsewhere ('the right stuff'). He said that people who leave with the idea that they will find employment elsewhere were making a big mistake, and it was not something that he could 'promote'. If one has a job, 'do it, keep the job even if it is painful and one dislikes the job'. Once a person is employed, 'you got to enjoy the job', even if matters at the company where the person is employed are unfair.

Another driver maintained that if one has a job, even 'a difficult one', it is wrong to complain and not to want it just because it is 'hard'. He said that 'you just carry on' and ensure that you 'do not get separation of this job. You ... are supposed to respect that because if you don't, maybe separation.' He recalled an incident when the pilots and management were involved in a disagreement. To keep business going, the management hired a number of 'casuals' to replace the pilots, some of whom complained that the work was 'too heavy', i.e. too difficult. Although loading the trucks is hard work and physically exhausting, because the goods are heavy and the trucks large, as unemployed people these casual employees 'had no right' to complain, he said.

A white male said that because his work is extremely important to him, he comes to work early in the mornings and sometimes only goes home late. He stated that the previous week he had been at work at 5:00 one morning and only went home at 21:00, without any right to claim overtime payment. As far as he is concerned it is the business that counts. If the business does not make a profit, the employees will also be affected. Therefore, he works in the interest of the company because eventually this will be in his own interest as well.

An older driver echoed the ideas about work being very important; he enjoys the process of working and working for the company, and for these reasons he was 'pushing his work' and 'pushing the new South Africa'. This seemed to indicate that he associated his work with the new political dispensation in the country and by promoting this, he was actually doing something for the country.

Work as a driver also means a particular form of involvement with other people. The drivers must interact with customers. If they are unable to do so effectively, or if they regularly confront irate customers (2.6 above), they are subjected to considerable tension. Work therefore means composure and self-restraint in the presence of rude people. For some of the drivers this is an aspect of their work which they would readily do without. One of them said that he feels that he lacks adequate experience to deal with the customers and their attitudes, thereby indicating that dealing with them is difficult. He felt that the company should provide the drivers with greater input on different customers and their demands and behaviour.

For a white male, work constitutes a form of escapism and the long hours he works, he said, are good for him – work keeps his mind occupied and is a diversion from his grief over the untimely death of his only son. He works hard and has the satisfaction of knowing that he has saved the company thousands of rand as a result of the initiatives that he has introduced. He said that he has been able to reduce previous expenses of approximately R250 000 or R260 000 to R65 000, without a reduction in the quality of the company's operations, which had actually improved. This idea of work satisfaction contributing to meaning was also alluded to by a driver who indicated that when his work proceeds smoothly, for instance if he finds a new address where goods must be delivered, it becomes satisfying.

The meaning of work is also related to experience. For instance, drivers commented favourably about their responsibilities in terms of doing what they had learned previously or, as in the words of one, he was doing his 'experience job, making deliveries', it is just the products that he delivers which are different. Another driver said that he has 'always been a driver', which is a 'responsible job' because of having to deal with the products of the company; facing danger on the road every day; checking that he is in the right place at the right time, and preventing accidents, as well as losses to the company. With a driver's licence an employee must know 'what they need, what they [the company] doesn't need, what you supposed to do, what you doesn't suppose to do'. Such comments imply that the drivers felt that they were doing what they were competent to do, and with which therefore they feel comfortable.

Two research participants had been retrenched by other companies which clearly influenced the meaning that their work has for them, specifically security. A driver who had been retrenched from a company where he had worked for 15 years was employed by the company after a two-year period of unemployment. He described this as a time when he had 'to stand'. He worked on a temporary basis for about a year before he was appointed permanently, permanent employment being 'better' than temporary employment because 'at the end of the day I get a package or something like that. If I get an injury or I get ill, I know that I can be paid. But now if you are a temporary, if you are ill, then you get nothing at the end of the day.' When he was retrenched, life had been very difficult and he had suffered a lot, even though he had received a retrenchment 'package'. At first he did nothing except work out a budget according to which he would use the money. Then he started to look for another job. When about half his money remained, he was employed on a temporary basis by the company. He said that he was very lucky to find the job, also 'because I was praying, looking for the job, you see'. There are 'plenty of people' with a code 14 driver's licence who are unemployed.

One of the females who had also previously been retrenched said that her work is reasonably (*redelik*) important, but added that it would be very difficult to deal with retrenchment if it occurred again. She believes that the more one learns, the better one's chances are of obtaining employment elsewhere in the event of retrenchment. Accordingly, she was grateful for the opportunity provided by management to incorporate additional tasks into her job description, which resulted from the company's association with another company in the same group, even though this meant that she would have to move to the other company. She indicated that the nature of the products that the company markets also adds meaning to work, since it is important that the company maintains its suppliers and ensures that the quality of their supplies is consistently good.

Another female employee, who has been with the company for thirty years, said that her long service was why her work was important. Thirty years of service with a company of necessity means that one's work is important. She added that the satisfaction she receives from working is also because she is not someone who can 'sit still': she would not be able to remain at home since she is too active. Not once in her thirty years of service has she ever considered leaving, and in this time she has seen many people come and go, as well as the downsizing of the company over the past four to five years.

Research participants' expectations, direct or indirect, were also seen to play a role in the meaning of their work. For instance, a white male said that there were speculations of changes in the company, as a result of which he believed it necessary to do his best in the hope that when the changes come, he would be among those who 'enter that door'. The inclusion of tasks that had not been specified in the original job description provided a male employee with an opportunity to meet a challenge imposed by the work environment, and contributed to the idea that any additional work he does will be noticed by management, and thus to the expectation that he will be duly rewarded.

4.2.2 Attitudes towards work

Closely related to the meaning of work in a dialectic relationship are people's attitudes towards work and the work situation in general, since underlying the meaning they ascribe to work are their attitudes. As evaluative statements concerning objects, people, situations and events, attitudes express a person's fundamental values. They reveal how people feel about something, thus when an employee says 'I like my job', he/she is expressing an attitude towards work. Attitudes have three components: cognition, affect and behaviour. In this study

behaviour, which concerns the way in which a person intends to behave, is the most important, although it cannot be divorced from the cognitive (evaluative) or affective (emotional) components (cf Robbins 1998:140-141).

Attitudes, which may be favourable or unfavourable, constitute selective orientations in that they direct a person's preferences, interests, choices and behaviour, and are based on beliefs which to the holder of the attitude are always true, whether this is feasible or not (Theron 1999:186, 187). People's attitudes towards various aspects of the work situation are difficult to ascertain through direct questioning, but some information could be inferred from research participants' discussions of other phenomena, particularly their intentions and behaviour, since people relate information that confirms their attitudes and disregard information that does not (Theron 1999:188). Also relevant is that in some cases the attitudes were those of the research participant being interviewed, and in others the participant was commenting on the attitudes of others.

The work environment may exert pressure on employees to behave in particular ways that actually contradict their attitudes, and people may have feelings about a matter without revealing them in their behaviour. This implies that the behavioural component of an attitude may not be very strong; consequently work-related attitudes are not necessarily good predictors of behaviour. Nevertheless, attitudes within an organisation are important, because in some way or another they do affect job behaviour. An investigation of attitudes provides valuable information on how employees perceive their working conditions, and in part explains why employees, as a group or individually, view policies and practices as unfair or discriminatory, which in contrast, management regards as fair and equitable. That such perceptions can lead to negative attitudes towards work and the organisation should be important to management. Since an awareness of attitudes can be regarded as early indications of employees' intentions, and because they underlie behaviour, they can provide early warnings of problems. This places management in a position to be proactive in seeking solutions to workplace conflicts and tensions (Robbins 1998:149). Encouragement of and support for favourable attitudes by a company's management may ultimately contribute to higher productivity, lower turnover and reduced absenteeism.

There are various types of attitude that may be interpreted in terms of job satisfaction and its converse, job dissatisfaction, job involvement, organisational commitment, and attitudes towards other people in the company. Because the distinction between them cannot be regarded as hard and fast, the discussion which follows must be regarded as a tentative account of job-related attitudes and should also be seen in conjunction with the discussion (4.3.1 above) on the meaning of work.

Job satisfaction concerns a person's primarily positive attitude towards his/her job, although it is unlikely that a person will be fully satisfied with all aspects of his/her work and may therefore be satisfied with some aspects and dissatisfied with others. If an employee feels or thinks positively rather than negatively about aspects of the work situation, one can refer to a general disposition of job satisfaction (Theron 1999:191). The reverse of course is also true. Someone with a high degree of job satisfaction has predominantly favourable attitudes towards the job and is likely to be more productive, in contrast with someone who is dissatisfied and whose attitudes towards the job are primarily negative (Robbins 1998:142). Job satisfaction is determined by the quality of the tasks an employee is required to do, perceptions of fairness, particularly as regards remuneration, a work environment conducive to effective performance, ie acceptable levels of temperature, light, noise, movement and fresh air, access to technology, supportive co-workers, particularly people in leadership positions who are seen to have employees' interests at heart, and disposition towards life in general. Besides being conducive to work performance, job satisfaction also manifests in support of the organisation in the face of criticism, and trusting the organisation and its management to operate effectively at all times. It can be encouraged or promoted through constructive attempts to improve conditions, for example by affirming an employee's contribution to the company's operation, suggesting ways in which improvement can be made in business operations, discussing problems with superiors, or through participation in union activity. Job satisfaction does not imply an absence of dissatisfaction, however.

From information provided by research participants it can be deduced that job satisfaction is generally expressed in terms of being happy at work and enjoying working for the company, that is, without precisely indicating to what the satisfaction is ascribed. For instance, the idea was expressed that job satisfaction is more important than money, but without any explanatory comments. One of the female employees said that she was less concerned about the money she earns: being happy in one's work is worth more than a salary, because money does not always allow one to buy the good things in life. An elderly driver who is approaching retirement said that he is happy where he is, and that his work 'is good'. Similarly, a female employee commented that she enjoys what she does, it is something to keep her busy – and she is happy with the people with whom she works. It would therefore be difficult to decide whether to accept a job offer elsewhere if this should arise. During extensive interviews with a white male, he frequently commented that he was 'coming up' for the company when problematic issues such as payment of overtime work, were discussed. His frequent comments about the company's market leadership in the face of severe compe-

tion and its positive future suggest a high level of job satisfaction. This particular employee was identified by others as one of the most hardworking and competent employees of the company. The average period of service of the research participants (1.4 above) and the hesitance with which many of them said they would ever leave the company for employment elsewhere are also indicative of a relatively high level of job satisfaction among all categories of employees, in spite of some indications of job dissatisfaction.

Job dissatisfaction can be attributed to a range of factors, including the impact of other people's actions on one's work, systems regarded as inadequate or unfair, and perceived inequities in the reward system expressed in terms of inadequate remuneration. This results in employees becoming demotivated and alienated from their jobs, the work process, and in some cases the company as a whole (cf Applebaum 1984a:5). When job dissatisfaction spreads to other aspects of the work situation, employees are more likely to express their dissatisfaction in some way, for example by directing their behaviour towards finding new employment or through premature resignation (Robbins 1998:143, 156, 157), although there were no indications of such actions actually being present among the research participants.

In contrast with indications of job satisfaction, research participants were more inclined to identify the source of job dissatisfaction, either within the organisation or outside it (cf Carrell, Elbert *et al* 1999:107). Factors originating within the organisation include, first, inadequate or problematic supervisory practices manifesting in interpersonal conflicts. A trader commented that he finds it highly disconcerting to experience problems with customers because other employees have not done their duty. On occasion he had reported a matter which bothered him to a manager, only to be told that he was complaining unnecessarily. A problem must be attended to as soon as it develops, he said, particularly if it concerns a matter for which he is responsible. He also related a recent incident when he submitted a request for particular products that had been ordered by a customer. When the goods were not provided, he was obliged to obtain them from a competitor. This was not the way in which business should be conducted. He said as much within hearing range of the senior people who were involved in the incident: *'Ek het dit kliphard in die kantoor gesê voor al die menere wat dink hulle is menere ... maar ek gee nie om nie want dis die waarheid.'*

Other internal factors which could be contributory to job dissatisfaction include grievances about the clock-in/clock-out system (2.7 above), incessant complaints about overtime payment (2.7 above) and theft (2.10 above).

External factors causing dissatisfaction are illustrated by the problems the drivers experience with customers (2.6 above). The drivers often complain about the customers, both to their white supervisors and to the shop stewards. One of

the shop stewards described a situation where a driver was unhappy about the attitude and behaviour of a particular customer, and he advised him to deal with his dissatisfaction by determining why the customer 'was shouting' and then to 'keep quiet or wait outside or try to encourage him'.

The managers are aware that some job dissatisfaction occurs among the employees, but this was rationalised in terms of there always being a few people whose personal dispositions would never allow them to be fully satisfied, and that the more that is done for them, the more they complain or demand. Since the company moved from its previous premises, however, it was said that there had been a marked improvement in attitudes, particularly of the black employees, and therefore greater job satisfaction. Yet, a driver said that they (drivers) just 'have to work' and they do not enjoy their work.

Job involvement refers to the extent to which employees identify psychologically with their jobs, and regard their levels of performance as important to the development of a sense of self-worth. Employees with a high level of job involvement identify strongly with their work and are particularly concerned about it (Theron 1999:191-192). They tend to be absent less frequently and have lower resignations rates. Among research participants high job involvement was also seen to suppress other matters, including complaints. For instance, an employee said that as a driver he has many problems that he could discuss with management 'for himself' and not for other people, if he so wished, but he would not because he 'likes the job'.

Patterning could not be identified in research participants' views that reveal job involvement, although in his views on the matter, a manager said that there is high degree of job involvement among all the employees. He described them as 'very conscientious', particularly the office personnel, and said that employees do not merely stay away from work. There is general awareness among employees that input into company operations and ensuring that matters proceed smoothly are not only in the interest of the company, but eventually to their own benefit as well. Among people who hold such attitudes, work is obviously a priority.

A number of employees commented on the importance of being responsible for their actions, thereby revealing their level of job involvement. As someone who is responsible for an entire section of company operations, a white male believes it is necessary to control whether delegated work has been done. He referred to the 'sandwich method' (*toebroodjie metode*), by which he meant that a supervisor should point out a person's strong points and where he can improve on his activities, but also reprimand him for his errors. This is how he had been trained and how he performs his work, but this type of attitude, he said, is not typical of everyone who works for the company, since there are

people who are willing to allow matters to slide. They merely do what they must do and are unwilling to 'roll up their sleeves' and do something extra because in their view there is always someone else who will do the work. A driver specified the limits of his job involvement in terms of his responsibilities, namely that he needs to look after his work, his truck, and the money which he receives from the customers. Similarly, another driver described his work as 'very responsible', because once he leaves the company, he is responsible for the truck, its load, the people who accompany him, as well as himself, so that 'at the end of the day I am responsible for five things', although this responsibility also means that he must take the blame when things go wrong and for shortages on his deliveries. In spite of positive comments such as these, two of the managers confirmed that there are instances when people blame someone else rather than accept blame for their own actions. It is not always possible to 'pinpoint' who is responsible for an error if two, three or four people are involved, and indicates that the persons concerned avoid taking responsibility for their actions, but this placing of blame constitutes an internal problem in the company which, it was said, is receiving attention. In most cases problems were said to be the result of carelessness or negligence and were not deliberate actions.

Job involvement also entails looking after one's job. When asked how he would feel if he lost his job, a driver said: 'It would be painful. But the thing is it's not easy that I can lose my job except if I make a blunder, or if I never respect my job. But now I'm trying to respect my job. Trying to keep it. Make sure that everything is done. To please my managers ... also to please myself.' He added that his salary is important but 'I don't take it at much ... the thing is the job ...' In contrast one of the senior drivers said that a small number of the drivers are irresponsible because they do not look after their jobs: 'job gives your living, living for our home, living for ourselves, because now if you are out of job, how are you going to live?' Not looking after one's job is also relevant when 'somebody came late every day for work; if somebody came late, you know they must start at 7 o'clock, they come at half past 7.' Also in line with the idea of looking after one's job, a trader said that today if one has a job, one must 'keep it'. He started his working life in the Police Force at a time when this was 'fun', and not for the purpose of making money. His present work is financially a far better option. He believes that if people enjoy their work, there is no reason to change jobs, particularly if they have spent many years at the same company and are accustomed to the way in which things are done. To illustrate his involvement in his work, he commented that he had recently undergone a knee operation which the doctor said would keep him away from work for between three and six months. However, 28 days after the operation he was back at work.

The company allows the office personnel relative freedom as regards the

performance of their duties and office attendance, but in return there are times when the company expects employees to attend to urgent matters outside strict office hours. In such cases they are not in a position to state that they only work from 7:00 to 15:00. Employees' views about this reveal something about their job involvement. Those with high job involvement insist that if people wish to develop their careers in the company, they should be willing to do something in addition to their normal tasks. These are usually matters which the people concerned are able to do. It also constitutes a way of obtaining experience and if people want something badly enough, they should work for it. Such attitudes apply to the majority of employees, since most of them indicated that they would 'go the extra mile' and help out when someone is on leave. Generally nobody says that 'this is not my job'. In line with this, a senior white male said that he enjoys his work, immerses himself in what he does, and would not easily leave the company. If he complained, he would be complaining for nothing. In contrast, employees with low job involvement do not go out of their way, for instance to occasionally stay late to complete a task, or they insist that what cannot be done today can be done tomorrow. Although no employee said this about him/herself, comments were made about situations where other people have been asked to help but insisted that the matter was not their concern.

Job involvement is also expressed as pride that people have in their work. What they do, they do with pride, not only for payment, but also out of a sense of achievement. For example, an employee said that most of his time goes into maintaining and ensuring that the trucks are clean, and he keeps a file for each truck in which he records its condition, age, mileage, and other details. As a result he is confident that he can send any truck onto the road with the certainty that it will reach its destination. When he had pneumonia, he came to work because he finds it impossible to stand aside and allow the work to 'flow past' him. He is proud of what he does, in spite of his dissatisfaction over the lack of overtime payment and the energy and time his work demands of him. He also said that, without casting reflections on other people's work, in addition to his prescribed tasks he is able to market the company's products, and can even manage the company. He then questioned other people's ability to do what he does and their preparedness to put the same hours into their work. He said that no one else would have lasted as long as he has, particularly not if the irregular hours that he works and the salary that he earns are taken into account. He regards himself as 'overworked and underpaid'.

People's pride in their work can be apparent in other ways. A male employee commented that if he were to leave he would take 'everything' with him, all the files and records which he has kept, because whoever takes over from him would not be entitled to his work and would have to do his or her own planning and

filing. He does not believe that it is right or fair to leave what he has achieved to someone else who will be given credit for it.

Job involvement was also apparent from comments that revealed an employee's conscientiousness. Responding to a question on how he could improve his work, a driver said: '*Om my werk beter te maak moet ek roer, moet ek die tyd sorg, om my werk te doen, om my werk op die tyd klaar te maak.*' ('To make my work better, I must move, do my work, to finish my work in time.') The manager would notice his good performance, and he would know that this man 'moved' (*die man het geroer*) to get his work done. In any case, he said, when he returns, he always cleans his truck, ensures that everything is in order, and that no problems can be identified regarding his work.

Organisational commitment means the extent to which an employee identifies with an organisation and its objectives, and wishes to remain a member of it. High job involvement means identifying with one's specific job, while high organisational commitment means identifying with the organisation where a person is employed. An employee who reveals both is also likely to have a high level of job satisfaction. An employee might be dissatisfied with his or her particular job, however, but be satisfied with the organisation as a whole; the reverse may also be true. Although research participants gave information that suggests organisational commitment, there is no certainty that this is indeed the case. For example, when an employee says that he/she would not resign, this could be the result of other factors, such as being close to retirement, lack of other job opportunities, or a personal inclination to avoid change, and does not necessarily imply organisational commitment. More often than not, leaving the company is related to earnings, with research participants, particularly the drivers, insisting that they would leave if they were to earn bigger wages. Frequently, the impression was gained from research participants' views that they perceived themselves to be highly committed to the organisation, while other employees are not. This can be explained partly as employees' attempts to justify and defend themselves and boost their self-esteem (cf Theron 1999:187-188). Nevertheless, in totality the information leaves no doubt that there is a high level of organisational commitment among all categories of employees, and in spite of some negative attitudes and generally unstated problems regarding work within the company, there is a common sense of functioning for the benefit of the company (cf Applebaum 1984a:4).

To determine organisational commitment employees were asked whether they had ever considered leaving to work somewhere else. A senior white male said that he has had several job offers from other companies, but he did not accept any of them. He has a family and is not prepared to change just for the sake of changing jobs, and is satisfied with his position in the company. Simi-

larly, one of the 'traders' commented that some years previously he was offered a position by one of the company's competitors at a time when the company was not doing very well financially. At the same time his own manager encouraged employees to act as buyers for other companies, which the informant did, and earned a lot of money in the process. Although he did consider moving to the competitor on a full-time basis, he decided not to, but believes that if he had moved, he would have taken many of the company's regular customers with him. At the present time he does not want to change his job, and has his pension to consider, and in any case, he said, he is not the type of person to move from one job to another.

Another employee said that he too has received excellent offers from other firms, but he is loyal. His view is that the company looked after his needs at a particular stage and he should reciprocate because employees should not only try to gain what they can from the company, but contribute something in return. Thus, although he had considered the job offers, he decided against accepting them and believes that he has a good future with the company. He added that he would also encourage other people to come and work for the company if this were possible. Similarly, another white male said that he has turned away many job offers because he enjoys working for the company. His work is a challenge and he 'learns and sees many things'. On the same subject another male employee said he prefers to remain where he is, while two female employees commented in similar terms; the first said that the situation 'outside' is very difficult, so for the time being it is important to remain stationary, and the second stated that in the many years that she has worked for the company she has never considered going elsewhere. Another female employee said that she finds working for this company better than at any of the others where she was previously employed, where there were larger groups of women who constantly argued amongst themselves. Here this is not the case and working conditions are very pleasant. A white male, whose comments revealed both high job involvement and organisational commitment, said that his positive attitude towards his work explains the manager's confidence in him. He does not mind doing something extra and he sees the recognition for this in the annual merit increases.

The drivers were also asked whether they would leave the company if they found jobs elsewhere. One said that he 'could leave' (*'Ek kan gaan'*), but he has many years of service and believes that he will lose a great deal of money if he leaves. If he were to announce that he was leaving, the company would not pay him what he is entitled to, so under no circumstances will he ever leave. An elderly driver said he did not think he would leave the company since he loves his job, and has been involved in it for a long time (*'ek loop lank pad met hom'*; 'I have walked a long road with him'). In addition he will receive a pension when

he retires. He enjoys working for the company and regards it as his own business.

Organisational commitment was also expressed in terms of not having problems with the company. For instance, a driver mentioned that he has been working for the company for about 18 years and he knows his work is good ('correct'), because no aspect of his work has ever been queried and he will work for the company until he is told that he can 'go home'.

Attitudes such as these reveal that there is a great deal of loyalty towards the company among the employees. This is perhaps best illustrated by the comments of the driver who said that he was aware that inferior goods which originated from the company were being sold at a particular outlet. He told his wife not to buy at the store and also to keep the matter secret. When asked whether other people were also not entitled to the information and to buy quality goods, he replied: 'Ja ... but part of my product I don't like to lose. I don't want my company to lose that customer ... because let people realise [themselves] that there is something fishy there. OK ... I like my company.'

4.2.3 Attitudes towards others in the company

The discerning reader will be aware that attitudes towards other people underlie much of the information in section 4 of the report. Here some attitudes that research participants' views revealed towards co-workers are emphasised. Outstanding among them were attitudes towards members of a different racial group, even when research participants, both black and white, were not specifically asked to express ideas about this.

In his account of his relationships with others in the company a senior white male said that while he is prepared to listen to the opinion of his black co-workers, he should be allowed the same opportunity. People are entitled to their ideas, as he is, and if they acknowledge this, it is possible to come to a compromise and understanding of differences between people. He agreed that such attitudes are fundamental to the establishment of a relationship of trust between co-workers, which allows them to respect their 'otherness'. However, not everyone in the company shared these ideas, he said. Some whites obstinately refuse to recognise that blacks also wish to make something of their lives, and that as human beings they too have aspirations and feelings. Many of the drivers have initiative, but some of the whites begrudge them any form of betterment of their positions. The informant pointed out the importance of establishing a relationship of trust with black employees which would ensure that they feel comfortable in the presence of others, and are not afraid of being criticised or humiliated. In the past there were no such opportunities. Others at the com-

pany do not have such attitudes towards their black co-workers and in attempting to account for this, he considered the possibility that such people still regard themselves as superior and do not want to see black people on the same level as themselves. He described a situation that developed when the newly appointed black trader became a target for exploitation by the whites who worked with him. A certain number of platforms, trucks and traders are involved in the loading process (2.1 above). The unequal numbers mean that the traders do not have the same number of trucks to attend to every day and inevitably on a particular day one or two of the traders will be responsible for loading more trucks than the others. This usually becomes the responsibility of the person who is available towards the end of the day's loading. However, the white traders deliberately tried to impose the loading of the last trucks onto their black colleague when they had already completed their own loading and could see to it themselves. Had they been successful, it would have meant that everyday the black trader would have more work than the white traders. They justified their actions by insisting that the man is black. The traders were reprimanded for their attitudes, and the matter was brought to the attention of the manager, who confirmed that their behaviour was unacceptable. The black trader was also aware of the situation. The attitudes of the whites were described as very destructive, and an attempt to destroy the morale of someone who had been appointed to a particular post, who had ambitions of his own, and whose work was said to be excellent, in fact better than some of the whites. Since this incident there has been a marked change in communication between this person and his white colleagues.

Bad language usage was also a problem among the same group of employees, but this too was addressed when they were told that such behaviour is unacceptable and they were asked how they would like to be spoken to in the way in which they speak to their co-workers. This too contributed to significant changes in their attitudes and behaviour.

Contemplating whether people with such attitudes would ever change them of their own accord, a white male said that he believes that this is indeed possible. The people who hold such attitudes had never had the opportunity to benefit from a course where, for instance, instruction is given on the establishment of good interpersonal relationships. Clearly, he said, there is a need for such courses, particularly for people who are in direct and frequent contact with people of other racial groups, something he has mentioned to the manager. He added that he thought such people would be willing to participate in a programme of this nature. People must start somewhere and learn about issues pertaining to the differences between themselves and other employees, and not always 'close the door'. The matter of colour, he said, is 'completely out'. One

of the traders commented on the drivers' wages which, in comparison with what he earns, are so low that he does not know how they manage to survive on them. He 'feels sorry' for them – he has been working with them for twenty years. But what can one do, he asked?

In spite of the expressed decrease in attitudes such as these among white employees, one or two persist with racist attitudes, but these were said to be attended to as they are revealed. If the people involved persist, their actions are brought to the attention of the manager to ensure that the wrongness of their attitudes and ideas is impressed upon them. In contrast with the attitudes of whites, the attitudes of the black employees towards white employees were described as 'very positive'.

As regards discrimination within the company (4.5 below), it was not uncommon to hear drivers refer to apartheid as a reality in the company, with an indirect reference to the attitudes of some of their white colleagues towards the drivers. Thus the idea of apartheid suggested not only separation between different racial groups, but also the unpleasant attitude of some whites towards blacks in general. One of the drivers said that 'they must know they cannot come to you and talk to you like they don't think you are a person, you see ... they respond by saying your fault, and they don't listen to me when I talk – I don't hear myself ... just because I am the boss for you, you must listen what I say finish and *klaar*.' He meant that because of some people's attitudes, it is impossible to discuss matters with them, since they refuse to listen. He suggested that only when people (by implication those to whom he must report) change their attitudes and are prepared to listen and deal with the drivers' problems, will 'the company grow up'.

Similarly, another driver said that the attitude of management towards the drivers was 'OK, but now we workers are still having that discrimination'. Another one said: 'It is apartheid here ... Plenty.' Here there has been nothing like the changes that have occurred elsewhere in the country, and he believes that it will take a long time before matters do change. To explain his meaning he said: 'It is going to take a long time because even when you try to say ... here and here, but the law does not say it is like that. You see, they tell you straight ... I am working with you here. So maybe tomorrow morning I come in and make a cup of tea for you and I clean there and there, and you drink your tea there, and I forget to take that cup there and put it on the right place, and they say to me, if you don't want to do that, you must know that the gate is open. What is the meaning of that? You are under pressure for the whole day ... I just work because we are a group of people you see, and we just work, we see that the new South Africa is bankrupt ... Now here, if you done something wrong it doesn't check you like the person who have the brains. They just harassing you, ... you

don't understand what they want to say to you, you see. They just harassing you – if he doesn't want to work, he must know that there are plenty people standing outside – you see something like that. You find at the end of the day you get the pain on you heart. You have woken up you see, going to the door, going to be harassed.'

This driver was also concerned about the matter of payment for overtime: he said: 'When you are not too satisfied, they say you talk too much', and 'when you go and ask they say you talk too much'. He was asked whether he had taken the matter to the union, he replied 'No I didn't go. I start to hear and then they say I can tell the union.' He said the blacks sometimes asked among themselves 'Why is that guy still like this?'

Another of the black employees described the attitudes of some of the white employees towards the blacks employees as 'still backwards'. He was asked whether attitudes such as these could ever change, to which he replied that change is possible, but the problem was that the people who retain such attitudes are mostly the older people at the company. Such people even try to convince him about a matter concerning another driver in an attempt to 'undermine' him when they 'show' him something about another employee. Thus, he said, the correct thing to do is to try 'to advise them, try(ing) to convince them'. The problem therefore is linked to rigidity in attitudes associated with age and longstanding discriminatory attitudes towards blacks.

It is clear that people's attitudes towards black and white people and perceptions of them are influenced by their experience outside the work context. A white male contemplated the amount of corruption which occurs in public life. He maintained that because blacks have regarded themselves as deprived for so long, they now wish to enrich themselves. Once black people have been appointed to a particular position, they feel that they have achieved what they set out to do, and consequently only do what is required and nothing extra. He did not think that this type of mindset would ever change. He was asked whether he had a great deal of contact with the black employees and he replied that he did, but contact with them would never mean that he would discuss his views with them or they theirs with him. He added that some day he might want to learn more about the culture and traditions of the blacks, but not at present since he has more important matters to attend to. In the business world, where time is of the essence, it is difficult to communicate with the people about non-essential matters. He was also asked how he would react if the company insisted that he acquire knowledge about other people's cultures that would have a direct impact on the business. He answered that he could not foresee a problem with such a request, provided time was set aside during office hours for input sessions. Having to attend to such matters outside working hours would be problematic. Life

was already rushed and outside working hours, he makes time for himself, his family and friends. Considering what he would do if he occupied a responsible position and was approached by a black person who wished to discuss a matter or wanted assistance, he said he would definitely try to help. There have already been such instances, since he does not mind helping people, but it would depend on the type of problem involved. He would provide advice, but ultimately the onus would be on the other person to solve his own problems. He would tell him what steps to take, but if the problem kept recurring and there was no change, he would not ignore the person, but he would no longer be as concerned about him.

4.3 Motivation

4.3.1 General comments

The focus on behaviour in this study draws attention to motives that underlie the behaviour of employees. Consequently research participants were asked to express their ideas on what motivates their behaviour or how they see or interpret motivating strategies introduced by the company. Since strategies and incentives that are designed to motivate people and influence their behaviour are culturally determined, a company characterised by sociocultural diversity will have some difficulty with the complex matter of deciding about strategies that will reward or motivate all its members (Hoecklin 1993:85-86), and it is also unlikely that management and employees will necessarily agree on a reward system based on subjective issues such as 'good interpersonal relations', 'appreciation of work done', or a 'feeling of being in on things' (Mead 1998:200). Consequently, objective factors are also essential in the design of an incentive system. The context in which a motivating system is applied influences the extent to which it motivates performance, and as a result such systems are primarily company-specific (cf Mead 1998:195). Motivation cannot be divorced from other aspects of corporate activity either, since people's attitudes, conflicts, behaviour and experiences are closely linked with motivating procedures.

The literature, particularly from the fields of organisational behaviour, business management and industrial psychology, distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and, by implication, between internal and external motivating factors. Both are relevant in this study. The psychological dimensions of the process, which concern internal motivation, are referred to in passing, although some ideas and principles were borrowed from these disciplines for interpretation purposes. Research data indicate that at times motivation and job satisfaction are regarded as the same, while it was also apparent, particularly among the black employees, that motivation is readily interpreted as encouragement. There

were numerous factors about which employees felt negative, and which therefore are demotivating. These were external factors as varied as aspects of company policy, concern about the general economic conditions in South Africa, salaries which were believed to be inadequate or inequitable when compared with salaries paid for similar work at other companies, excessive supervision, relationships with co-workers, theft and congested working conditions. The resultant demotivation is associated with diverse problems in the work environment and influences people's attitudes towards their work, the company and co-workers (cf 3 above).

Although factors other than money motivate performance, the most important motivator in the company is money. This is not unusual, and in the context of the company where many employees' needs are primarily for monetary rewards which can be converted into goods and services to satisfy their and their dependants' physiological and security requirements, this is understandable. In addition, as a motivator a good salary or wage package justifies a person's sense of self-esteem (Mead 1998:198), indicates one's value to the company and reflects one's achievements. It is also a means of rating oneself against other people and with oneself in terms of previous achievements (Mead 1998:199). However, salaries or wages are not always the most highly valued reward for working and by implication the promise of a pay rise or monetary incentives may not be the most effective motivator, nor may they be regarded particularly seriously (Mead 1998:199). In the company the relevance of this evaluation depended upon the category of employee involved. The lowest category of employee, ie the drivers, attached far greater value to monetary rewards than employees in higher postgrades where recognition featured predominantly in research participants' comments (specifically white employees) on motivating factors. Other non-monetary incentives include achievement and job satisfaction. No mention was made of the need for advancement, promotion or more challenging or interesting work, which are also regarded as important motivating factors contributing to job satisfaction. Motivation and motivating factors also varied between people according to age, service history, education, family obligations, and position in the company (cf Applebaum 1994b:16).

4.3.2 Monetary incentives: company strategies

At a senior level it was stated that the need to motivate employees arises from the need to improve productivity and therefore to work harder, matters said to be receiving attention at managerial level. In fact the company has different incentive schemes to encourage and motivate employees at all levels, which include salary/wage increases and bonus and/or incentive systems. Not only do the systems contribute to effective functioning, but they also give employees

feedback on their performance, and allow them to assess their positions. This, it was said, applies in particular to the white or the salaried personnel. In information on motivation provided by research participants the incentive bonus systems received considerable attention.

The incentive system for the traders and office personnel (ie salaried personnel) comprises merit increases on the basis of interviews between management and the employees. A significant aspect of this system is that it allows an employee to evaluate him/herself annually according to particular criteria. This evaluation is studied by management to determine an individual's merits, who then, at a meeting with the employee concerned, indicates where he/she allocated too many or too few points. The annual increase is determined according to this evaluation. Employees can interpret their contribution to the company, the quality of their work, and effectiveness of functioning on the basis of the size of the merit increase. One informant said that the previous year he had received a 10% increase and he interpreted this as significant affirmation of his value to the company because statistically it has been proven that 10% constitutes a very good increase. It implies that the employee has not been idle and that the company is satisfied with his/her work. An increase of less than 10% implies that the employee has been slack. It was also mentioned that in considerations for increases management takes into account an employee's willingness to do work that is not included in his/her job description, hence the importance of 'going the extra mile'. The implications of this system are that an employee is largely responsible for improvement in his/her financial position, that a salary and the ability to earn a living are in an employee's own hands, and that conscientious work is rewarded by management. There are employees who complain, but they were described as people who fail to do their work properly, do not broaden their spectrum or acquire new skills, and are satisfied to maintain the status quo. There is no justification for their complaints and, it was said, these are the people in whom management does not have much faith. With regard to the merit increases, one of the traders indicated that he is unconvinced about the extent to which this exercise determines an employee's increase. Management, he believes, ultimately decides upon the size of the increase, and by implication, the outcome of the self-evaluation is not taken seriously. The merit increase is not the same as the annual bonus, which constitutes a further incentive for salaried employees.

A separate incentive bonus system applies to the drivers. About three years ago the company introduced an incentive scheme designed to encourage hard work and to reduce various work-related problems among the drivers. It is based on the evaluation of an individual's performance in terms of a number of performance criteria. An initiative of management but approved by head office, the

bonus system was introduced after discussions with the drivers. The system was worked out in conjunction with the NPI, including all the points of evaluation, what is expected of a driver, and how the system should be implemented. The drivers have been fully informed about the system, and how it functions, and they have been told that they will not receive a bonus at the end of each month if their work does not meet the required standards and their performance during the month was unsatisfactory. 'Satisfactory work' entails returning from deliveries within an acceptable time, not having shortages on the orders which they deliver, being on time for work, and keeping the trucks clean. Since the size of the trucks varies, the tonnage is also taken into account, because this influences the size of a load and the number of stops a driver must make on a route which, in turn, impacts on the speed of his deliveries. Consideration of such factors implies that the system has been thoroughly investigated. The bonus is added to an employee's wages at the end of the month after amounts are deducted for unsatisfactory work. The incentive bonus therefore fluctuates according to a driver's 'behaviour'. Accordingly, a driver commented that if management sees his truck leave at about 8:00, that he returns about midday, that there were no problems with his deliveries and his truck is clean, they will know that he has done his duty, has completed his work well, and will be entitled to the bonus at the end of the month. Company management is convinced that the system constitutes a significant motivating strategy, since it is possible for a driver to add substantially to his monthly wages from the bonus system. The perception among management is therefore that it works very well.

With the bonus payments, the drivers receive a document indicating the total volume of goods they delivered, its value and the time they took to deliver the goods, as well as a form on which the customers they serve have entered a score out of five to indicate satisfaction or otherwise with the service provided by a driver, the neatness of the driver and his truck, as well as any comments they may wish to make. This is a relatively simple system, but the details are taken into account in the assessment of the bonus. Sometimes drivers look for excuses about the length of time it took them to make a round of deliveries, or they state that the truck gave problems and broke down. In legitimate cases the details are noted and taken into account in the calculation of a bonus. When asked how well the drivers understand this system, a respondent replied at first that they understand it 'reasonably well' and then later that they understand it 'well', even though it has taken time for them to get to grips with it. There are times, though, when they look at the 'bottom line' only, and are merely concerned about the amount of money they receive at the end of the month, meaning that they are less concerned about the reasons for a reduced bonus.

Given the confidential nature of their incomes, the drivers were not asked

how much the bonus amounts to every month, but whenever the incentive system was discussed the general comment from the drivers was that 'we don't see it', not meaning that they had not been paid the bonus, but that after deductions there was very little left to make a difference to a wage package. Although some of the drivers who were interviewed provided information that corresponds with the intended benefits of the incentive bonus, from all the others the information that was obtained indicated that they regard the system as unfair and that deductions from the bonus mean that they are being punished. It is clear therefore that in the minds of the drivers the bonus forms part of their wages. Few were able to indicate the size of their bonus because, as one of them mentioned, the company 'mixes up' different components of the wage package and the bonus is included in the basic salary. He said 'each month they just write out papers', that is, the paysheets. He does not know what goes on the paper, nor does he understand 'how they write them'. This lack of understanding among some of the drivers was confirmed by a senior driver, who said that although some drivers do understand the incentive system, they want the bonus in full every month. They do not understand the value or meaning of 'incentive' or why the bonus fluctuates. If approached by a dissatisfied driver, a shop steward would explain to him that 'sometimes you come back with shortage, sometimes you are late, sometimes you have an argument with the customer', all of which are taken into consideration in the determination of the incentive bonus. When a driver was asked where he thought the solution lies to the problem of lack of understanding of the incentive bonus system, he said that one must sit down and explain the matter to the drivers 'or they won't be satisfied. People are looking for money; they want money, but they don't understand even the value of what I am saying; they still want some more money. You must explain, because one comes and asks some questions to this very thing.' In his experience therefore he has found that even if a matter is explained to someone one day, the following week it must be explained again, in spite of earnings and deductions being specified on the monthly paysheets (cf 2.7.3 above). It is therefore necessary to explain 'what is it, it works like that; the truck was late there; the delivery was OK or it was not OK; it takes so many hours to do deliveries and you have lost so much time, and you came late'. This driver was also asked what other incentive system could be introduced for the drivers, to which he responded: 'The company must educate the people ...' It seemed that he had in mind a programme of in-service training, since he added that 'most of the drivers, most of them ... you can talk with them today, you can start with them today, then one comes to you to find out ... and you must start over'. It would seem that what is relevant here is that the drivers either do not have adequate information at their disposal to conduct aspects of their working lives meaningfully,

or they do not understand the information related to them, ie there are barriers inherent in the communication process (cf 2.13.2 above), and a custom-made form of in-service training focusing on the company, its objectives and mode of operation would go some way towards meeting this need, resulting in less resentment, greater understanding and greater productivity.

Comments such as these indicate that in spite of what certain white employees believe, not all the drivers necessarily understand how the incentive bonus system works, and that when the bonus is paid regularly it is taken for granted and regarded as part of the regular wages, as a result of which the bonus may no longer motivate greater effort. The reduced bonus produces disappointment, dissatisfaction, resentment, and hence may be demotivating (cf Mead 1998:199). Employees may therefore become defensive and engage in behaviour such as being excessively judgmental and distrustful (cf 4.4 below), question the motives of other people, and make sarcastic or negative remarks about the company and its employees in particular. Thus, in spite of the system and its potential benefits, some drivers frequently agitate for more money and provide ready explanations for matters which don't meet company approval. From management's side it was said that such people are unlikely ever to be satisfied, regardless of incentives introduced by the company. Management believes that the time of paying uniform salaries to all employees who belong to a particular category is past, even though it is apparent from negotiations with the union that the union prefers uniform salaries or wages to differentiated ones. Although the company pays the drivers uniform wages, the introduction of the incentive system after negotiations was intended to differentiate between workers and to remunerate them according to the way in which they do their work. The union that participated in the discussions accepted the incentive system, which also suggests a change in attitude amongst its leaders. The amount paid as part of the system has been increased and it is envisaged that ultimately regular salary increases will constitute a smaller component of the wage package and the incentive bonus a greater part. Given the significance, present and future, of the company's incentive bonus system, it would seem to be imperative that everyone whom it targets should clearly understand its purpose and how it functions.

Approximately once per month a meeting is held at which matters are discussed such as figures of monthly turnover, and the sales for the month in comparison with other months, ie whether the company is still on target to meet its production goals. These are confidential matters, but set the target for company production for the next month, and are therefore interpreted as a motivating factor. Only office personnel attend the meeting. The drivers are not involved, since it is believed that they do not know what 'creditors' and 'debtors' or other aspects of accounting are. The informant who provided this information indicated that to motivate the black staff one needs to communicate with

them in their own language, and encourage them to work harder and to look after their vehicles, thereby justifying their absence from the meetings.

4.3.3 Reinforcement

Reinforcement, which refers to the notion that behaviour which has pleasant consequences may be repeated, whereas behaviour that produces unpleasant results is unlikely to be repeated, is often regarded as the most significant behaviour conditioning factor, and therefore motivator (Robbins 1998:72-73). Through reinforcement strategies, behaviour is acquired because it is reinforced by reward which constitutes a stimulus for repeating the behaviour. Punishment, however, is also a reinforcing factor, and consequently behaviour can be inhibited when it is reinforced by punishment. In the work context consequences which a person interprets as rewarding and meaningful are regarded as positive motivation, while consequences which are experienced as punishment and unpleasant may be regarded as negative motivation, which is not constructive. In positive motivation the intention is to reward correct behaviour and not to punish incorrect behaviour. Conversely, negative motivation focuses on punishing incorrect behaviour which does not promote appropriate behaviour. Its significance as a motivating factor to ensure effective behaviour is therefore limited. In addition, negative motivation can also have the following undesirable consequences: first, if it is associated with reprimands and hostility for poor quality of work, resentment can be generalised to other aspects of work, resulting in a negative attitude towards the work situation in general (cf 4.2.2 above). Second, punishment can make a person avoid the punisher rather than discontinue the behaviour that leads to the punishment. This means that undesirable behaviour may be continued with the perpetrator making efforts to avoid being caught. Third, a focus on negative behaviour can actually encourage an indignant person to persist in it, since frequent confrontation with what should not be done may encourage resentment and a continuation of the behaviour (Theron 1999:167), almost 'getting one's own back'. If this reasoning is correct, it might help explain the drivers' negative perceptions of the incentive bonus system, their dissatisfaction despite its apparent financial benefits, and negative comments about the work situation and the manager in particular, as a result of what may be an unconscious identification of the most senior person in the company as the source of their problems and hence their avoidance of him. Also relevant here are comments by white employees that deducting money from drivers' bonuses at the end of the month only helps for a short while before they relapse into their former 'careless' manner of going about their work.

4.3.4 Recognition and expectancy

Earlier it was mentioned that white employees rate recognition as a motivating factor (cf 4.3.1 above). In terms of Herzberg's two-factor theory, recognition is regarded as a 'motivator' of proper behaviour (Smit & Cronjé 1997:312). Research participants were therefore asked to what extent they value recognition or acknowledgement by the company, including head office, for work well done or for doing work beyond what was ordinarily expected of them, and then to indicate to what extent such recognition was forthcoming from management. The intention was to obtain their ideas about verbal recognition, but responses indicated that recognition also entails financial reward.

As far as recognition from management is concerned, it was mentioned that the manager recognises input and thanks employees for hard work at meetings with office personnel which are held from time to time. However, it was also stated that although it is obvious that management is aware of the input of employees, particularly those who are in the frontline of contact with the public and have a particular responsibility as far as marketing is concerned, recognition from the company management and from head office in particular is not always as one would wish it to be. The belief was expressed that senior executives at head office should be a little more 'positive' in their approach and comment personally to employees on their successes. The employees who indicated this maintained that everyone in the company felt this way and that there should be more feedback to employees and more open discussions.

Among the white employees the idea of additional effort being taken for granted was heard repeatedly. For instance, without hesitation one of the traders said that doing anything beyond one's normal duties is taken for granted. He is regularly consulted by members of the management team about prices of a particular product because of his extensive knowledge and experience in dealing and marketing it, but he is not given any credit, even if the information is used to solve a particular problem or contributes to a successful marketing strategy. In his comments he said that this type of issue had occurred before the company moved from its previous location and that 'all the managers' acted in this way, thereby suggesting that it is a longstanding issue which has impacted negatively on his perceptions and relationships with all the members of the company's management, past and present.

A younger employee, who stated that he often puts in extra hours and comes to the office earlier than required, said that he felt that he was not receiving adequate recognition for his input. However, he qualified his ideas by insisting that he is still learning and that it is important for him to do his best for the company. One must 'crawl before one can walk'. He added that he is ambitious, and ultimately reminds himself that he has a stable job that must be looked

after. He said that he does receive some verbal recognition, but not financial recognition, even though in the short time that he has been with the company he has received good salary increases as well as upgrading to a new postgrade and a new position, although the company's recent financial performance was not as good as had been expected and the value of its shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange had decreased. To justify this view, he said that he compared his situation with a co-worker who earns the same salary but puts far less effort into the work. However, he said he is still young and believes that this situation will change in time.

For another informant the lack of recognition is manifest in not being paid overtime for the extra time that he has to work (2.7 above). He pointed out that the company is aware of the additional hours that he puts in, including weekends and public holidays, and the positive consequences of his actions for the company. At first he received some gratitude for what he did, but no longer, and no notice is paid to what he does. He felt that he was entitled to some form of recognition. He believes it is unfair that white employees are not paid for overtime, and also discriminating and indicative of a lack of recognition of their input (cf 2.7.4 above).

A temporary employee was told at the time of his appointment that he would receive medical aid benefits and contributions to a pension fund, but these have not materialised. Consequently he felt that he was not receiving due recognition from the company.

This discussion points to three dimensions in the generally negative responses to questions on recognition. First, negative responses were pervasive among the employees. Second, the white research participants often commented on having put extra effort and time into their work, that is, beyond what was expected of them to ensure the success of the company, with the justification that such effort was to the company's benefit, but without recognition, either verbal or financial being received from management for their input. They were going 'the extra mile', not for their own benefit, but for that of the company. (None of them mentioned that they were under no obligation to work as they had described and that the decision to do so had been their own.) One of these employees commented that extra effort by white employees was expected and taken for granted, and their reward for doing so lies in the awareness that they were working for the benefit of the company. The same argument does not apply to the black employees who are paid overtime. Therefore, it is inexplicable that white employees' input must be interpreted as 'for the benefit of the company' but not that of the black employees. This points to the third dimension, namely that employees' expectations regarding recognition for their input to the business are frustrated. In terms of expectancy theory, people have subjective beliefs about the outcomes of their behaviour which may be positive or negative.

Should the outcome be negative, their expectations are not met and they become demotivated (Smit & Cronje 1997:318). Expectancy can therefore help to explain why employees may not be motivated to do more than the minimum requirements, and the dissatisfaction of those who do and whose expectations of some form of recognition are not met.

Despite unhappiness over the lack of recognition, some of the research participants did indicate that their additional time and effort were personally meaningful: for instance, one said that it was a pleasure to work for the company; another said he worked the additional hours to ease the pain of the recent loss of his only son; and another believed that this would benefit his long-term prospects in the company. Thus, although recognition was expected, the research participants rationalised its absence in terms of some value or need of their own. To a certain extent good salary adjustments and bonuses paid to employees compensate for the general lack of recognition.

In their discussion of recognition from senior employees, two research participants who work in the same section of the company were very complimentary about their direct manager, who in a deliberate action of recognition gives his subordinates credit for timeously finalising the financial records at month end and regularly thanks them if they reach their target. The information they provide in the course of their work is required each month by head office, and if it is inaccurate, serious problems can result. From time to time they are therefore required to work longer hours, but their efforts are duly recognised by their manager. This recognition, one of them said, means much to them and consequently they are inclined to feel that the additional effort is worth their while. The other informant said that in the past she had occasionally felt that she was being exploited and did not receive adequate recognition for what she did, but not any more.

Although the motivating strategies of the company are clearly well intended and have numerous benefits for the employees, some problems emerged regarding their implementation. The analysis of motivational problems and expectations of different categories of employees are specific to the company and, given the variety of factors that impact on employee activities and the diversity among them, it is obvious that designing strategies that satisfy everyone cannot be easy. Some aspects of the dissatisfaction also arise from personal attributes and expectations which do not directly concern the company.

4.4 Trust

Trust is defined as 'a characteristic of high performance teams where members believe in the integrity, character, and ability of each other' (Robbins 1998:193).

An effective business environment should be characterised by mutual trust among employees and hence it was necessary to determine the extent of trust among research participants.

Because people work together every day, this does not mean that they trust each other. According to Senge *et al* (1999:155-156), trust only develops where people are sincerely interested in one another, which, in turn, results if people discern qualities in others which are worth trusting. There are several ways in which mutual trust between employees can be developed. First, if people are concerned about trust, they should develop a genuine sensitivity for other people, for their beliefs and behaviour, and establish sound relationships with them to rid themselves of any suspicion they may hold towards other people. Second, people must do what they say (Hoecklin 1993:50), particularly if they hold management positions. Third, people must be sure of the good intentions of others, which implies transparency in activities and an understanding of decisions which affect employees. Fourth, there should be a readiness among managers to meet and to listen to the views of employees (Mead 1998:237) rather than insist on a top-down approach in implementing decisions which affect everyone in the company. Trust between managers and employees is clearly necessary for effective functioning within corporate environments. In view of the power distance between managers and employees, the inherent problems concerning trust in such situations, and because people are more likely to trust others where power distances between them are small (Mead 1998:237), it seems that in the context of the work environment, the onus is on managers to promote the development of trust (cf Koopman 1991:28).

Besides its association with power distances between people and a lack of transparency in decision making, distrust also develops from inadequate communication between people, differences in values, unexpected and unexplained changes in standard activities, differences in frames of reference, together with a lack of understanding or a willingness to understand such differences, and lack of knowledge of company activities because of inadequate information. Against this background the degree of trust between employees was investigated. In spite of some favourable comments, a general lack of trust seemed to pervade the company, mostly involving management and ordinary employees, but accounts of distrust between employees on the same postgrade were also mentioned. In some cases research participants had first-hand experience of distrust, while in others distrust was perceived to exist.

Where favourable comments were forthcoming, they usually concerned the research participant him/herself and other employees. A white male said that the drivers trust him more than they trust anyone else. He also said that he knew that the management had complete trust in him because he keeps the keys to the

storerooms. He maintained that there are other people who could be given the responsibility for locking the storerooms and keeping the keys, but the manager does not trust them, and therefore gave him this responsibility, which means that he is not at liberty to delegate his responsibility to anyone else. In addition, as regards the importance of trust in the company, he maintained that the manager's 'open-door' policy (cf 4.1.3.1 above) promotes the development of trust between himself, ie the manager, and the employees since employees can readily consult the manager if they need to.

One of the white employees believes that there is a reasonable degree of trust between employees and thus no real problems arise from a lack of trust. He believes that they are all reasonably adult and in fact he associates the success of the company, as well as its stability in relation to other companies in the business environment where industrial and union action are common, to the mutual trust between its employees. He added that many of the white employees have been working together for a long time, as have many of the drivers. Among the drivers, new employees are absorbed by the group and are given guidance by the older drivers. Such conditions, he believes, are conducive to the development of trust between people. Another white male also ascribed the cooperation between employees to mutual trust. In his view it is impossible to manage a company and be successful financially where conflict and distrust exist between people. He too believes that the stability and prosperity of the company in comparison with the market in general, the absence of theft and the lack of disunity amongst employees must be ascribed to the trust among people.

Trust also implies that a person consults the one he/she trusts with a range of matters, including personal problems. To honour the trust an informant said that in such cases he offers assistance and then, by acting upon what he says, he promotes the development and maintenance of a relationship of trust with the persons concerned.

Yet not everyone held such favourable views. The driver who was recently transferred from a sister company stated as a general proposition that when black people meet someone new, trust is not immediately forthcoming, and it takes a long time for people to trust one another. He described how he was aware that some of the other drivers spoke about him behind his back, wanting to know what had happened to his co-workers at the branch where he was previously employed. They intimated that he had been favoured by company management for some unknown reason, that the other employees had been treated unfairly, that he was now also involved in some special relationship of favouritism with management, and hence they did not trust him. The attitude of the other drivers meant that he kept to himself, but he said in time they would begin to trust him.

It was also stated that some employees, black and white, lack the confidence to approach the manager with their problems and instead consult other employees or ask them to consult the manager on their behalf. These employees were said to have greater trust in the persons they approach than in the manager, despite the manager's 'open-door' management style. In part this lack of trust can be explained by the power distance between the manager and other employees, and a perceived lack of readiness by the manager to listen to them (cf 4.1.3.1 above), and also because older employees had had greater freedom in their activities in the past, while current management is stricter, producing a situation which is resented by the older employees who, as a result, distrust the manager. Moreover, the manager is much younger than they are, and this was said to add to their lack of trust in him. This lack of trust extends across the company, and on numerous occasions it was heard that in addition to employees distrusting the manager, he distrusts the employees. In this situation of general lack of trust by management, the people who are not trusted often have difficulty trusting others.

The drivers' perceived lack of trust of them by management was emphasised by the comments of one of them that if someone explained a problematic situation to management, such as theft for which he/she was not responsible, management would understand, but would never trust the person involved. Although it is possible to discuss a matter with management, this must be done in the knowledge that management would never trust that person, which, in the context of the employee's views, means that white management does not trust the drivers regardless of the situation. This apparent distrust of blacks by whites impacts directly on the working atmosphere and was said to apply to all the whites who work for the company. A black person cannot talk to a white person because if he/she does so, 'your ideas are already wrong', although the person involved would never admit this. He is a 'whitey', who also cannot be trusted, and people are afraid to talk to whites, because it is impossible to predict the consequences of 'talking'. Another driver said that he trusted no one, not black or white. He works for one company, yet he must assume responsibility for (black) employees of another company. As for the traders, he said that they could and sometimes do, write '2 boxes' on an invoice, but then just load one box of goods onto a truck. When this is discovered, the driver is responsible for paying for the 'missing' box.

One of the traders said that at one stage he had recommended certain changes to the work schedule, but this was rejected because 'they', implying management, do not trust many people. This idea was partly confirmed by a manager who referred to '*n klein bietjie wantroue*' ('a small amount of distrust') in the company in general which he associated with the nature of the goods produced

by the company, shortages on deliveries, and the way in which the products are handled. Goods must be weighed before delivery and again on delivery. Although it is known that different scales weigh goods differently, there is always an element of doubt arising from the possibility that part of the goods has been removed by the driver or his pilots.

A white male said unhesitatingly that he trusts no one except the manager. He also referred to a general lack of trust between employees, which is something that bothers him about the company. He was particularly concerned about what he perceived to be a general lack of trust by management of the employees of the company. How is it possible, he asked, that there is this distrust of individuals by management? The employees 'make' the company, but this requires that management trust them implicitly. He explained the pervasive distrust between employees with reference to his belief that 'they', management, believe that everyone who works for the company is guilty of theft. It would seem that he was referring primarily to white employees, because he added that this belief had arisen because in the past whites had been found guilty of theft. He believed that many positive changes would occur in the loading process if the four white traders were trusted more, and if the manager refrained from sending someone or going himself to check what was happening in the loading area. To the informant this is a direct manifestation of a lack of trust. He felt that if management had reason to believe that someone was involved in some misdemeanour, rather than distrust everyone, management should call the person involved and discuss the matter privately. He included himself in the group that was distrusted and felt very strongly that this was unacceptable. He added that if management thought that he could possibly steal from the company, then his position at the company was redundant.

To explain why he believes the manager distrusts everyone, the informant described an incident when the manager arrived at the loading area unannounced at a time when a driver had inadvertently left with the keys of a truck in his pocket. The truck blocked the way of another one that had to be loaded, which meant that a customer received his goods late, a situation which from a marketing and financial point of view is unacceptable. The manager then commented that it appeared that this type of situation 'happens every day'. The informant's response to the manager was that this was incorrect, but if his assumption was correct, then the company did not need him, and he should be told to leave because of the implication that such an incident suggested that he 'stole' (ie wasted) the company's money.

While distrust in oneself, perceived or otherwise, is distressing to an employee's self-esteem, the ultimate fear underlying distrust would appear to be that people, particularly the drivers, are afraid of losing their jobs in the volatile economic

climate of the country. Any situation that employees are not informed about beforehand, for example the lack of information on the drivers' paysheets (2.7.3 above), the drivers' perception that the manager listens, but does not follow up on their complaints and suggestions, and the at times top-down approach of management during meetings (4.1.3.1 above), is viewed with a great deal of distrust, and to cope employees sublimate their distrust of others and do not talk about it. This could explain the frequency with which the drivers said that they do not discuss various matters among themselves. Careful preplanning, consistency and transparency in actions are required to ensure that employees are not forced into a position of distrusting the motives of those who initiate them.

4.5 Discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping

Prejudice and discrimination are closely related concepts. While prejudice involves negative attitudes and beliefs about members of a group, discrimination involves different, usually negative or unfair, behaviour towards the members of a group. Prejudice develops as a result of direct contact between different often conflicting groups, from early learning within a particular sociocultural environment where bias and discrimination form part of the value system of the people concerned, and from cognitive processes by which a person immediately categorises people as members of particular groups, thereby directing bias, antipathy and discrimination towards them (Ungerer 1999:134-135). It also arises from the meanings ascribed to differences between people merely on the basis of gender, race, and class, among other criteria, which are regarded as undesirable and objectionable (Carnavale & Kanu Kogod 1996:11). Such attitudes and behaviour produce inflexible generalisations towards the people concerned and marginalise them from mainstream activities merely because they are perceived 'not to belong'.

An attempt was made to determine research participants' ideas on prejudice and discrimination and whether they are relevant in the workplace. Different ideas were produced. The perception among the white participants was that there is no discrimination or prejudice in the company, or at least that they themselves do not discriminate and are not prejudiced, while others in the company are. In contrast, black employees mostly said that there is discrimination, as indicated by one of the drivers who, referring to the attitudes of some of the white employees, said that 'we workers are still having that discrimination'. Exceptions among the drivers include an older driver, who, interpreting the concepts in terms of problems experienced with other people in the company, said

that he has not experienced any such problems, but if he did, he would confront the people involved to solve them. A young driver said that he did not understand the meaning of the word 'discriminate', and on hearing its meaning said that he has not experienced anything like that, meaning discriminatory practices directed at himself at work.

Other black employees had different ideas about discrimination, most frequently on the perception that they are deliberately paid low wages because they are black. One of the drivers reasoned that wages are determined by qualifications and not the position held by an employee. Thus, because black employees generally have low educational qualifications, they are being discriminated against by payment of low wages. A senior driver confirmed the views of his younger colleagues that discrimination was still evident in the company. Although he did not do so, he said he could identify whites who are 'still resisting' change, but he thought that their attitudes would change in time, since the atmosphere in the company has already changed. The black female office employee also maintained that discrimination is practised in the company. Although she said that there have been some changes and more are likely, she can still 'feel' that there is discrimination. She believes that it is inherent in the attitudes of some white employees, and as an office worker she was referring to the people with whom she works daily. She too was convinced that her salary is lower than that of whites on the same postgrade as herself. When asked what she based this idea on, she answered that it was merely because she was black and blacks are always being 'held back'. The suggestion was made that she should obtain advice about the matter, but she persisted with the idea that her race counts against her: 'And then get advice about it and then what about your colour?' About discussing her problems with the manager she said: 'The door is closed.' The suggestion was also made that she approach her immediate superior, but to that she answered that he was aware that she was not being paid adequately, but he is 'not the owner [of the company]'. During the interview the discussion turned to the informant's ideas about the pension fund and the comment was made that after 18 years of service, she should receive a 'nice pension'. She indicated that she did not think so: 'You know we blacks, we don't get anything. Always we are under, but what can I say. There is nothing which ever satisfies you, you know.' She was also asked whether she thought people exploited her. She said this is sometimes true, and like other black people, she feels that she is exploited but bottles up her feelings because she is afraid. She cannot talk back and 'say why do you do this to me'. Blacks, she said, actually have no choice but to remain silent even though they do not feel like doing so.

On the questions of differentiation in terms of salaries between blacks and whites who are on the same postgrade, it was said that if there were any differ-

ences, as employees had suggested, they were the result of differences in experience and number of years' service, and not in colour or race.

The only indication of apparent discrimination against whites came from a white male who considered whether management did exploit whites because they know that they 'do not strike', unlike blacks who do. In this way he could account for the lack of payment for overtime work among whites, in contrast with blacks (2.7 above), therefore his belief that whites were being discriminated against as regards remuneration.

Stereotypes are beliefs that people have certain characteristics because of their membership of a particular group and they are judged accordingly. As a result, members of a group are treated as though they are and were always the same (Mead 1998:74), in spite of evidence to the contrary. In stereotyping, which can be positive or negative, change or exceptions to the norm are disregarded. The most common stereotypes are negative, based on gender or membership of racial or occupational groups. They are often broad generalisations that ignore the diversity within social groups, and are not only based on inaccurate perceptions of people, but perpetuate the existence of such inaccuracies as well (Ungerer 1999:131). Like prejudice and discrimination, negative stereotypes may result in marginalisation of the targeted people. Also like prejudice and discrimination, stereotyping is a means of simplifying and explaining complex situations, consequently people easily turn to stereotyping, because stereotypes make it possible to evaluate and behave towards others in particular ways without taking differences between them into account. Because of the organising function of stereotyping, stereotypes are not based on facts or rational argument. Rather they represent a disregard of reality, because they consist of preconceived ideas and beliefs, and as a result their effects can be particularly destructive.

Stereotyping was most evident in the white employees' perceptions of the drivers. The idea that a black person is 'like a child' because he/she is dependent on whites was mentioned. Even at the time of the research, when blacks have become 'almost everything', they 'still look up to the whites', and also have great respect for older people. This, a white employee thought, applies generally, not only to the people with whom he works. After the election and political changes in the country in 1994, some blacks remained polite and did not try to tell others that they 'are now the boss'.

On at least two occasions, white employees' perceptions of the drivers were justified in terms of 'this is how they are'. A trader said that the situation where a black person indicates that he/she must attend the funeral of a close relative such as a father, 'small father' or 'big father' would 'never change' because 'this is how they are'. On a more positive note it was also said that if a driver is away

for a day or two, the others stand in for him. They do this because they regard themselves as part of the company, but also because 'this is how they are'. In a similar vein, a trader said that sometimes the pilots throw goods onto the scale which could damage them and cause the scale to misread the weight. Then when the truck is moved onto the weighbridge, the weight is incorrect and the truck must be unloaded. This, he said, is 'the problem with many of these people' – they throw the goods onto the scale.

Stereotyping was also forthcoming in information provided by the drivers. References were made to 'whiteys' to whom blacks turn for advice or assistance, but who do not extend themselves to provide assistance to blacks. The generalised comments by blacks that whites discriminate against them are also stereotypes. Closer investigation of these issues (cf 4.1.3.2 above) reveals that such views were often unjustified and constitute inaccurate perceptions of people resulting from selective perception, generalisation on the basis of past experience, and a disregard for individual and situational differences (cf Human 1996:171).

4.6 Taking initiative and making meaningful contributions

Taking initiative qualifies someone who is enterprising, who initiates matters, or takes the first step in doing something new. People with initiative act before they are forced to do so by external factors. Such innovative people are characterised by a desire to make use of opportunities and behave in ways beyond what is required of them. They may also encourage other people to put extra effort into their work (Goleman 1998:122). Initiative can only be discerned by observing and evaluating a person's actions, and for initiative to be truly effective in a work environment, an individual's efforts must be recognised, acknowledged and acted upon. Taking initiative is closely related to recognition (4.3.4 above): the more contributions to company operations are recognised, the more likely employees will take initiative.

In view of the significance of initiative in company operations, research participants were asked for their views on initiative and how company management reacted if or when they show initiative. In some cases respondents referred to initiatives they have taken and in other cases they considered hypothetical incidents. The former was only evident among white employees, and the latter among both black and white employees. The absence of initiative among the black employees could be the result of a lack of adequate understanding of the notion of initiative, but it could also be associated with their responsibilities being highly routine with little scope for change or development.

A good example of a successful initiative came from a white employee, who stated that when he first joined the company it came to his attention that the

manager wanted to know the volume of goods that were loaded every day, but the employees responsible were unable to provide the required information. To meet the manager's request, he developed a system of graphs which indicate daily output. Graphs for the past three years are now available on file. Initially the graphs were compiled for the respondent's benefit, but recently other employees besides the manager have shown interest in the volume of goods loaded in a single day. On the basis of the graphs, a break-even point of 65 tons per day has been identified, and if not achieved, means financial problems for the company. Subsequently, the system has been recognised by the manager and also applied in a related company, with the result that the informant may be sent to the other company to determine whether the system is being applied correctly. His attitude is that a person should always work on something new, try one's best and hope that in the event of downsizing, one would be safe. Because he values initiative, he is also prepared to listen if someone else, black or white, brings a new idea to his attention. He believes that it is important to listen, and that failure to do so results in a loss of trust. He described a recent incident when, at a meeting, he suggested that certain primary tasks should be completed the previous day before employees go home to facilitate the loading of the trucks in the morning. He asked employees for their comments and was surprised by the ideas suggested by black employees in particular, for instance that the proposed arrangement would increase the possibility of theft. He therefore believes that innovative ideas could come from 'unlikely' sources. Circumstances should be created which give employees the opportunity to be innovative, and if they are, their ideas should be given due consideration.

A female employee was asked to describe how management would react if she made a suggestion which would facilitate the work process. She answered that she thought that the manager would allow her to try what she had proposed if he was convinced that it would be successful. Similarly, another female employee answered in the affirmative when she was asked for her ideas on management's reaction to an employee's initiative. A white male also believes that management is receptive to new ideas, but added that sometimes it takes too long for a suggestion to be implemented. In response to a question on the procedure followed by the company in dealing with initiative, a manager said that such matters are added to the agenda of the monthly meetings for discussion.

Not all initiatives are favourably considered, however. A trader said that because the workload increases at the end of the month, he suggested that the loading process should start much earlier, even as early as 4:00 rather than 6:00. Because two pilots accompany each truck that is loaded, each time a truck leaves, the traders are without the assistance of two people. At the end of the month or

when the company is very busy, problems develop as the number of pilots decreases. As a result, it can take up to two hours to load the last trucks; they leave late, which, depending upon the driver's route, can mean that a customer receives his order much later than he requested. If the loading process starts earlier, the loading can be completed by 7:00. Under the present system the first truck to leave departs after 7:00. In the past trucks were loaded the previous evening, which to the informant meant that the company 'delivered a service', but by implication this is no longer true. He said his suggestion was not accepted by management. When asked whether management provided a counter-argument for what seemed to be a good business proposition, he answered no, because 'management trusts very few people'. He added that 'they' – himself and his co-traders – have made many suggestions but these are never accepted.

4.7 Frustration

Frustration develops when people's attempts to achieve particular aims and satisfy various needs are hindered by external factors. How a person reacts to the frustration is related to the significance of the aims to be achieved and the needs to be satisfied, the source of the frustration, and its duration. A person's ability to tolerate and cope with frustration is determined by biological and personality factors and, importantly, by the extent to which he/she has learned to cope with needs that are not satisfied, which is primarily a function of sociocultural orientation. In terms of the frustration-aggression hypothesis, ongoing frustration which is not resolved in an acceptable manner produces aggression, hostility and anger, which in turn are displayed in resentment, alienation or even open conflict (cf Bergh 1999:451). Such matters constitute hindrances to effective functioning in the workplace, and are barriers to establishing meaningful relationships between co-workers.

In view of the problems identified by members of the target group and the apparent relevance of frustration as a causative factor in such matters, research participants were asked to describe their frustrations, if any, which impact upon their work. Some were uncertain about the meaning of frustration and in such cases illustrations were used to elicit a response, usually referring to a day when matters did not proceed smoothly, or to matters that prevented them from doing their job properly. There was general agreement that frustration is part of any work environment. Information revealed that the primary sources of the frustration are factors that are inherent in the work situation. Although these sources can usually be explained, and hence tolerated, they often remain severe, since they retard people's work, which must be done regardless of the frustration. In some instances the actions of co-employees were identified as the source

of the frustration. They may not be intended to frustrate the work process, but when they do occur, they impact negatively on the work of others. Although such matters can be addressed, employees do not necessarily regard it their responsibility to do so, nor are they willing to do so if the source of their frustrations is the action of a more senior employee.

Factors that frustrate employees varied. They were largely individualised, which is understandable because of the small number of employees and their task specialisation. What frustrates a senior white male is that on occasion, for example while he was being interviewed, there is no supervision 'down there', that is, in the area of the company where he works. There is a single individual whom he can trust to a certain extent, but if he delegates work, it must be followed up with some form of control. This constitutes a pattern in his functioning, although he added that he had been trained to supervise work that he delegates. As a conscientious person this lack of an adequate 'back-up' system is not only frustrating, but also causes him anxiety. For another white male the volume of work is sometimes frustrating, or he is frustrated by his own errors, which makes him impatient with his co-workers. They cope with his impatience by laughing at him. They have known him for a long time and realise that he does not really become angry.

It would seem that delays caused by problems with loading the trucks are primary sources of frustration for the drivers. A driver who arrives at work at 7:00 but only starts his deliveries at 13:00 is likely to return late. Before he leaves, there is little a driver can do but ensure that his truck is clean, sit or sleep in the truck, or just wait. One of them identified the source of his frustration as the insufficient number of platforms at the company, which means that loading operations are slow. If there is a shortage on an order and he telephones the company to report it, he may be told that it is his fault and he must pay for it. Sometimes a customer 'checks him', is rude, or wants his orders delivered early in the morning. If he is unable to deliver on time, he is blamed and criticised for not working properly. Consequently, the driver said, his 'heart is not good' and he is 'not free'.

White employees who were asked about frustration at work justified their frustrations as typical of all workplaces. For one white male frustration arises when he is under considerable pressure. He described a recent incident when a co-worker was on leave at month end and he had to cope with his own work as well as the other person's, which is not easy, more so because management required specific information from him by a particular time. He managed to complete the task, but said that in such circumstances when he is under pressure a problem develops: he becomes quiet and does not communicate or interact with others because he wants to get his work done. His co-workers, however,

interpret his behaviour as irritation or anger, even though he has told them that he is not angry but merely under pressure. The attitude of his co-workers poses a problem for him since their interpretation of the situation is incorrect.

One of the female employees says that she often feels frustrated. She is dependent on others to bring her information for processing, and when this does not happen, she cannot do her work. She believes that the information should be made available beforehand, but this is not what happens. She has spoken about the matter, but the situation has not changed. Moreover, once she has received the information, changes are very often necessary, although this is typical of what she does, and the work must be redone. This exacerbates her frustration. The changes, she said, are because of attempts by the company to retain its suppliers, who must be offered good prices, otherwise they sell their products elsewhere where they are paid more. In addition, at times haggling over prices appears to produce a stalemate if people cannot agree about them – prices cannot later be raised randomly. This type of situation is also frustrating since it means that work is either retarded or must be redone. In a similar vein another female employee mentioned frustration arising from her particular work situation and specifically from inadequate information being sent to her to be able to complete her tasks. Price lists may be incomplete, or accounts are closed and require the manager's approval and signature to be reopened, but he is not always available.

Fewer comments identified other employees as the actual source of frustration. A female employee who described herself as someone who works well with others said that there are times when she must concentrate on her work, which entails working with figures, and she cannot afford to make errors. However, sometimes other employees interrupt her work, not merely to chat, but to bother her for example with requests for coffee, causing intense frustration. These are people, she said, who refuse to acknowledge that she is busy, and merely wish to irritate her. She has tried to 'sort the problem out' but has found this to be very difficult. It is a matter of trying to maintain good relationships with co-workers, and also of getting her work done.

A driver said he was frustrated because people do not always perform their designated tasks, for example those who are required to fill the trucks with diesel in preparation for the drivers involved in the early morning shift. 'They just don't do that,' he said. They sit in their trucks and wait to be called to a platform. Sometimes they are missing when a truck is called and someone else must move the truck. At other times he feels frustrated with the mechanics who tend to the trucks. When asked what he can do about matters such as these, he replied nothing if the manager does not instruct the people responsible for filling the trucks to perform their duties on time.