

**COVERT IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION ON EMPLOYEES  
WITHIN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR: SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS  
PERSPECTIVE**

by

**SARAH NKWANA**

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SUPERVISOR: PROF MS MAY

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## DECLARATION

Name: Sarah Nkwana

Student Number: 30782368

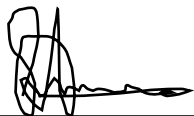
Degree: Master's in Industrial and Organisational Psychology

Dissertation title: Covert impact of organisational transformation on employees within the financial services sector: Systems Psychodynamics Perspective.

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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## SUMMARY

### **Covert Impact of Organisational Transformation on Employees Within the Financial Services Sector: Systems Psychodynamics Perspective**

By

Sarah Nkwana

The “new normal” has become the order of the day in the business environment and personal space. Over the decades, factors such as digital transformation, globalisation, the legal framework and now the COVID-19 pandemic, to name but a few, have been shaping the organisations, particularly in the financial services sector. This has compelled more financial services providers to transformation at a precipitous rate (Carbó-Valverde, 2017), occasioning organisations to reengineer the organisational structure, operating models, processes, as well as human capacity, in order to remain relevant in the industry. The aim of this study was to explore and describe the unconscious impact of the organisational transformation (OT) phenomenon on employees in the financial services sectors using the systems psychodynamics perspective. The study was conducted under the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm, employing purposive sampling technique to select participants who experienced the OT phenomena. To collect data, in-depth interviews were utilised and hermeneutic analysis was used to analyse data.

The main findings indicated that employees experienced the organisation as persecutory, volatile and uncertain system as a result of the voluntary and involuntary nature of OT. Furthermore, the impact of OT on employees manifested itself as dehumanising and showed the uncaring nature of OT, gearing participants to awareness and learning as a means of survival to cope with the stresses of OT.

**Keywords:** Voluntary Change, involuntary change, defences, CIBART model and basic assumptions



**Thulano ye esego ya latelwa ya Phetogo ya Lekgotlakopano go bašomi ka go  
Lekala la Ditirelo tša Matlotlo: Ponego ya mokgwa wa Saekhotaenamiki**

Ka

Sarah Nkwana

“Tlwaelo ye mpsha” e bile selo sa letšatši ka letšatši go tikologo ya dikgwebo le go sebakeng sa motho yo mongwe le yo mongwe. Mengwaga ye lesome yeo e fetilego, mabaka a go swana le phetogo ya titšithale, nyalelano ya ditiragalo tša lefase, foreimeweke ya semolao le gabjale leuba la Covid-19, go bolela ka tše mmalwa, di betlile sebopego sa mekgatlo, kudu lekaleng la matlotlo. Seo se gapeleditše bathuši ba ditirelo tše dintši tša matlotlo go phetogo ya lebelo la godimo (Carbó-Valverde, 2017), yeo e dirago gore mekgatlo e šušumetše leswa sebopego sa mokgatlo, dimotlolo tše di dirišwago, ditshepedišo, gape le bokgoni bja motho, gore go dule go swanetše intasetering. Maikemišetšo a nyakišišo e be e le go utolla le go hlaloša thulano ya ponagalo ya boitebalo ya phetogo ya mokgatlo (OT) go bašomi ka go makala a ditirelo tša matlotlo go šomišwa ponego ya ditsela tša saekhotaenamiki. Nyakišišo e sepedišitšwe ka tlase ga pharataemo ya *hermeneutic phenomenology*, go dirišwa thekeniki ya *purposive sampling* go kgetha batšeakarolo bao ba itemogetšego ponego ya OT. Go kgoboketša datha, dipoledišano tše di tseneletšego di šomišitšwe le tshekatsheko ya heremeneuthiki e šomišitšwe go sekaseka datha.

Dipoelo tša motheo di tšweleditše gore bašomi ba itemogetše mokgatlo bjalo ka wa tlaišo, o phakišago le tsela yeo e belatšago ka lebaka la tlholego ya OT ya boithaopo goba yeo esego ya boithaopo. Go feta fao, thulano ya OT go bašomi e iponagaditše bjalo ka yeo e nyenyefatšago ebile e bontšhitše tlhago ya go hloka tlhokomelo ga OT, e thušago batšeakarolo go maitemogelo le thuto bjalo ka mokgwa go phologo ya go katana le dikgatelelo tša OT.

**Mareo a bohlokwa:** Phetogo ka boithaopo, phetogo ka go se ithaope, ditšhireletšo, motlolo wa CIBART le dikamogelo tša motheo

# **Onbedoelde impak van organisatoriese transformasie op werknemers binne die finansiële dienssektor: 'n psigodinamiese stelselperspektief**

deur

Sarah Nkwana

Die “nuwe normaal” is aan die orde van die dag in die besigheidsomgewing en persoonlike ruimte. Oor die jare het digitale transformasie, globalisasie, die regs-kundige opset en tans die COVID-19 pandemie – om enkele faktore te noem – organisasies gevorm, veral dié in die finansiële dienssektor. Dit het meer finansiële diensverskaffers tot transformasie teen 'n vinnige pas verplig (Carbó-Valverde, 2017) wat veroorsaak het dat organisasies die organisatoriese struktuur, bedryfsmodelle, prosesse, sowel as menslike kapasiteit moes herontwerp, ten einde relevant te bly binne die bedryf. Die doel van hierdie studie was om die onbedoelde impak van die transformasie- (OT) fenomeen op werknemers in die finansiële dienssektore te ondersoek en te beskryf met behulp van die psigodinamiese stelselperspektief. Die studie is volgens die hermeneutiese fenomenologie paradigma gedoen deur die doelbewuste steekproeftegniek te gebruik om deelnemers wat OT-fenomene ervaar het, te kies. Ten einde data te versamel, is diepgaande onderhoudsgevoer en hermeneutiese ontleding is aangewend om data te ontleed.

Die hoofbevinding is aangedui dat werknemers die organisasie as 'n hinderlike, wisselvallige en onbetroubare stelsel ervaar het weens die vrywillige en gedwonge aard van OT. Vervolgens het die impak van OT op werknemers as ontmenslik gemanifesteer en die afsydige aard van OT getoon, deelnemers op bewustheid en kennis ingestel as 'n manier van oorlewing om opgewasse teen die stres van OT te wees.

**Slutelwoorde:** Vrywillige verandering, gedwonge verandering, verdediging, CIBART- model en basiese veronderstellings

## **CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 provides the scientific orientation of the dissertation which entailed various constituents. Firstly, the background and motivation of the study are discussed. This is followed by the problem statement which articulates the general aim, specific aim and research question of the study. The constructs of the study are also deliberated in the literature review. The paradigm worldview that models the research study is reflected on and the research design is specified. The chapter is concluded by discussing the chapter layout.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

Digitisation, artificial intelligent, and the fourth industrial revolution have been the lexis dominating the business world in the 21st century and the dominant source of radical transformation of the business landscape (Carbó-Valverde, 2017), and this is quite noticeable in the financial services sector. Carbó-Valverde (2017) further highlights that the changes in technology, coupled with competitive advantage throughout the financial industry, resulted in the emergence of new banks. Further unforeseen disruptions in business were noted in 2019 when China experienced the influenza pandemic COVID-19, which soon spread across the world. In South Africa specifically, I noted the spread in the first half of 2020. This forced the government to initiate the lockdown of the economy to stop the spread and contain the virus. Subsequently, COVID-19 has forced business into the “new normal” signified by remote working and less human touch and social distancing. This major disruption has encouraged the use of digital or virtual platforms.

Having been exposed to the financial services industry for over 15 years, I have witnessed the relentless transformation of organisations eliciting the downsizing and laying off of employees. The legal framework, technology, mergers and embryonic banks are some of the forces behind the habitual incessant transformation. Having experienced a series of organisational transformations (OT) in my tenure within corporate business, I have observed how both outgoing and remaining candidates have been emotionally and physically scarred by the process. It is my passion to

drive an agenda of effective and engaged employees and to aid organisations to be efficient. To achieve this, one needs to study the impact of OT on the employees and also help organisation to proactively plan and be better equipped to deal with change management.

The financial services sector's business landscape has been going through a spate of OT. In the previous decade, implementation of legislation to professionalise the industry, regulate remuneration structures, licensing regimes and disclosures were on the rise. I note new trends of disruptions emerging in the digital space, all of this resulting in changes in structure, business models and downsizing of organisations. Mhlungu et al. (2019) describe organisational digital transformation as the strategic interventions aimed at improving the organisation's processes, goods, services, and business models through enhancing the organisation's digital capability.

According to the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2019), the South African financial services sector is fast progressing towards the "marketplace without boundaries" and continues to be pursuing radical transformation initiatives aimed at improving digital transformation, customer experience, enterprise-wide cost reduction and new ways of working. In recent years, organisations in the financial service industry in South Africa, specifically the four major banks, have been forced to go through challenging and radical but vital OT (downsizing) exercises, resulting in layoffs of staff. The media has reported that more than 3 000 jobs collectively were lost during 2019. This OT affected employees at all levels, from executive right down to operational staff, leaving many people without jobs.

The beginning of the new decade (year 2020) erupted with an unexpected COVID-19 pandemic that has never been experienced before. This influenza has brought disruptions in the normal way of life (Dev & Sengupta, 2020) and has forced business into lockdown for a short period. During this period, businesses had to quickly create the "new normal". Face-to-face human interaction came to a halt and remote working was introduced in response to the pandemic. Remote working is fostered by the increased use and reliance on technology (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). With an anticipated increase in digitisation and industry 4.0, more jobs may

be lost and I ask the question of how employees experience these changes and what unconscious impact it has on them.

The process of transformation entails radical restructuring, reformed business and operating models, change in leadership and redefined organisational values. Cummings and Worley (2008) point out that the transformation process transpires in preparation of, or in reaction to major changes faced by the organisation. Ledimo and Martins (2014) support this view by indicating that the process of transformation is aimed at cultivating organisational performance and establishing competitive advantage over competitors. The South African banking industry has become more competitive (Probart, 2013) with more banks entering the market and increased digitisation and automation of financial services and products to provide efficient service to the customers. The primary rationale in the periodic transformation that continues to increase organisational pressure for survival includes technological innovations and advancements (Ledimo & Martins, 2014). This is not overlooking other causes such as globalisation, change in the business landscape and transforming customer needs. The unsuspected, sudden COVID-19 snowball forcefully induced social distancing, further influencing the proliferated exploitation of technology.

Most organisations have been reactive in nature and not applying forward-thinking strategies, and as a result, the changes may impact staff negatively due to a lack of proper change management. Jabri (2015) states that regrettably, since managing change and transformation initiatives is one of the most demanding and complex responsibilities that every organisation faces, it fails in approximately 70% of the cases. Krantz (2018) points out that while tumultuous operating conditions may need such changes, they are also extremely disruptive to businesses and the people who work within them. Ledimo and Martins (2014) put it this way that surviving employees are negatively or positively affected by the transformation process. This study embarked to comprehend the impact and experiences of change on employees from a covert (unconscious) perspective. The research employed the systems psychodynamics (SP) perspective to explore the unconscious experiences. Cilliers (2018) cites other authors who define SP as a science-based lens towards comprehension of the unconscious behaviour within organisations. This notion is

echoed by Armstrong (2005), who notes that SP utilises an organisational theory to understand and describe systemic structures and its likeness to individual, social and organisational anxiety that is innermost, unconscious and unvoiced (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

Numerous studies that focus on realities of OT and its conscious impact on employees have been conducted (Cummings & Worley, 2008; Ledimo & Martins 2014). The notable change in South Africa in the last decade was as a result of legislative intervention (Msweli-Mbanga & Potwana, 2006). This view is maintained by Steyn and Cilliers (2016), noting that the convoluted inherent legislative requirement of equality, organisation relevance and attracting top talent enhances employees' stress levels (Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). Gould et al. (2006) and Krantz (2018) highlight the internal and external dynamics cause the need for change and equally indicate that ineffective change management may be disabling and disastrous for both the ongoing concern of the system and its people. The contemporary dynamics that are coercing the need for OT are the fourth industrial revolution, characterised by technology. The unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic also fuelled business to relook at the "old normal" versus the "new normal" ways of work that are epitomised by the use of technology.

The global fast-paced technological advancements continue to drive organisations to transform at a rapid rate and pose various challenges that impact on employees. A study conducted on 11 Brazilian banks that underwent OT predominantly due to technological advancements showed elevated occurrences of employees' physical and mental suffering and sensed a loss of professional identity (Silva & Navarro, 2012). Steyn and Cilliers' (2016) study emphasises how performance and output of employees were adversely influenced, thus manifesting in waning cognitive abilities, emotional instability, inability to concentrate (depression, anger, aggression and exhaustion) and poor interpersonal relationships (Jabri, 2015). Cascio and Montealegre (2016) advocate that the institution of innovation triggers a lack of autonomy and skills that consequently produces stress, demotivation and counter-productive work behaviour. These studies are beneficial in addressing the root cause of OT and challenges thereof. Further, they are congruent with my thought that OT has an impact on employees; however, mostly focus on the conscious impact. It is

evident from the one study that the conscious behaviours/outputs manifest in the unconscious. Consequently, the current study aimed to further explore the unconscious influences of OT due to technological advancements.

Most of the research studies conducted has been quantitative in nature and one-dimensional, focussing on the conscious impact of OT on employees. This study will take a qualitative approach to embark on enhanced comprehension of the unconscious impact of OT on employees. The study by Steyn and Cilliers (2016) resolves that employees experienced high levels of anxiety, noticeable negative feelings and a series of defensive structures hindering the employees' personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

This study will benefit organisations in a number of ways. Firstly, organisations will gain an understanding of employees' unconscious experiences, thus could proactively put plans in place to remedy the effects of OT. This in turn will improve organisations' effectiveness (Ledimo, 2012); employees will be engaged and increase future profits. Steyn and Cilliers (2016) propose that the value-add of understanding the impact of OT on employees is to develop a depth psychology understanding of OT experiences, particularly concerning the type and severity of anxiety, its protective structures, and the lack of containment.

The current study aimed to contribute to the knowledge foundation by exploring the covert (unconscious) impact of OT on employees, especially envisioning the rise in digitisation and artificial intelligence. Frey and Osborne (2017) suggest that several jobs will be at risk as a result of being susceptible to computerisation. In their study, Ghislieri et al. (2018, p.3) explore how the advancement of technology may impact on employees. My attempt to answer questions such as:

- (1) "Are automated systems supporting humans or overtaking them"
- (2) "How is the relationship between technology and people changing" (Ghislieri et al., 2018, p. 1).
- (3) "How is technology affecting people's well-being" (Ghislieri et al., 2018, p. 1).

Ghislieri et al. (2018) conclude that there is limited literature and empirical evidence on how the advancement of technology resulting in OT will impact on employees and recommend that further studies be carried out.

This study will focus on the lived experiences of employees post the OT exercise.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

A major shift in the South African financial services sector took place in 2004 through the implementation of the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services (FAIS) Act 37 of 2002 (Government of South Africa, 2002). Recent studies also noted a major change in the financial services sector due to the automation and digitisation of services and products (Ledimo & Martins, 2014). The South African Society of Bank Officials (SASBO) (2019) reports the loss of employment opportunities for thousands, which is considered a devastating blow to an already-crippled economy, but banks are refuting the number of potential lay-offs.

Competition from “branchless” digital banks is forcing their more traditional counterparts to rethink how they do business. Many have reduced floor space, with operations being streamlined (SASBO, 2019). This shift has led to organisations restructuring every two to three years. Amidst the change process, Steyn and Cilliers (2016) state that employees will be instructed about the fast execution of the restructuring process, sometimes without a rationale for the restructuring process and, most importantly, repercussions for their employment or professional prospects (Anderson & Anderson, 2001; De Jager et al., 2004; Fuda, 2013), leaving some employees unemployed and the remaining employees affected either negatively or positively (Ledimo & Martins, 2014). The transformational process has a conscious and unconscious impact on employees.

The majority of change and transformation research focusses on the viewpoints and experiences of leaders in the planning and implementation of change (Hughes, 2015). Furthermore, Henderson and Boje (2015) state that most OT research makes use of quantitative research designs to study conscious behaviour and it is provided from a humanistic as well as practical social and individual psychology perspective.



The parallel view is shared by Huffington et al. (2004), highlighting that the fact that OT research focusses on conscious behaviour suggests that little is known about the type and severity of transformational anxiety beneath the surface of consciousness. Sievers (2009) further alludes to the fact that because of its complexity and difficulty to assess, the unconscious OT behaviours are rarely explored in organisations.

Research has focussed on the conscious factors of OT. To identify the unconscious factors of OT on employees, the research embarked on a qualitative study to examine the covert impact of OT on employees, specifically in the financial services sector in South Africa. The research question was thus:

- (1) Does OT in the South African financial services sector have a covert (unconscious) impact on employees as a result of the rapidly transforming landscape (digitalisation, artificial intelligence and flu pandemics)?

To answer the research question, the study further examined the following literature and empirical questions:

- (1) What is the covert impact of OT on employees in the financial services sector as a result of digitalisation and artificial intelligence?

## **1.4 GENERAL AIM**

The general aim of the study was to explore and describe the covert (unconscious) impact of OT on employees (as a result of the rapidly changing business landscape) in the financial services sector in South Africa employing the SP perspective.

### **1.4.1 Specific aims**

The specific aim of the literature review was:

- (1) To conceptualise OT;
- (2) To conceptualise SP; and
- (3) To conceptualise the unconscious impact of OT on employees from an SP perspective.

The specific aim of this interpretative study was to:

- (1) Explore and describe the unconscious impact of OT on employees as a result of the rapidly changing business landscape.
- (2) Make recommendations on interventions that help employees, manager, OD consultants and Industrial and Organisational Psychologists (IOPs) post OT.

## **1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Organisational Transformation**

OT refers to effected variations in the organisation's structure, operational capabilities, culture and orientation to its environment (Baptista et al., 2020; French et al., 2000; Levy & Merry, 1986; Meyer & Botha, 2000). For the purpose of this study, OT will focus of restructuring and downsizing of organisations resulting in layoffs of employees.

### **Financial Service Provider**

Signify any individual, except a representative who supplies guidance; or furnishes advice and renders any intermediary service; or c) renders an intermediary service as a regular element of such a person's business (Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act, 2002 (Act No. 37 of 2002) (Government of South Africa, 2002).

### **Financial Representative is known as a Financial Adviser/Representative**

According to the FAIS Act 2002, a representative refers to any person employed and given authority by the financial services provider to perform work tasks such as giving financial advice to clients on its behalf. Employees performing administrative or specialist tasks such as clerical and legal respectively and do not advance a client to making a specific financial decision are excluded.

### **FAIS Act**

Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act, 2002 (Act No. 37 of 2002).

## **1.6 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

This study will be effected in the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) that has the sub-discipline Organisational Psychology.

## **1.6.1 Disciplinary context**

### *1.6.1.1 Industrial and Organisational Psychology*

IOP has its ontological and epistemological roots in psychology and multi-disciplinary theories that attempt to resolve employee satisfaction and production issues (Watkins, 2001). Schreuder and Coetzee (2010) assert that IOP is a field concerned with the study of human behaviour that is both academic and applied and is associated with work, productivity and organisations, in a specific sort of location in an organisation (Cascio, 2001; Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology [SIOP], 1999). The academic field conducts theoretical and empirical studies within the different sub-disciplines to generate knowledge that will aid challenges experienced in specific socio-economic environments and the applied field on the other hand, employs psychological philosophies, scientific based solutions that produces new information to resolve challenges faced by business environment (Bergh, 2009; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010).

### *1.6.1.2 Organisational Psychology*

Organisational Psychology as a sub-cluster of IOP centres its attention on employee emotions and commitment to the organisation, role-related behaviours and organisational behaviours (Muchinsky et al., 2005; Salas-Vallina & Fernandez, 2017), organisational effectiveness (Rothman & Cilliers, 2007), and organisational influence on attitudes and behaviour of employees (Coetzee et. al., 2016). Examples of activities entailed in organisational psychology include organisational change, culture and climate, motivation, and organisational commitment (Bergh, 2009; De Sousa Sabbagha et al., 2018; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010).

## **1.7 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Philosophy of science employs a systemised method of studying a phenomenon and utilises multiple specialised disciplines to provide a rational description or explanation of the phenomenon (Rosenberg & McIntyre, 2019; Spring et al., 2017). In this section, I discuss my ontological world view, epistemological stance, the

paradigm that frames this study as well as axiological, rhetorical and research methods.

This research study was framed by my worldview of relativism which supposes firstly that people create their own reality (Warrick, 2001), secondly, that no reality exists outside the mind independently, as well as the shared meaning and collective comprehension. Warrick (2001) testifies that other idealists assert that the reality is not absolute but observer-dependent. O'Neil and Koekemoer (2016) remark that truth is perceived as relative and as such, multiple truths may exist. This is different from relativism which reasons that there is no single reality that is socially constructed, but a succession of substitute social constructions (Barnard & May, 2019), and finally, that reality is constantly debated, negotiated and interpreted.

The ontological belief used in this research is anchored in the epistemological stance of social constructivism and it infers that people construct their own understanding of reality, further, that the knower's experience creates the truth or knowledge (Creswell, 2014; Oxford, 1997; Warrick, 2001). Crotty's (2003) reference from Creswell suggests that through interaction with the human community, the social meaning is always created (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Creswell (2003) emphasises that rather than starting with a theory (as postpositivists do), constructivists generate or develop a theory or pattern of thought inductively". According to Clarke and Hoggett (2009), and Terre Blanche et al. (2006), individual experiences can be comprehended through engagement, empathetic listening, and respectful interpretation, according to the epistemological assumption.

The paradigm congruent with social constructivist epistemology is hermeneutic phenomenology which, according to O'Neil and Koekemoer (2016), and Nieuwenhuis (2016), is the paradigmatic assumption to describe individuals' lived experiences with the intention of unearthing the meaning of the experiences for the individuals. The research followed explorative and descriptive research (Wilson & MacLean, 2011), which is rested in the hermeneutic phenomenological research paradigm. This paradigm is birthed from the philosophy of psychology and it describes individual lived experiences about a phenomenon according to the participants (Groenewald, 2017). The aim of this research was not to work from any

given background, but to describe (Giorgi, 2009) the phenomenon as experienced by participants (Groenewald, 2017). This relates to the focus of this research as it sought to understand the lived experiences of employees in the financial services sector who have gone through the OT process. The main focus was to comprehend the unconscious impact of the phenomenon on the employees.

Since this was a qualitative study exploring people's lived experiences, my axiological assumption was that I would bring value to the study as an inquirer. As mentioned in the background, I have personally experienced the organisation's downsizing exercise; consequently I had an emotional attachment to the study which might have led to bias in conducting the research and interpreting the data. The research participants' stories might have been illuminating my voice as a researcher. Axiology assumption also refers to the ethical considerations regarded during the research proposal preparations and this includes consideration of philosophical approach to making right decisions based on values (Finnis, 1980). The axiological assumption involves the process of evaluating, understanding and establishing the concepts of ethical and unethical conduct in research. It considers what value is attributable to the various components of our research such as research subjects, the data and the audience to whom I will report the findings of the research. Discussion on how to remedy my personal values will be discussed in detail under ethical consideration.

The rhetorical assumption or research language was fashioned in a personal, literary manner and employed qualitative terms (Mayfield et al., 2020). This implied that the prose would be in the first person using terms such as "I"; furthermore, metaphors might also be used. Justification of ethical consideration used qualitative terminology such as "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "conformity" (Creswell, 2014). In view of the fact that the research methodological approach was inductive in nature, the narrative was engaging and in my voice as it was shaped by my experience in the data collection and analysis. Inductive research entails applying the bottom-up approach, working back and forth between data until a rich data is realised and comprehended. Hermeneutic phenomenology research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher describes the lived experience of the phenomena by

a human as expressed by those who took part in a study (Creswell, 2014). This research strategy will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The axiological, rhetorical and methodical assumptions discussed above are congruent with the hermeneutic phenomenology research paradigm, which is used to describe individuals' lived experiences as portrayed by participants. As the researcher, I have highlighted in the axiological assumption that I have experienced the phenomenon; however, as a researcher I have "bracketed" my perceptions with the aim of gaining access to participants' experiences without presumptions (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018) before interpreting it from the SP perspective. Rhetorical prose is in the first person, highlighting an individual's lived experiences and the research methodological assumption was focussed on describing individuals' lived experiences as portrayed by the individuals.

## **1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research approach followed a descriptive and qualitative research within the hermeneutic phenomenology research paradigm that aimed to describe individuals' animated experiences of a phenomenon as expressed by participants (Wilson & MacLean, 2011).

Aspects of research design, such as research approach, sampling method, entrée and establishing research roles, data collection and analysis are articulated next.

### **1.8.1 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study. The aim of this research approach was not to work from any given background but to describe (Giorgi, 2009) the phenomenon as experienced by the employees in the financial services sector (Groenewald, 2017).

To collect data, a qualitative research approach was utilised to explore and describe the meaning employees assigned to a social or human challenge. This approach focussed on collecting data in a natural setting and occurring events that produce real-life experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data was collected employing an

interview research method (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Due to its nature of being an emergent design (Creswell, 2014), the initial plan of the data collection process and phases changed. The initial plan entailed conducting face-to-face interviews with participants; however, due to the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, data was collected virtually via Microsoft Teams.

### **1.8.2 Research strategy**

This study employed the hermeneutic phenomenological strategy to gather relevant data. De Vos (1998) attests that understanding and interpreting the meaning that individuals assign to their everyday lived experiences is central to the phenomenological approach. Additionally, Merriam (2002) states that phenomenology is a search for meaning in the lived experiences of individuals in their natural setting and attaching meaning from the viewpoints of those who have experienced a given phenomenon. This strategy was chosen because I was able to delineate common and shared meaning of my lived experiences and those of several individuals who have been affected by OT. Thereafter, an SP perspective was used to interpret the experiences.

This research design facilitated comprehending how OT (the phenomena) impact on employees (lived experiences). Data was collected in the form of in-depth interviews to derive meaning from the data. In order to derive meaning from the data, in-depth interviews were conducted.

### **1.8.3 Research method**

The research method section entails a discussion on how empirical data was collected. The emphasis is on describing the research process, type of tools used and procedures employed (Ledimo, 2012). Discussion includes the following aspects, namely sampling population, technique and method. The sampling discussion is succeeded by the entrée's description and establishing research roles, data collection and analysis.

### *1.8.3.1 Entrée and establishing research roles*

The population earmarked for this research was employed by an organisation in the financial services industry in South Africa. Although the financial services institution employs about 42 000 employees nationwide, the population size pursued ten employees who are currently confined to the Gauteng province.

The population for this research recently endured a restructuring process as a result of the rebranding, a change in operating model and a reduction of over-engineered senior leadership. Furthermore, this organisation has undergone the process of restructuring approximately three times in the past decade. In this calendar year the unforeseen flu pandemic, COVID-19, has caused major disruptions in the ways of work, forcing virtual remote working. OT has been part of the targeted audience's subjective reality.

The permission to conduct research was granted by the organisation where the research would be conducted. Evidence to back up approval is in the form of an e-mail message. The participants comprised all employees in the organisation at the same or higher leadership level in which I was previously employed (in my previous role). I observed and complied with the organisation's policies and conditions while conducting the research.

### *1.8.3.2 My role as the researcher*

As indicated, this was an interpretive study and I have personally gone through the process of downsizing within the research setting in which this study was conducted. This raised a concern with regard to ethical, strategic and personal issues (Locke et al., 2013). For this reason, throughout the research I articulated any form of bias, background and history that may influence my interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

I am a black African single mother and currently studying. Previously, I was a full-time employee for a period of four years in an executive leadership role. In mid-2018, I was affected through a downsizing process and was retrenched. After the downsizing process, I was in touch with many survivors at the organisation who expressed the psychological effects of the process. I shared the same sentiments



with the surviving employees. It was at this point that I was intrigued and decided to carry out a study on the covert impact of OT on the remaining employees. I was intrigued to produce scientific evidence that would aid organisations to manage the after-effects of organisational changes. I believe that this study can make a contribution to organisations and their employees considering the periodical changes taking place in the financial services industry.

I was retrenched and have since returned to the same organisation as an IOP intern in a different business unit. I conducted “backyard research” which signifies that the study was conducted in my organisation with the employees from different business units. “Backyard research” involves the researcher studying their own organisation or friends or immediate environment (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, as cited by Creswell, 2014). At the time of this study, I was an intern in a business unit where employees might wish to participate in the study. Furthermore, there was an opportunity to be exposed to participants I previously engaged with or lead. As the researcher, I introduced myself as a student and IOP intern who was conducting research for study purposes. In addition, I highlighted to the participants that I obtained permission from the organisation to conduct research. All participants who were interviewed were in a junior and/or senior leadership role and gave consent to be interviewed. Most participants expressed that this was a good study and that they hoped it would help the organisation to deal with issues of OT.

Sensitive ethical issues, such as research with peers and backyard research, are discussed under ethical consideration. Examples of issues that may arise include a familiar research setting that may compromise my ability to reveal information or bring up issues of power imbalance between the inquirer and the participants (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, information collected may be inaccurate, or the roles of participants and researchers may be vulnerable since I previously held a superior position to participants. I recently experienced the effects of retrenchment, and as such, interpretation of findings may be influenced in a certain direction (lean towards certain themes).

### *1.8.3.3 Sampling*

A study population is the entire set of variables from which a representative sample of respondents is selected. (Welman & Kruger, 2005). Morgan and Sklar (2012) attest that a sample, also known as a subgroup of the population is selected from the population and is usually significantly less than the total number of people in the population but it is intended to be representative of the original demographic group. Denscombe (2008), on the other hand, defines sampling as picking a fraction or a lesser number of units of a population as representative of that entire population or having a certain attribute of that complete population.

#### *a. Sampling technique*

There are two primary sampling techniques utilised in research, namely probability and non-probability. A non-probability sampling technique was used for this qualitative study. This sampling technique describes a process where samples are collected in a procedure that does not give all participants in the population equal probability of being included in the study (Etikan, 2016), and methods that are subjective are used to decide on components that should to be included in the sample. Etikan (2016) further indicates that his technique can be implemented quicker. According to Etikan and Bala (2017), convenience sampling, purposive or judgmental sampling, stratified and quota sampling are several of the non-probability sampling criteria that can be utilised.

For this research, a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2002) was used to pick out the sample. Purposive sampling is described as selecting a sample based on your personal knowledge and features of the research setting and the nature of your research aims (Etikan, 2016). Patton (2002) affirms that purposive sampling is commonly used in the qualitative enquiry to select key informants and it is cost-effective. Snowballing was used where one colleague referred other colleagues to the researcher and Microsoft Teams virtual invitations were sent out requesting them to participate in the research study.

### *b. Sampling criteria*

Inclusion criteria for participants entailed all employees who have worked for the organisation. Employees included those who once exited the organisation and were reabsorbed into the system. Participants for this research were employees who showed interest and volunteered to be part of the research. Participants included:

- (1) Different business units – employees working in various business units, i.e. functional groups such as Human Resources (HR), Engineering Services, or core business, i.e. bank tellers, advisers, sales managers, branch managers staff.
- (2) Gender – male and female.
- (3) Tenure – two years and more.
- (4) Employment contract – full-time staff.
- (5) Corporate level – employees on all corporate levels, i.e. operational/administrative (BA3 level) to managing executive (ME) level.
- (6) Skill and knowledge – any employee with qualifications from matric to postgraduate degree. This also included generalist roles to specialist.
- (7) Language – participants were required to have English as their preferred language. At the research setting in question, English was the preferred business language.

Exclusion criteria entailed all employees who worked for the organisation but have never experienced any form of OT. Employees of the company were invited by e-mail to engage in the research for this study.

### *c. Sample size*

The sample size that was selected from the population was ten participants as recommended by Boyd (2001) who claims that this sample size is sufficient to reach saturation for qualitative research study. Furthermore, I determined the type of data that was required and stopped collecting data when themes were saturated (Charmaz, 2006; Wium & Louw, 2018) and research subjects did not introduce new themes. For this study, eight employees participated in the research and by the eighth participant there were no new themes emerging.

Creswell (2014) recommends that the interview should be long, since this was a hermeneutic phenomenological study wherein I spent time allowing the participants to describe their lived experiences about a specific phenomenon. This helped me to listen to participants and build an understanding from what I heard. Given that the hermeneutic phenomenology research is a qualitative study, collecting and analysing data is time-consuming and may be costly, thus a smaller sample is recommended. The following table specifies participants according to gender, race, tenure (number of years within the research setting), and business units in which participants held their roles.

**Table 1.1**

*Details of gender, race, tenure, leadership level and business unit*

Gender	Race	Tenure	Leadership level	Business unit		
				Banking	Financial services	Functional
Male	Indian	15	Senior		*	
Female	White	7	Junior			*
Female	White	5	Junior			*
Male	Black	6	Senior	*		
Female	Indian	15	Senior		*	*
Female	Black	20	Senior	*	*	
Male	White	5	Senior			*
Female	Black	4	Senior		*	

#### *1.8.3.4 Data collection*

This study is anchored in the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm, which believes in encapsulating a profound narrative of data (Groenewald, 2017). The core of phenomenology aims to comprehend and describe research subjects' lived experiences as stated by the subject themselves (Groenewald, 2017). To achieve this, I utilised the semi-structured interview as the qualitative data collection approach. As stated by DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019, p. 1), semi-structured interviews is a flexible interview approach facilitated a dialogue between the researcher and the subject, which is augmented with follow-up probing questions, and remarks. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) further affirm that this approach lets

the researcher use open-ended questioning to analyse participants' ideas, feelings, and opinions on a certain topic by delving deeply into personal and frequently delicate themes.

The structure of the interview schedule followed a specific flow. The first section entailed questions about the participant's OT "story". This was followed by the next section focussing on the participants 'experience' of their OT journey, and finally the "impact" of the experience of their OT journey. As the researcher, I was able to collect participants' specific OT journeys, which led to further discussion about participants' thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

Qualitative interview entails a reciprocal interaction where the interviewer poses questions to the interviewee to try and comprehend the subject's perspective and unfold the meaning of people's experiences (Kvale, 1996). Creswell (2014) lists the different types of semi-interviews as face-to-face, telephone, focus group and e-mail internet interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption and limitations, I conducted virtual interview (Jones & Abdelfattah, 2020), using the Microsoft Teams platform. For this study, I applied the in-depth exploratory interview. The research questions were semi-structured and open-ended.

In the first phase of data collection, I presented an informed consent letter that was read and signed by each participant (Appendix A). All participants were of legal capacity. The information letter provided participants with the purpose of the research and ethical considerations that would be adhered to. Examples of the elements contained in the letter encompassed these elements:

- (1) The purpose of the study;
- (2) Who I am;
- (3) What I was doing;
- (4) How long I would be involved;
- (5) An invitation to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason;
- (6) Possibilities for personal and societal benefits;
- (7) The researcher's potential for damage or discomfort;
- (8) Confidentiality;
- (9) How to obtain a copy of findings; and

(10) Ways to contact the researcher for any enquiries.

An interview schedule was drawn up for the study (included in Appendix B). The interview was subdivided into three sections: The first section focussed on gaining an insight into the participant's overall OT story at micro and meso level, section 2 enquired about personal and individual experiences, and section 3 engaged participants on the impact of psychological factors of OT. The concept of follow-up probing questions was built on the interactive interviewing notion that both the interviewer and the participant would build a container to keep the procreation of insight (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009), and "rich description of the phenomena and their setting" (Groenewald, 2017, p. 47). The interactive questioning technique was utilised to tap into the covert views and feelings, as well as the implicit (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

The participants' interviews were audio-recorded to ensure validity and truthfulness of qualitative data and I obtained consent from participants before conducting the interviews (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Audio recordings also helped to capture details (emotions, behaviour, and sounds) that may have been omitted by me during the interview. To confirm the reliability, I transcribed recordings of all interviews and verified through listening to the recordings. I was respectful, empathetic and sensitive towards the interviewees at all times. Furthermore, I avoided enforcing subjective views by asking probing questions and not leading questions. Considering that in recent times I experienced OT in the form of a downsizing process, I documented a chronicle of my own emotions, experiences and thoughts in my research journal (Silverman et al., 2016).

Concerns relating to the limitations of lockdown levels as a result of COVID-19 were considered. Interviews were conducted virtually by means of Microsoft Teams and the participants' permission was obtained to record the interviews. Provisions for face-to-face interviews were made according to the University of South Africa's COVID-19 guidelines. It is important to note that no face-to-face interviews were conducted as the organisation did not allow employees to meet in person during the time I collected data.

#### *1.8.3.5 Data analysis*

A hermeneutic analysis, which is a technique used to analyse qualitative data, was employed in this study (Bhattacharjee, 2012). According to Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 116), the hermeneutic analysis is a class of content analysis in which the researcher attempts to “interpret” the subjective meaning of a text in the light of its socio-historical setting. given text within its socio-historic context. Thus, to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher alternates between a single interpretation of the text (the part) and an all-inclusive comprehension of the context (the whole).

The hermeneutic analysis consists of three stages (Prasad & Mir, 2002). The first stage involves choosing the text and studying the language and themes of the text according to any textual method (for example thematic analysis). The second stage involves careful consideration of the holistic context; this includes history, culture, social and industry and textualised interpretation between extracted meaning of text and centre-anchored context within which the text originated. At this stage, hermeneutic circle (comprehending how contextual experience determined content of the text and as a result how the text influenced the narrative) is closed. Finally, the formation of the conceptual framework of in-depth meaning of the relationship between text and context is reached.

For this research the hermeneutic circle was applied to analyse the individual narration and the entire OT phenomena (Prasad & Mir, 2002) at micro, meso and macro levels (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016) independently before combining all three stages into a holistic interpretation (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). First, I employed simple hermeneutic analysis to read, arrange, and comprehend the transcribed data (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009) from the interviews with the research participants.

This was followed by meaning making of the text, which was achieved through content analysis (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). I used double hermeneutic analysis to analyse data and the research environment from a systems psychodynamics perspective (Parsadh, 2019). This stage aided in exploring the below-the-surface unconscious underlying forces. Through an alternative repetitive process of

observing and harmonising singular participant's text to the whole (Bhattacharjee, 2012), I textualised interpretation between extracted meaning of text and centre-anchored context within which text originated, and finally formation of the conceptual framework of in-depth meaning of the relationship between text and context. Throughout the analysis process, I applied theory and literature related to the SP perspective. Findings were integrated to highlight the CIBART model constructs which identified the impact of OT on employees. Furthermore, findings were integrated with literature to highlight the basic assumptions of SP as defence mechanisms of coping with the unconscious anxieties. This aided to describe the covert impact of the phenomena.

## **1.9 ENSURING THE QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH**

The following section will deliberate on how ethical considerations as well as the reliability and validity of the research were observed to ensure the quality of research.

### **1.9.1 Ethical consideration**

Firstly, I obtained the gatekeeper's permission to do research in the research setting in question and the purpose of study was highlighted. Creswell (2014) describes a "gatekeeper" as the person authorised to grant permission to conduct research in a specific research setting. Information sharing of data was discussed and agreed upon. The second phase entailed obtaining ethical clearance from the university that required me to uphold the professional and ethical principles according to CEMS, Research Committee, 2010 – certificate number: NkwanaS – 2020/CEMS/IOP/028. Interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Team. I ensured that if a need arose for a face-to-face interview, both the participant and I would observe the government, university and organisation's COVID-19 guidelines as articulated in section 1.8.3.4.

To confirm confidentiality and anonymity of participant information, I obtained signed informed consent from the participants (Bhattacharjee, 2012). An information sheet, containing all relevant information, including the purpose and process of the study, was provided to the participants prior to the interview to help them to make an



informed decision. Participants' involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and they were given the option to withdraw at any time they wished to do so. Moral and ethical concerns and accuracy of data were maintained (Van Eeden, 2005). Electronic data (raw and analysed) is kept safe with the use of passwords and hard copies are locked in a safe in a filing cabinet. When reporting on findings, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants. Existing literature and theory was applied to substantiate the research findings and to explain the phenomenon and experience in the study. Aspects that have a bearing on the study were articulated to illustrate a holistic perspective of employees' experiences (Parsadh, 2019; Van Eeden, 2005).

There were numerous concerns that came with conducting research in the same setting in which a researcher is employed. Firstly, issues of a familiar research setting might have compromised my ability to disclose information regarding their biased perspective, and information collected might be inaccurate (Creswell, 2014). This was followed by the imbalance of power between researcher and participants, which may have influenced the collection of good data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Finally, concerns were considered that relate to what is referred to as "dangerous information" which is political and risky for the internal researcher (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). For example, the researcher may risk losing their job if findings of the report are not favourable, or sensitive information shared by participants may put the organisation at risk.

To deal with these concerns:

- (1) Strategies of ensuring rigour are reported on. The strategies of ensuring rigour included credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as discussed under "ensuring rigour of the research".
- (2) I used the reflexivity strategy to minimise study subjectivities. For example, I discussed my views and bias under the researcher's role and ethical considerations.
- (3) Approval to conduct research from the organisation was obtained from the gatekeepers. The request to the organisation entailed a brief of the proposal together with the title and the purpose of the study, my role as an intern and Master's student, and benefits to the organisation and employees, i.e.

information would add to the reservoir of knowledge of the subject of IOP academics and would be shared and used by the organisation to develop contemporary change initiatives to help employees deal with rapid change affecting the business landscape.

- (4) At the time of my research, I was no longer in a leadership position but was an IOP intern. To ensure that past professional relations did not create an indirect concern relating to an imbalance of power, I applied three guiding principles, i.e. respect for people, concern for welfare and justice, which were incorporated into the ethical considerations as discussed under data collection. Further, the research participants held leadership positions at the same level or higher than my previous leadership role. Consequently, this aided in addressing issues of imbalance between the researcher and the participants.
- (5) Obtaining informed consent from participants prior to conducting the research is an example of ethical aspects that were taken into account and the purpose of study was also articulated in the consent form. Furthermore, informing participants that confidential information would not be disclosed, and the use of pseudonyms was applied to protect the participants.
- (6) During the interview with colleagues, I maintained a professional relationship emphasising my role as a student/intern and the purpose of research to enable sharing of rich insights. Findings of the research were shared with participants for feedback prior to publishing the findings of the research.

Despite the challenges and concerns that accompany backyard research, there are advantages for conducting research in a familiar research setting. The following advantages are deliberated by Hockey (1993) and Mercer (2007). The researcher finds it easy to build rapport and have enhanced communication with the gatekeeper and participants. They will experience minimal culture shock and uncertainty. The researcher is able to determine the truthfulness of responses and the possibility of participants providing innermost details of lived experiences with someone seen as empathetic or who have experienced the phenomenon.

## 1.9.2 Ensuring the rigour of the research

Rigour and trustworthiness are strategies used in qualitative research to ensure quality of the data collected. Trustworthiness addresses validity in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). It is pivotal to demonstrate validity and reliability for any type of research. Gibbs (2007) defines qualitative validity as verifying accuracy of the finding by employing varied procedures and describes qualitative reliability as the consistency of the research approach across different researchers and projects (Creswell, 2014). Bhattacharjee (2012) supports this notion and sites Lincoln and Guba (1985), who suggest that in qualitative research, rigor and trustworthiness should be ensured. Trustworthiness can be achieved through the application of multiple validation strategies.

Creswell and Poth (2016, p. 154) deliberate on the importance of utilising multiple validation strategies for backyard research to ensure that the research findings are “accurate and insightful”, namely participant’s lens, researcher’s lens, and readers or reviewer’s lens. The authors recommend that at least two of the three strategies be employed. The table below summarises the multiple validation strategies that were employed for this study.

**Table 1.2**

*Validation strategy*

<b>Validation Strategy:</b>		<b>Researcher’s Validation Strategy</b>
Checking accuracy of qualitative account		
Researcher’s Lens	Reflexivity – clarifying researcher’s bias	As a researcher, I elucidated my “dark matter” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) by disclosing my experiences, values and bias in line with the topic being researched in the research proposal.
Participants’ Lens	Prolonged Engagement and persistent observation in the research setting	Researcher is working in the research setting, therefore has spent time prior to commencing the study and has spent more time during the study building rapport with gatekeepers who approved the

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study. More time was spent building connections with participants, understanding the context culture. Prolonged engagement in the study also helped verify misinformation that stems from misrepresentations from participants.

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Source: Creswell and Poth (2016)

Furthermore, trustworthiness can be achieved by employing the following measures: credibility, transferability and confirmability.

#### *1.9.2.1 Dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability*

Bhattacharjee (2012) describes dependability as having a researcher observing a phenomenon at various points in times and arriving at same conclusions. This concept is likened to test-retest reliability. To ensure reliability, I documented procedures followed by documenting the detailed phases of the procedures to allow other parties to track the procedure (Yin, 2009).

To ensure consistency, the research question was clearly related with the aims of the study and research methodology (Shongwe, 2014). Credibility is parallel to internal validity in functional research. Credibility can be demonstrated by prolonged engagement in the research setting.

I was with the organisation as an employee for five years prior to being retrenched (this indicates that I have personally experienced the phenomena). I then returned as an intern and for the full duration of the study I continued to spend time in the research setting exploring how employees experienced the OT phenomena. Spending prolonged time in the research setting and observing the phenomena at different times helped me in developing in-depth understanding of OT. This also provided me with an opportunity to provide details of the research setting and employees. According to Creswell (2014), this gives credibility to the narrative account. Furthermore, the use of theoretical reasoning in interpreting the findings increased credibility.

The extent to which qualitative research findings can be applied to other similar contexts with different respondents is referred to as transferability; it is the interpretive counterpart to generalisability (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). This was accomplished by purposively selecting the participants and providing a thorough description of the enquiry.

Confirmability refers to how the current study is backed up by meticulous data collection and ensuring that the findings of the study are that of the participants and not influenced by researcher's bias. The mode of data collection was through semi-structured interviews utilising an interview schedule. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, data was collected virtually via Microsoft Teams and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. In further assuring that the qualitative enquiry does not misrepresent the study, I proposed the concept of peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as a method of exposing oneself to a detached or non-interested peer in a way that resembles an analytic session, with the aim of examining parts of the investigation that may otherwise remain simply latent in the inquirer's thoughts. I exposed myself to other fellow researchers who were not familiar with the study and my research supervisor, which ensured that the findings and interpretation of the study were not influenced by my bias. This helped to enhance the validity of the study. From the onset, I disclosed my predisposition to the study to all parties involved (Shongwe, 2014).

#### *1.9.2.2 Reflexivity, disconfirming evidence and prolonged engagement*

Since this research is rooted in the social constructivism, various validity procedures congruent with trustworthiness concepts discussed above were applied. Reflexivity, extended field engagement, disconfirming evidence, and deep, rich description were all part of the validity procedures. Hanley (2016) refers to various researchers who emphasise that the inclusion of the reflexive component plays a pivotal role in high-quality qualitative research. I self-disclosed information that may have affected the interpretation and articulated a detailed process of the interpretation. The validity of qualitative research and transparency are enhanced by discussing the potential influence of my views and values (Creswell, 2014).

I further applied the disconfirming validity procedure. This process involved the initial phase of determining preliminary themes and then searching for negative or disconfirming themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The disconfirming evidence presents auxiliary support of the account's credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I also spent extended time in the research field, thus building rapport with participants and focussed on gaining a credible account of data. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), this also aids in comparing the interview notes with observable data, consequently aggregating validity. The final validity procedure applied was to describe the participants, setting, and themes in "rich detail" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Denzin (1989, p. 83) posits that "thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts". Rich detail provides the research with participants' true lived experiences which also provide the individuals' unconscious state, providing rich data.

## **1.10 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The rich data collected for this study, which was the participants' compact descriptions of deep, dense and detailed accounts (Denzin, 1989) was analysed and interpreted using the hermeneutic analysis method. I purposely made use of the hermeneutic analysis to interpret the subjective meaning of employees who have experienced OT within this research setting. Analysed data was grouped and tabulated into themes and sub-themes; each theme was discussed in detail and also integrated with literature. Specific reference to participants' verbatim statements was highlighted. For example, I indicated the precise locality of the interview verbatim. The findings of the study aimed at comprehending the covert impact of OT on employees are presented in Chapter 3. The aim of the detailed discussion was to tell the participant's story (Parsadh, 2019) and the individual's unconscious state.

## **1.11 CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1.11.1 Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to gain insight on the covert impact of OT on employees within the financial services sector through the SP perspective. Conclusions of this research will be deliberated in Chapter 4. This will entail extrapolation of the findings of the interpretative study, as well as the literature review to confirm whether the aim of the study was met.

### **1.11.2 Limitations**

The current study has some anticipated limitations as described below; however, further discussions relating to the actual study are conferred in Chapter 4.

- (1) Researcher's interpretative bias may be a limitation (Mouton, 2001).
- (2) Time constraints are foreseen as the limitation for the current study. This viewpoint is established by Chawane et al. (2003), who declares that qualitative study is generally known to have high cost and time implications. The length of time it will take to collect and analyse data may be long because of the nature of the study.
- (3) Thirdly, it is likely that participants may not show up for the interviews for various reasons.
- (4) There may be limited responses, unwillingness of the sample participants to take part in the research study, and participants not keeping to their appointments timeously.

### **1.11.3 Recommendations**

The recommendations attributed to the literature and the integration of findings with literature of the study is discussed in Chapter 4. Future research recommendations about the study of the unconscious phenomenon using the SP will also be discussed. Furthermore, recommendations will be made based on the outcome of the study.

## **1.12 ARTICLE DEVELOPMENT**

The article presented in Chapter 3 is a succinct account of the entire dissertation and encompasses different elements of the report. In the first section, I discuss the motivation and background of the study, including the theoretical context in relation to the study. Further, I deliberate on the process followed to conduct the study; this entails discussion of the research methodology, design, approach, entrée and researcher's role. That is followed by a discussion on data sampling, data criteria, data collection and analysis.

To analyse the data, I used the SP perspective to interpret and comprehend the unconscious impact on the phenomena being studied. Since this is an interpretive

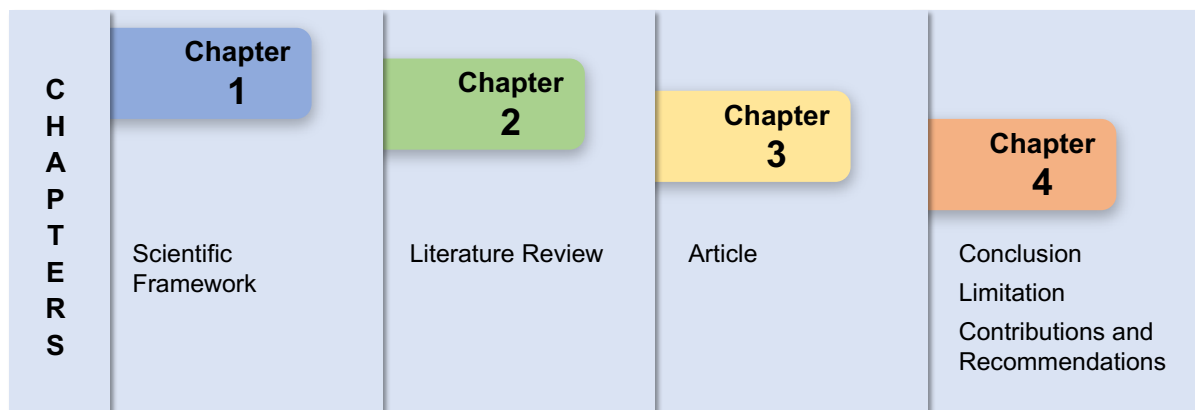
study, I employed the hermeneutics analysis method to understand the participants' experience of the phenomena. I discussed the four stages of analysing data, with the first phase involving studying the text and the language and choosing themes of the text according to any textual method. This is followed by discussion on careful consideration of the holistic research setting context; this includes history, culture, social and industry. I concluded this chapter by deliberating on limitations, recommendations and conclusion of the study.

### 1.13 CHAPTER LAYOUT

This dissertation is arranged into four chapters, as depicted in Figure 1.1. Chapter 1 provided information on the background and impetus of the study. A problem statement was constructed and literature review, as well as interpretative study was framed. This was followed by rationalisation of the paradigm stance, psychological paradigm, theories, concepts and constructs. Chapter 1 was concluded by tabulating the research methodology.

**Figure 1.1**

*Chapter layout*



The literature review is summarised in Chapter 2, which entails definitions of the phenomenon of the study, namely OT (also known as organisational change) and the construct of the unconscious (covert). Lastly, the concept of SP was also explained in view of the fact that the study employed the perspective to interpret data.



Chapter 3 is presented in a scholarly article format and is a condensed version of the dissertation. This chapter is structured for authors who aim to publish their studies in specific accredited academic journals. In this instance the article will be submitted for publication in the South Africa Journal of Industrial Psychology (SAJIP). This article observes the prescribed scholarly article guidelines and design. The chapter opens with the foundational background, which details the introduction, background of the study, research purpose, literature review development and learnings, the problem statement and aim of the study, Next is the discussion on the research design and methodology, which entails a description of the approach, method and setting of the research, entrée and researcher's role, sampling, data collection and analysis, with the final step of reporting on the research findings in relation to the literature review and theoretical background.

To conclude, I used the research aims articulated in Chapter 1 to present the conclusion, limitations and recommendations of the study. All of this is encapsulated in Chapter 4.

#### **1.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 1 encompassed the scientific orientation of the study. In summary, this entailed the research motivation and background. The research problem and question, together with general and specific aims, were articulated. This was followed by the paradigmic view, research design and method. Finally, the chapter layout was tabled.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Consistent with the research aims, this chapter explores the literature on the constructs of the study. The focus of this chapter is to deliberate on the concept of OT, and its root cause. Further, the unconscious will be discussed using the SP perspective. The SP perspective will help to gain an understanding the inherent impact of the OT phenomenon on employees.

This research, which is anchored in the hermeneutics phenomenology paradigm, is centred on exploring and describing (Wilson & MacLean, 2011) the lived experiences of the participants in the specific research setting (Groenewald, 2017). The purpose of reviewing the literature is to explore if the findings of the study are related to the existing body of research. It is imperative to note that this study is not to work from any given background (Giorgi, 2009), but to describe the phenomenon as experienced by participants. After describing the participants' lived experiences, the study will aim at comprehending the unconscious impact of the phenomenon on employees in the financial services sector.

### **2.2 ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

From classic times to quite recent years, a body of research has consistently referred to OT as some type of change in the organisation's setup, practices, culture and orientation to its environment (French et al., 2000; Jabri, 2015; Levy & Merry, 1986; Meyer & Botha, 2000). As highlighted in the introduction of the study, for the purpose of this research OT will focus of restructuring and downsizing of organisations resulting in layoff of employees.

To conceptualise OT, I will first look at the definition of the construct; this will be followed by exploring the root cause and its impact on employees.

### **2.2.1 Organisational transformation**

Change is defined as the process of continually rethinking and rewiring an organisation's direction, design and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers (Baptista et al., 2020; Jabri, 2015; Moran & Brightman, 2001). Daszko and Sheinberg (2005) state that although not all change is transformational, all transformational matters cause change. Ndlovu and Brijball Parumasur (2005) explain that OT is in favour of strategic change and progressing to a future of work and modern organisation (Armstrong, 2005; Baptista et al., 2020); it leads to significant change in organisational structure, departmental redesign and employment downsizing (Mullins, 2002).

Digital transformation has been transpiring since the 1950s to satisfy the needs of the 7.4 growing population that is increasing at the rate of 1 person per 14 seconds (Heavin & Power, 2018). With technology being the biggest external change contributor within organisations and artificial intelligence on the rise, it promotes further and continuous job cuts within organisations as most functions are being digitised. Downsizing is referred to as a strategy implemented by management to enhance organisational productivity effectiveness and competitiveness, which in turn helps maintain the organisation's profitability and long-term sustainability (Cameron 1994; Salazar, 2019). Downsizing is also defined by Heavin and Power (2018) as displacing of semi- or unskilled workers and layoffs of staff (Robbins, 1997), that are and will continually be replaced by machines or digital services. Downsizing may effect decentralising of functional and administrative roles, thus reducing human resource capabilities.

The literature on change and transformation contains a diverse set of theories and recommendations aimed at assisting change agents in comprehending and managing of its complexity (Henderson & Boje, 2015). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the definition that centres on what Levy and Merry (1986) termed "second-order change", as this type of change is known to be multi-level, radical in nature and entails a paradigm shift. Now more than ever, transformation is one of the ingredients impacting on employees in the workplace, thus is it imperative that the construct is well understood and explored to proactively manage its impact on

employees, especially with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic having fast-tracked the use of technology, adding further complexities from the health, social engagement and work-life balance perspectives (Heavin & Power, 2018).

### **2.2.2 The root cause of organisational transformation**

Various authors in their research work state that OT is necessary in order to meet the demands of the precipitously changing business topography. Based on the systems theory, organisation is made up of multifaceted structures, operations and circumstances or settings (Cilliers, 2018). Change or transformation of the organisation may be induced by numerous factors within or outside the parameters of the system and at different levels. For the purpose of this study, I focussed on the root cause (Alcántara-Ayala et al., 2021) of change that is characterised by three elements: level, intricate interconnections, and finally course or sequence. Firstly, the source of OT can occur at different levels; secondly, change at one level has a ripple effect on other levels and respective level; and finally, the course of OT can follow top-down or bottom-up course.

The cause of OT can occur at three levels, that is macro, meso and micro (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019), and is guided by vision and challenges at different levels (Meyer & Botha, 2000). Factors at macro level include all national and external drivers such as globalisation (Jahan et al., 2021; Ledimo, 2012). The author further deliberates that at the meso level the different factors entail changes that are implemented by organisations internally, i.e. changes in operational model, processes and policy, among others. Baptista et al. (2020) and Harigopal (2006) emphasise that influences such as shape (complexity and size), structure (systems and/or ownership), or nature (culture and technology) are some of the features that influence change internally. At the micro level the changes concern transformation by employees as a result of OT that occurred at macro and meso levels. The OT process focusses on radical changes that impact on employees' behaviour (Zehra & Siddiqui, 2019) in terms of how employees perceive, think and perform in the organisation (Cummings & Worley, 2008).

The second aspect to be considered is that the cause of OT occurring at the macro level has a domino effect on the meso and micro levels and, similarly, at each respective level. This is affirmed by Meyer and Botha (2000, p. 12) and Serpa and Ferreira (2019), who acknowledge that OT is an “integrative disciplinary approach that promotes lifelong learning and transformation at different levels”. In the introduction, I highlighted that at the macro level, external forces such as Industry 4.0, technology, globalisation, legislation and economic factors incite OT. One of the most recent and dominant factors causing OT at this level is the flu strain COVID-19 (Bostan et al., 2020), which has affected the entire world. As a result of the external variations at the macro level, organisations have had to fast-track internal operational adjustments. In the year 2020, organisations had to make various internal adjustments, including digitising of services, change in internal policies, downsizing and/or change in operating models. One of the prominent changes is setting up employees to work remotely (Kuckertz et al., 2020). At the micro level, most employees had to adjust to the new normal of remote working while trying to manage their work-life balance.

At the macro level, COVID-19, the disruptive unplanned flu strain that affect the whole world (Bostan et al., 2020), consequently required that legislation had to be amended to mitigate the risks that are associated with the flu strain (Aquino et al., 2020). For example, in South Africa, the Department of Employment and Labour (2020) issued a directive on health and safety in the work place wherein the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993 (Government of South Africa, 1993) was to be amended to include screening processes for essential workers. This is an example of the ripple effect of change at the respective levels.

At the meso level, policies were amended to ensure that health and safety are maintained by essential workers and employees working remotely. Kuckertz et al. (2020) state that during the COVID-19 crisis, the majority of governmental actions to protect economies appear to have targeted established firms, existing industry sectors, and economies as a whole, with the goal of protecting employment and the continuation of critical economic activity. Due to lockdown measures effected at the macro level (Kuckertz et al., 2020), at the micro level working remotely necessitated employees to create office space that aligns with company policy in their homes.

From the above example, we can gather that most changes are instigated at the macro level and filter down to the micro level.

Finally, the root cause of OT can follow a top-down or bottom-up course. In the latter, I have already alluded to the top-down OT progression. At the micro level, the cause of change may emanate from different rudiments (Kuckertz et al., 2020), for instance change in customer needs, tough competition and gaining market share. Change in customer needs forces organisation to re-engineer their processes, systems and structures internally to be able to meet the demands of clients. In consideration of the body of this literature and noting the various and recent causes of change, the question in mind is what impact has this change had on employees.

The body of literature for this research confirmed that transformation is a process of constant re-envisioning and re-engineering an organisation's direction, operational design, services and products to remain competitive, profitable and serve the needs of customers. Furthermore, the transformation construct has an impact on the various levels (micro, meso and macro). This ongoing radical process ultimately impacts on employees consciously and unconsciously. This research work will employ the SP perspective to explore and describe the unconscious impact of organisation cyclical transformation on its employees. The SP perspective, the unconscious and specific behavioural constructs, will be deliberated in the next section.

## **2.3 SYSTEM PSYCHODYNAMICS**

### **2.3.1 The chronicle of systems psychodynamics**

According to Flotman (2018) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016, p. 3), the conception of SP emanated in the United Kingdom (UK) at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and is rooted in "social psychoanalytic, group relations, object relations and open systems theory". Literature highlights the numerous scientists who contributed to the foundation of SP: Miller and Rice's seminal work *Systems of Organisations* (1967) introduced the concept of SP; however, the actual SP term originated from the Tavistock Institute's *1992/93 Review*. Neumann and Rice of the Tavistock Institute promoted the use of SP (Fraher, 2004), which entailed varied

approaches and theories for the diagnosis and interventions of organisational change and development. SP is an integration of three components, namely the practice of psychoanalysis, theories and methodologies of group relations, and open system perspective.

The theoretical foundation was primarily laid by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theories which emerged in the 1800s when science started advancing during the social conservative climate. The psychoanalysis theories centred on individuals. Melanie Klein's work, which was influenced by Freud's contribution, predominantly focussed on children and later developed into adults and groups. Klein's work was succeeded by Bion's opus focussing on group behaviour. Other scientist include Gustave Le Bon who observed large unorganised groups and theorised that individuals sacrifice part of their individuality in a group, are easily influenced, and vulnerable to persuasion (Fraher, 2004). Further, that the group mind was irrational, intolerant, biased, rigid, uncontrolled and submissive to any dominant force exerted by authority. Le Bon's work was dismissed by many including Freud (Harrison, 2000). A social theorist, McDougall (1920) expanded on Le Bon's work and believed groups were emotional, impulsive, violent, and suggestable. He added that a mental shift comes with marked change in group behaviour in an organised group that is task-oriented. He states that shift leads to deepened emotion in individuals that is seldom attained under any other condition and can be harnessed (controlled/used) effectively for positive group achievement.

The second element of SP, Group Relations, is defined by Flotman (2018) and Hayden and Molenkamp (2003) as an inquiry of group dynamics as a holistic system. This study not only focussed on psychodynamics, but extended its inquiry to group theories as a social system. Study of group relations became prevalent post psychological learning of World War I, in the era that the Tavistock clinic was founded in London in the year 1920. At this point the interest groups that contributed to the body of knowledge of group relations included the nine doctors from the Tavistock Institution from different professional background, the non-private medical patients who were helped by the doctors at the institution and theorists who were not SP experts but had influential historical contributions toward SP with their theories.

The three critical contributions to group relations were made by Le Bon, McDougall, Bion and Lewin.

In the article, Fraher (2004) deliberates on the three historical contributions; firstly, Le Bon and McDougall who focussed on studying the group as a whole, observing group behaviour. It is at this juncture that I note a shift from psychodynamics (focus on individuals) to studying a group as a system (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). Bion (1984) made the second contribution, by developing a new method of working with groups by making himself as an instrument to detect group behaviour. The shift here is renouncing the classical psychoanalysis and embracing group as an entity (Parsadh, 2019). The third contribution by Kurt Lewin drew from experiential learning hypothesising that individuals learn more effectively from interactive experiences (Fraher, 2004).

Other contributions made to group relations include theorist like Follett (1941) highlighting the advantages of a collaborative work environment, Mayo (1933) emphasising the exploration of the relationship between employee and work environment and Lewin (1948) who observed that humans possess good and bad and that social science should maximise on human good (Flotman, 2018; Fraher, 2004). Lewin's theories perceived as applied psychology enabled for tension between individuals and group to be investigated.

The final element of SP, "open systems" was explored by the Tavistock Institution post World War II and focussed on task and boundary awareness. Rice (1965) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016) discuss boundaries in an open system. The task and boundary awareness scientist Churchman (1968) refers to expansion of his perspective that entailed five theoretical developments as the system's approach. The theoretical development entailed psychophysical system advancements, field theory methodologies, social system understanding as anxiety defences, open systems thinking, and sociotechnical approaches.



### **2.3.2 The elements of systems psychodynamics**

Fraher (2004) defines SP as a disciplinary encompassing practice of the three elements. The researcher cites Neumann (1999) who states that SP is referred to as a collective psychological behaviour in and amid groups and organisations. This view is maintained by Cilliers et al. (2006), who assert that Psychodynamics is rooted in the classic psychoanalysis of Freud (1921), open systems theory and group relations theory (French & Vince, 1999; Miller, 1993), which have now developed into group and organisational consulting (Flotman, 2018).

SP is characterised as a scientific study adapted to comprehend the behaviour in organisations, including expression of the unconscious (Cilliers, 2018). According to Cilliers (2018), its main goal is to push the frontiers of group and organisational awareness in order to gain greater understanding of the unconscious and dynamic meaning of management, leadership, and authorisation challenges (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2002; Colman & Bexton, 1975; Colman & Geller, 1985; Miller & Rice, 1967). Cilliers (2018) continues to highlight that SP presents an open system approach which centres on exploration of the conscious and unconscious behaviour. Gould et al. (2006) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016) expand this notion by alluding to the fact that SP seeks to comprehend the organisation's constructs and its nexus to deep-rooted, unconscious and implicit individual, social and organisational anxiety.

### **2.3.3 The unconscious impact of organisational transformation on employees**

Freud coined the powers of the unconscious mind (Bargh & Morsella, 2008). In their study, Bargh and Morsella (2008) deliberate on two definitions of the unconscious: the traditional cognitive psychology definition as the nature of inadvertent behaviour or processes and the contemporary operational meaning, a lack of awareness of impact of a triggering stimulus and not of the triggering stimulus itself (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). This phenomenon continues to be debated; however, the current study will focus on the unconscious impact of OT on employees.

The unconscious mind is a phenomenon that has been researched extensively. Kihlstrom et al. (2000), in their research, indicate that a body of research has proved that "the unconscious information can affect the subsequent processing of conscious

information". This is supported by Kihlstrom (1987), stating that the conscious individual's conscious experience, thoughts and action are affected by the nonconscious mental structures. De Vries et al. (2010) define unconscious effect as improved judgment and decisions after a period of distractions. De Vries et al. (2010) continue to explain that the unconscious effect is birthed from the clinical field and is explored to determine whether conscious or unconscious information processing affects performance in psychiatric diagnostic classification. In addition, the study of unconscious impact was intended to understand and describe the potential role of unconscious thought condition in clinical decision-making. It is interesting to note the findings of the study reveal that participants in the unconscious processing condition made the best decisions and outperformed those in the conscious thought condition. According to the study, people do not have sufficient cognitive resources to consciously process large complex data at hand, as such conscious processing does not always improve the quality of judgement and decision-making. In contrast, reliance on intuition through unconscious processing can result in better decision-making than the conscious.

A body of literature and empirical studies suggest that OT is disruptive to employees. Krantz (2018) highlights that emotional toxicity of members of an organisation is a by-product of OT; toxicity is defined as basic mental contents that, when projected and implemented in an organisational environment, result in detrimental outcomes. According to previous research, most employees are the furthest removed from the heart of OT decision-making and thus may be under more stress than those who are closely involved in making decisions on change (Nohria & Khurana, 2010). According to Cilliers et al. (2006), OT has a disruptive effect on employees, invading individuals' personal and work boundaries. Numerous authors reason that the impact of OT on employees comes with significant anxiety of moving out of the comfort zone into the new unknown (Cummings & Worley, 2008; Schafer, 2003).

The impact of OT on employees can be conscious or unconscious, as well as positive or negative (Ledimo, 2012). Levy and Merry (1986) point out that the benefits of OT on employees include "better jobs" (certain changes may make certain jobs more important); this will sequentially come with better pay (increase in salary benefits) and "innovation" (new vision as a result of change promotes

creativity). The inverse is the resistance to change and negative impact on psychological and physical well-being (Hayes, 2007; Schafer, 2003). In support of this, Lawrence (1999) and Miller (1993) advocate that anxiety of employees is attributable to searching of self and the diverse elements of change. Further to this, Huffington et al. (2004) promote that anxiety may result in defensive reaction, for instance denial and projection. Ledimo (2012) highlights that other undesirable impacts include relationships between people being destroyed.

As stated by Huffington et al. (2004), anxiety is denoted as the system's unconscious dynamo to contain the fear of the future and acts as the motivating force in the system's unconscious. Huffington et al. (2004) continue to highlight that employees can manifest their anxieties in a number of ways, namely free-floating, survival, performance, and paranoid anxiety. Steyn and Cilliers (2016) define free-floating anxiety as a widespread, irrational expectation that is unrelated to a clearly defined notion or object of fear; survival anxiety is expressed when an employee has the assumption that their existence is threatened; performance anxiety is demonstrated when the employee's assumption is that their worth is less than what is deemed at the specific time; and finally, paranoid anxiety is based on the belief in a potentially harmful adversary (Cilliers, 2018).

As literature indicates, SP is focussed on exploring the unconscious relationship and interconnectedness of a group and its individuals. The next section deliberates on the CIBART model that entails six interconnected constructs to explore intra-personal, inter-personal and intra-group conflict (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) to understand how employees experience the impact of OT.

#### **2.3.4 Systems psychodynamics to understand group as a whole**

The literature trend of SP revealed that the concept of group relations is focussed on the "group as a whole" (Mayer et al., 2018). The group or system consists of individual members referred to as intrapersonal who then interact with each other (interpersonal) within a whole group's task and process, known as formal work or organisations. The "group as a whole" is described as the group's unconscious mind (Stacey, 2003) and it signifies group behaviour as a social system, as well as how

the people affiliate with the system itself (Geldenhuys, 2012; Mayer et al., 2018). The connection of group members is formed through the non-verbal and unconscious agreement and the wholeness is established through the interaction.

Another pivotal dynamic of SP is systems theory, which centres around and illustrates the intra-group as well as inter-group's interaction, interconnectedness, interdependence, and the role of individual within and beyond boundaries (Parsadh, 2019). Consequently, SP focusses on uncovering, examining, and interpreting defence processes in organisations. An organisation comes with inherent anxiety, thus any form of transformation denotes disruption to the system that would release its anxieties into the system, especially if the organisational boundaries, roles and structures are unfitting to hold organisational anxieties. For the group to survive, the "group as a whole" acts as a social defence mechanism (Flotman, 2018) when the organisation fails to contain the anxiety.

In defining the OT construct, it was established that transformation can occur at the macro (globalisation, COVID-19), meso (structural and operational), and micro (employees being laid off) levels. Additionally, transformation can be triggered from the bottom-up (employee needs, i.e. wellness or working conditions that require operational changes) or top-down (structural changes impacting on employees). This illustration of OT is congruent with the elements of SP discussed above. For example, the organisation as a whole contains structures and processes by which task is set as a boundary. Employees form part of the organisation, interact with each other and with the organisation through authority and task boundaries. The organisation itself interacts and is interdependent with the external world (i.e. COVID-19 flu pandemics that affect how organisations do business).

### **2.3.5 Systems psychodynamics behavioural constructs: CIBART model**

A system (organisation, group or employees) suffers from anxiety, mental disturbances, conflict and uncertainty (known as fear of the future) at some point or another (Henning, 2009; Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). SP uses the CIBART model to explain how employees experience the OT phenomenon. Mayer et al. (2018) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016) confirm that the constructs of this model are conflict,

identity, boundary, authority, role and task, as well as containment (Bion, 1984). The constructs of the CIBART model are interrelated; they are all boundaries in their nature and make a provision for the containment (Shongwe, 2014). For example, clear boundaries such as well-defined structure, tasks and official authority lines are stimuli for a favourable containment.

**Conflict** emerges as a result of the unconscious anxiety in the workplace and employees' exposure to both positive and bad parts of the system (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). Conflict exhibits itself in four ways; firstly intra-personal (struggle of emotions and ideas within an individual), secondly interpersonal (disharmony that occurs between team members), thirdly intragroup (discord between sub-groups), and finally inter-group (friction between teams or business units and the larger group) (Parsadh, 2019; Shongwe, 2014). The frequency and nature of change and transformation, particularly the COVID-19 flu strain and digital transformation (Heavin & Power, 2018) in organisations instigate conflict for the organisation and its employees. For example, digital transformation affects the group as a whole as it is initiated at the macro level and it filters through the system to the meso level (change in operational capabilities) (Mhlungu et al., 2019), and the micro level (anxieties experienced by employees) activating conflict at each level (Henning, 2009).

**Identity** refers to how a system identifies and differentiates itself from the other based on its values, culture, experience and dreams (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012; Henning, 2009; Parsadh, 2019), and this self-identity perseveres amidst volatile and disruptive times of change. A solid sense of identity is a stimulus for self-reference during change and transformation (Cilliers, 2018; Shongwe, 2014). Throughout the transformation process the individuals, teams, business units and the organisation as a whole will uphold self-identity for each sub-system and the group as a whole. The system's identity is influenced by leadership, thus is it critical that the individuals identify with the leadership (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). The sub-system's or group's sense of belonging is comprehended through group identification. During transformation, anxiety is heightened with the deprivation of identity at the various levels (organisation, department or individual).

**Boundary:** All the CIBART model constructs (conflict, identify, boundary, authority, role and task) are in their own right boundaries that are pervious and preserve the system (Shongwe, 2014). Boundary is defined as a room between and around parts of the system (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Flotman, 2018) and keeps the system safe and contained (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). For example, defined and clear boundaries help organisations, its business units and individuals to function efficiently without complications by providing structure and guidelines. The types of boundaries identified by Cilliers (2018), Mayer et al. (2018) and Shongwe (2014) are spatial (physical and emotional boundary), temporal (operational, i.e. working hours) and psychological (well-being and peace of mind). Henning (2009) argues that a fair amount of structure encompasses anxiety and safety for the system. Fraher (2004) affirms that weak boundaries occasion external influence into the system, causing disruption to the internal system, while rigid boundaries impede adaptation to environmental changes. It is therefore pivotal for the system to contain objective and balanced dose boundaries to survive (Miller, 1993). A system and its individuals that are in default of boundaries will experience struggles.

Transformation and change occur at different levels (macro, meso and micro) and this is indicative of the SP view that organisations operate as open systems leading to boundaryless organisations (Miller, 1993). Change is constant and continues to taper the horizontal and vertical boundaries (Shongwe, 2014). For example, digital transformation is a conscious act (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020) that forces organisations (macro) to advance their internal operation systems at meso level and implement role changes at micro level. This example illustrates the interconnection, interrelation and interrelatedness of the system's theory or group as a whole.

Since boundary also acts as a means of access and a position where a system connects with its environment, at group level a closed system will experience frustration and ultimately crash (Flotman, 2018; Shongwe, 2014). At individual level, a lack of boundaries will cause anxiety as individuals experience uncertainty and a lack of security (Fraher, 2004; Henning, 2009). For example, implementation of remote working for employees is affecting the employees' personal working space (spatial boundary), thus causing frustration and anxiety (psychological boundary) (Cilliers, 2018; Henning, 2009). In contrast, remote working has all allowed flexibility

(temporal boundary) for employees, positively impacting on their psychological boundaries by providing less pressure and a degree of comfort.

**Authority** refers to official influence and power that is possessed by the system to perform tasks (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). The authority can flow top-down (manager to subordinates), bottom-up (subordinates to management), or side-ways (team member to team member) (Henning, 2009). Person-based, also known as informal authority is another form of authority and is contingent on sympathy of peers and colleagues. This type of authority can be granted and/or denied to fellow colleagues at any given time (Mayer et al., 2018). Authority is consciously assigned to individuals and roles (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020) and their primary task is to organise the system as a whole to be functional. Mayer et al. (2018) and Oosthuizen and Mayer (2019) continue to highlight that in defining primary task, authority needs to engage employees who have beliefs, emotional needs and concerns. Authority that contradicts employees' beliefs and emotional needs may cause disequilibrium for employees, causing uncertainties which may manifest in unconscious behaviour. Authority can be likened to a caring "parent" who nurtures, provides guidance and security (Flotman, 2018). A work-friendly containment (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016) is created and executed by leadership (authority). In the context of transformation and change, failed authority may cause anxieties and uncertainty for the contained (employees).

**Role:** According to Cilliers (2018), Henning (2009) and Shongwe (2014), role encompasses an individual's activities that are differentiated from another's activities through boundaries. In addition, role can translate to an individual's identity as they can define themselves according to the role based on two conditions, firstly, the significance of role in the context of the organisation, and secondly with respect to their authentic self (Czander, 1993). Henning (2009) further asserts that role is a behaviour that is formally identified by a title and can be at different authority levels (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Role can manifest itself in different forms (Mayer et al., 2018); it can be identified in a framework of job description (normative), the individual or team's belief in their performance, known as existential, and finally, the phenomenal, which are projections received by the employee from key members of the organisation's system (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019).

Authority is consciously conferred to employees tenanted a role in an organisation to perform their primary task (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020) and contributes to a functional system (containment). Furthermore, it establishes individuals in a social system (Bion, 1961; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). Any disturbance of employee's role authority and displacement in the social system leads to role ambiguity (Shongwe, 2014), referred to as absence of defined key performance information in relation to employee position. Transformation in technology, COVID-19 disruption and changing economic factors will lead to interruption of traditional roles and work patterns (Shongwe, 2014). Transformation in its nature triggers instability and uncertainty to the system as a whole, which may lead to conflict in role identification, which may lead to anxiety and underperformance. Misplaced safety, familiarity and having to learn new work habits as a result of transformation cause a psychological state of uncertainty (Krantz, 2018).

**Task:** Various authors refer to task as the building blocks of work or job content that is made of primary or secondary task functioning (Mayer et al., 2018; Shongwe, 2014). Authors continue to rationalise that primary task is the main reason employees have a job, while secondary task espouses the Primary task. Precision of the primary task boundary enables task performance, while confusion leads to anti-task behaviour and free-floating anxiety (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012; Henning, 2009). Anxieties that come with transformation within the system will lead to anti-task behaviour by employees. Since task is linked to role, any form of disruptions in role may lead to task ambiguity, which is related to performance disruptions. In addition, Cilliers et al. (2006) contend that role conflict has a negative impact on task, causing elevated internalised frustration that in turn manifests in diverse behaviours within the organisation. Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2020) indicate that large organisations have multiple task boundary affecting not only the structure but functional dynamics. For example, digital transformation may affect the structure in a form of job cuts and operations, while the function element is affected by means of technology taking over administrative tasks performed by employees, and as such, primary task is impacted and may lead to employees being uncertain about their future in the organisation.



**Containment and contained:** According to Parsadh (2019) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016), containment is another SP behavioural construct that explains employees' experience of OT. Containment is a condition of a system and it is said to be fundamental for transformation to be effective (Flotman, 2018; Shongwe, 2014). Steyn and Cilliers (2016) outline that containment consists of the container (leadership, team and operations) and the contained (employees). For containment conditions to be favourable, leadership needs to be officially empowered to enable fruitful relations within the system, change the container with the aim of transforming the employees, change the system within by helping employees to take charge of modifying the system to which they belong. The rapid transformation does not allow sufficient time for the container to embed change management initiatives that are favourable for the employees, thus elevating the uncertainty of the future for both the container (system) and contained (employees).

Literature has established that transformation emerges at different levels of the system. Subsequently, through transformation and change, the system (organisation, business units and employees) experiences some form of conflict and anxiety (Cilliers, 2018). The CIBART model was designed to explore conflict by illuminating the unseen and covert influences of conflict through psychodynamics perspective (Shongwe, 2014). All constructs of the CIBART model as discussed above are perceived as boundaries by themselves which aid the organisation and its employees during transformation and change. Transformation is experienced differently at each level of the system and distinctive boundaries act as a defence mechanism (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) for the organisation, business units and individuals. The study will employ these constructs as a framework to describe how employees manifest their covert experiences (Parsadh, 2019) of the OT phenomenon from an SP perspective.

The discussion in the next section is focussed on SP behavioural constructs of the basic assumptions of group behaviour manifested by employees in reducing and containing anxiety.

### **2.3.6 Systems psychodynamics behavioural constructs: Basic assumptions behaviours (defences)**

SP utilises five basic assumptions to elucidate how the system (this includes the organisation and its employees) manifests its anxiety (Cilliers, 2018; Cilliers & Harry, 2012). Oosthuizen and Mayer (2019) assert that these basic assumptions are group behaviour reactions employed to deal with anxiety in the system. The five basic assumption include, fight/flight, dependency, pairing (and splitting), we-ness, and one-ness or me-ness (Bion 1970; 1996; Hirschhorn 1993; Lawrence 1999; Lawrence et al., 1996; Turquet, 1974). Basic assumptions are described as survival motive of groups. These basic assumptions are the basis of exploring relationship and interrelatedness in systems (Flotman, 2018).

**Dependency:** Oosthuizen and Mayer (2019) refer to dependency as connecting to an fictional “caring parental figure”. Cilliers and Harry (2012) support this notion by describing dependency as a system’s (person or organisation) anxiety regarding its need for security. Flotman (2018) asserts this view by indicating that dependency is a strong need for protection and security that exists amongst members of a group and an inference is made that some members will provide the parental nurturing and protection. If not met, the unconscious manifests frustration, powerless and helplessness (Stapley, 2006).

**Fight or flight:** The fight or flight is perceived to be a reaction against adversary (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). Fight refers to system performance anxiety and fight reactions are displayed in a form of aggression against self and others, i.e. jealousy, competition or fighting for a position within a system. Flight responses, on the other hand, are demonstrated by rationalising and intellectualising to circumvent what is seen as unpleasant (Flotman, 2018). As per Flotman (2018), flight manifests itself “physically”, i.e. being ill, resigning, avoiding others, and “psychologically” (Gould et al., 2006).

**Pairing and splitting:** Pairing refers to when two or more members of a group come together for survival (Parsadh, 2019). Pairing is an indicator of coping with anxiety of isolation (Bion, 1961; Flotman, 2018). Splitting refers to parting the good from the

bad object as a means of surviving. Splitting is employed by groups to form safety cohorts (Geldenhuys, 2012). For example, when groups feel threatened, they may team up against authority figures.

**One-ness/we-ness:** One-ness, also known as we-ness (Fraher, 2004), portrays individuality while simultaneously merging with other greater forces to experience well-being (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). One-ness manifests itself when an individual psychologically joins an imaginary greater force (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

**Me-ness:** When an individual feels threatened, they use the me-ness as a defence mechanism. According to Oosthuizen and Mayer (2019), me-ness refers to detaching from group membership and is displayed when the system retreats to rely on the inner world, ignoring the reality of the outer world (Flotman, 2018) to cope with the emotional anxieties.

Group relations are pivotal in cultivating the system's members' comprehension of the unconscious meaning. For this research, I will employ these five basic assumptions of group relations to comprehend and describe how employees manifested unconscious anxieties and utilised the basic assumptions as defence mechanisms.

The trend in OT literature has highlighted that groups or organisation in their nature carries an inherent anxiety. OT (whether it is due to digital transformation or health, i.e. COVID-19) disrupts the system. Furthermore, the rapid and unforeseen nature of transformation exacerbates anxieties experienced by the group, causing organisational boundaries, roles and structures to be unsuitable to hold organisational-anxieties. For the group and its individuals to survive, the basic assumptions are used as a defence mechanism (Flotman, 2018).

## **2.4 SUMMARY**

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the covert impact of OT on employees. The study explored the theoretical background of SP focussing on systems theory and group as a whole. Furthermore, literature on SP behavioural

construct and basic assumptions was deliberated to comprehend how the system manifests and copes with anxieties.

## CHAPTER 3: JOURNAL ARTICLE

### COVERT IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION ON EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR: SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS PERSPECTIVE

#### CHAPTER 3: JOURNAL ARTICLE

*(This chapter is compiled according to the guidelines of the SA Journal of Industrial Psychology (SAJIP) for qualitative research and will be submitted to the SAJIP for review on acceptance of this dissertation)*

**Title of Dissertation:** Covert Impact of Organisational Transformation on Employees within the Financial Services Sector: Systems Psychodynamics Perspective.

**Author:** Sarah Nkwana

**Co-author:** Prof Michelle S May

**Affiliation:** Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, College of Economic and Management Sciences, University of South Africa.

**Corresponding author:** snkwana911@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** The concept of the unconscious in the business world is still very much undervalued, and as such, less attention is paid to the impact on the employees and business. Findings in this study revealed how employees consciously and unconsciously experience OT and, most importantly, how the experience of OT covertly impacts on them.

**Research Purpose:** This study embarked on exploring and describing the covert impact and experiences of OT on employees from a systems psychodynamics perspective.

**Motivation for the study:** Most of the research studies conducted have been quantitative in nature and one-dimensional, focussing on the conscious impact of OT on employees. This study will take a qualitative approach to engage in an enhanced comprehension of the unconscious impact of OT on employees.

**Research design, approach and method:** The research approach followed qualitative and descriptive research that is founded on the hermeneutic phenomenological stance. The research setting was an organisation within the financial services sector in South Africa and included eight staff members who were selected employing the purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and was analysed using the hermeneutics analysis method.

**Main findings:** The findings highlighted five main themes, namely context that manifested in a panoptic system, persecutory, volatile and uncertain system, a conflicted system resulting from OT, dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT, and finally, surviving hardship and conquering. Sub-themes, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, are discussed under each theme.

**Practical Implication:** Researchers affirm that work is pivotal for the psychological health of employees. Understanding the covert impact of OT on employees will help organisations and employees to cope better with the unconscious anxieties of OT. Furthermore, it will aid organisations to develop appropriate change management processes and amended human resource policies that will ensure employee wellness; organisations will have healthy and engaged employees.

**Contribution:** Different dynamics are fast-tracking OT at a rapid pace. An effort to understand the covert impact of OT on employees will, from an academic perspective, add to the body of knowledge. Secondly, from a corporate perspective, it will aid organisations to develop current and relevant OT and change management initiatives, and finally, since this study is need-based, it will assist professionals participating within organisations to amend policies, apply forward-thinking and proactive planning with regard to the organisation's workforce, particularly employee wellness.

**Keywords:** Voluntary change, involuntary change, defences, Group as a whole, CIBART, basic assumptions

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the intervening years, bountiful research has averred that dynamic forces, such as globalisation, changing customer needs, and advancing technology (digitisation, artificial intelligence, the fourth industrial revolution) are driving uncompromising transformation in organisation topography (Bostan et al., 2020; Carbó-Valverde, 2017; Ledimo, 2012), particularly in the financial services sector. New bank entrants in the South African banking industry have also increased competitive advantage (Probart, 2013), leading to organisations constantly transforming. The flu pandemic known as COVID-19 is the most recent force that has accelerated the process of transformation, thus impacting on the economic system at macro (health policy changes), meso (organisational changes) and micro level (impact on employees). Cogitating the precipitous transforming business environment, the research embarked on describing the covert impact of organisational transformation (OT) on employees.

### **Background of the study**

There are notable factors attributable to increased OT within the financial services sector in South Africa. First, the introduction of the normative framework Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services (FAIS) Act 37 of 2002 (Government of South Africa, 2002; Msweli-Mbanga & Potwana, 2006) in the early 2000, with the intention of treating customers fairly and professionalise the industry. Digital transformation has been one of the major reasons forcing organisations to transform and the most recent is the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital transformation refers to critical digital proficiency operations that meliorate products, services, and operational processes of an organisation (Mhlungu et al., 2019). Dev and Sengupta (2020) acknowledge that the explosion of COVID-19 across the world perturbed the order of business affairs, and as a result personal communication was replaced by virtual interaction. McKibbin and Fernando (2020) confirm that remote working as the new normal incites compounded confidence in technology, thus promoting digitised services and artificial intelligence. These factors augment the occurrence and type of OT that occasions change in structure, operational models and downsizing of organisations. As a researcher, my inquisitive mind continues to be curious regarding how

employees experience the succession of OT and what the unconsciously impact of OT is on employees.

Findings from the study of Jabri (2015) indicate a failure rate of 70% in change management initiatives as a result of tempestuous business conditions (Krantz, 2018) that impact negatively on employees. While transformation is deemed indispensable for the system to survive, it is equally disruptive to the business ecosystem (organisation and employees). For example, advanced digital services enhance customer experience and reduce cost, while anxieties in the system keep soaring as the financial services industry progresses to what is termed “marketplace without boundaries” (PricewaterhouseCoopers [PwC], 2019). Further, the process of OT continuously effects job cuts as a result of restructuring or downsizing exercises. It is also worth noting that OT may be beneficial or detrimental for both employees and organisations (Ledimo & Martins, 2014). This study aimed to describe the impact and experiences of transformation on employees from a covert (unconscious) perspective.

### **Research purpose**

Research has produced prolific studies on the OT phenomena, bringing awareness to the conscious impact of OT on employees. OT studies conducted are oriented towards leadership and the execution of change initiatives (Hughes, 2015). Research methodology employed is usually from an individual psychology perspective and primarily quantitative focussed on the conscious behaviour (Henderson & Boje, 2015), using the individual psychology perspective. The research focus on the conscious is indicative of the fact that limited studies have been conducted on understanding the unconscious behaviours of OT on the system and its sub-systems (Huffington et al., 2004).

This study has taken an interest in exploring and describing the covert (below the iceberg behaviours) resulting from the impact of OT on employees due to the rapidly transforming business topography in the financial services sector in South Africa utilising the SP perspective. Aligning with the aims of the study, literature explored the OT construct and the root cause of transformation. The study further deliberated



on system psychodynamics by focussing on the chronicle of SP, understanding the unconscious through defining the SP behavioural constructs, such as the CIBART model and basic assumption group behaviour. The SP constructs will aid in describing the unconscious behaviours by highlighting how employees experience the impact of OT and how they cope with the anxieties of the system.

### **Literature review trends**

Literature trend on OT has been consistent in defining the construct as some genre of change that encompasses adaptation of organisation's structure, operations, processes and culture, among others. (French et al., 2000; Jabri, 2015; Levy & Merry, 1986; Meyer & Botha, 2000). The definition of OT and its root cause are deliberated on so as to conceptualise the construct.

### **Organisational transformation**

Baptista et al., (2020), Jabri (2015) and Moran and Brightman (2001) refer to change as a lifelong process of regenerating and reengineering of an organisation's holistic structure and operations to be an ongoing business concern. Some literature use transformation and change in parallel; however, it is worth noting that all transformational matters cause change, even if not all change is transformational (Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005). OT is a good strategy (Ndlovu & Brijball Parumasur, 2005) of developing into a designed and sought-after organisation (Armstrong, 1999) and is crucial for mitigating the pressures of the changing business structures.

The world population of 7.4 billion continues to grow at the rate of 1 person per 14 seconds (Heavin & Power, 2018), necessitating the increased use of digitised services within the financial services sector, leading to job cuts (downsizing). Downsizing is characterised by decreasing organisation size (Robbins, 1997), replacement of semi/unskilled workers (Heavin & Power, 2018), improved competitiveness, organisational efficiency and productivity (Cameron, 1994; Mullins, 2002), leading to profitability and ongoing concern for organisations (Cameron 1994; Salazar, 2019).

With digital transformation and flu strains such as COVID-19 on the rise (Heavin & Power, 2018), employees' wellness, social engagement and work-life balance will continue to be affected. This is motivation enough for organisations and the industrial psychology profession to continually study the OT construct with the aim to proactively manage OT's complexity (Henderson & Boje, 2015) and its impact on employees. The focus of this study is on "second-order change" which entails a paradigm shift known to be multi-level and radical in nature (Levy & Merry, 1986).

### **The root cause of organisational transformation**

Transformation in organisations can be attributed to diverse factors external to the boundaries of the organisation and contained within at different levels. This study focussed on the root cause (Alcántara-Ayala et al., 2021) of OT that is typified by multidimensional, interconnectedness and course of transformation.

Literature on systems theory emphasises that organisations are multidimensional in their tasks, operational structures, and setting (Cilliers, 2018). This is confirmed by research asserting that the root cause of OT transpires at macro level, for example national aspects such as globalisation, artificial intelligence, flu pandemics (Jahan et al., 2021; Ledimo, 2012), at meso level, such as leadership, operating model, processes, structure (complexity, size), and culture (Harigopal, 2006), and at micro level restructure affecting employees (Zehra & Siddiqui, 2019) and how they behave and think (Cummings & Worley, 2008).

According to system theory, a system and its sub-system is interconnected, consequently transformation taking place at one level will have a ripple effect on other levels following an integrative disciplinary approach (Meyer & Botha, 2000; Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). COVID-19 is one of the external global drivers (macro) impacting on how organisations function (Bostan et al., 2020), and consequently internal variations (at meso level), such as remote working for employees, policy amendments (Kuckertz et al., 2020) and operating models, to mention a few, had to be implemented. Employees (at micro level) needed to adjust to the new ways of working remotely and managing work-life balance.

Supplementary to OT impacting on the macro, meso and micro levels, as well as having a domino effect, the root cause of OT can follow a top-down or bottom-up progression. The latter discussion is an example of the top-down progression. Bottom-up approach refers to course initiated from a micro level progressing to the meso and macro levels. An example of the bottom-up course includes fundamentals (Kuckertz et al., 2020), such as a shift in employee needs or a lack of performance. The need at micro level compels the organisation to transform their processes, come up with learning and development initiatives or implement wellness initiatives at meso level. This could even require the organisation to change processes at meso level and leadership at macro level.

Copious research confirms that radical OT continues to affect employees consciously and unconsciously. In their study on the impact of OT on bank employees in Brazil, Silva and Navarro (2012) confirmed increased manifestations of physical and psychological distress and experiences of a loss of professional identity. Poor interpersonal relationships (Jabri, 2015), adverse work performance, a lack of concentration, exhaustion, depression, and aggression (Steyn & Cilliers 2016) and counter-productive behaviour (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016) are examples of the effects of OT.

This study specifically focussed on the unconscious impact of OT on employees and for this reason made use of the SP perspective.

### **Systems psychodynamics**

SP. which is a fusion of “social psychoanalytic, object relations, group relations and open systems” (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016, p. 3) was birthed from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (Flotman, 2018). The SP concept originated from Tavistock Institute’s 1992/93 *Review* and was introduced by Miller and Rice’s seminal work *Systems of Organisations* (1967). Scientists such as Miller and Rice then promoted the use of SP to aid with diagnosis and interventions of OT and development.

In the 1800s when science started advancing, Sigmund Freud laid the theoretical foundation of psychoanalysis centred on individuals. Melanie Klein advanced Freud’s

work by focussing on children and then expanding to adults and groups. Group relations, one of the SP dynamics, became popular following World War I's psychological learning and encompassed psychoanalysis and group theories as a social science (Flotman; 2018; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2003) and are referred to as a study of group as a whole system. The historical contributions (Cilliers & Harry, 2012; Fraher, 2004) on group relations include Bion's work who promoted group relations focussing on group behaviour. Gustave Le Bon, in his work, experimented with large unorganised groups, indicating that in a group, individuals forego part of their individuality, get easily influenced and are receptive to suggestion (Fraher, 2004). An expansion of Le Bon's work was carried out by McDougall (1920) suggesting that groups are emotional, impulsive, violent, and suggestable (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). Furthermore, McDougall (1920) added that in a structured group that is task-driven, a noticeable change in group behaviour is congruent with mindset change.

Other scientists that furthered the SP movement, according to literature, include Kurt Lewin who hypothesised that effective learning in individuals stems from interactive experiences. Lewin's theories (supposed as applied psychology) activated investigation of pressures between individuals and groups. Follett (1941) stressed the benefits of a work environment that is collaborative, Mayo (1933) emphasising employee work environment interaction and Lewin (1948) who observed that humans possess good and bad and that social science should maximise on human good.

Following World War II, the Tavistock Institution explored "open system", the last element of SP, and devoted their attention on task and boundary awareness (Rice, 1965; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Churchman's (1968) (known as the task and boundary scientist) perspective of five theoretical developments as a system's approach entailed psychophysical systems, field theory methods, the understanding of social systems as defences against anxiety, open systems thinking, and sociotechnical approaches (Fraher, 2004).

## **Understanding systems psychodynamics group relations**

SP is defined as study of psychological behaviour as a collective within a system (organisation, group and individuals) (Neumann, 1999), and seeks to understand behaviour and manifestation of the unconscious (Cilliers, 2018). SP observes the open system theory (Cilliers, 2018), which explains the individual relationships, roles, interconnectedness, interdependence within and across groups (Parsadh, 2019). Furthermore, it explores the inveterate organisation's dynamics, such as the contained unconscious organisational, social and individual's anxieties (Gould et al., 2006). Group relations are one of the theories used in SP (Mayer et al., 2018) and explore the concept of "group as a whole". Stacey (2003) defines "group as a whole" as the unconscious mind of the group. Group as a whole represents the system, group behaviour as a social system moreover how the people relate with the system (Geldenhuys, 2012; Mayer et al., 2018).

Considering the definition of OT and group relations, parallels can be observed. OT's definition highlights that transformation consciously and unconsciously impact on the individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole. In addition, the relationship and interconnectedness of individuals and group is demonstrated through how each level (macro, meso and micro) has a domino effect on the other.

## **The unconscious impact of organisational transformation on employees**

### **The unconscious**

The impact of the unconscious mind powers conceived by Freud is defined by Bargh and Morsella (2008, p. 73) as "the unintentional nature of behaviour or processes" (traditional cognitive psychology definition). The contemporary operational connotation is defined by Higgins and Bargh (1987) as a lack of awareness of the impact of a triggering stimulus and not of the triggering stimulus itself (Bargh & Morsella, 2008).

Copious research has proved that the unconscious data can have an impact on the subsequent computation of conscious information (Kihlstrom et al., 2000). Affirmation by Kihlstrom (1987) positions that the mindful individual's conscious experience, beliefs and behaviour are influenced by the non-conscious mental state.

De Vries et al. (2010) define unconscious effect as improved judgment and decisions after a period of distractions.

Various researchers in their recent studies assert that SP is characterised as a scientific study adapted to comprehend the behaviour in the organisation, including expression of the unconscious (Cilliers, 2018; Gould et al., 2006; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). In addition, SP presents an open system approach that centres on the exploration of conscious and unconscious behaviour. Gould et al. (2006) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016) expand this notion by alluding to the fact that SP seeks to understand the organisation's constructs and its nexus to the inherent, and implicit individual, organisational and social anxiety.

### **Covert impact of OT**

A wealth of information emanating from literature confirms that OT is subversive to employees, causing emotional toxicity. Krantz (2018) defines toxicity as internal offensive mental states that lead to detrimental consequences when acted out within an organisation. Cilliers et al. (2006) support this notion by stating that OT is invasive and invade private and work boundaries. Other researchers explain that the impact of OT culminates in moving employees out of the known into the unknown, causing anxiety (Cummings & Worley, 2008; Schafer, 2003). Employees are particularly affected as they are furthest from the hierarchy of decision-making (Nohria & Khurana, 2010).

Ledimo (2012) notes that employees can have a mindful or oblivious experience of OT, as well as a positive or undesirable one. Examples of positive outcome may be job promotions that come with an increase in salary, and agile ways of work that promote creativity. Hayes (2007) and Schafer (2003) mention resistance to change as the undesirable outcome, Ledimo (2012) gives examples of people relationships being destroyed, leading to anxiety, which also results in denial or projection as a defence mechanism (Huffington et al., 2004). Individuals' self-discovery amidst transformation could be another reason for experiencing anxiety (Lawrence, 1999; Miller, 1993; Parsadh, 2019).

Anxiety is the stimulus in the system's unconscious (Huffington et al., 2004) and can be expressed by employees as "free-floating anxiety" (an idealistic and inescapable belief free from object of fear) (Cilliers, 2018; Shongwe, 2014), when an individual's existence is threatened "survival anxiety is exhibited". "Paranoid anxiety" is presented when there is a belief about an adversary that causes harm (Cilliers, 2018; Fraher, 2004 Parsadh, 2019). When an employee questions their worth compared to what the system believes, "performance anxiety" occurs (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

This research work will employ an SP perspective to explore the unconscious impact of an organisation transformation on its employees. The SP perspective and its unconscious construct will be deliberated in the next section.

"Group as a whole", founded in the group relations theory (Mayer et al., 2018), is defined as the group's unconscious mind (Stacey, 2003), and it refers to both group behaviour as a social system and how people relate to the system. Within a whole group are individual members (intrapersonal) who engage with each other (interpersonal) through tasks and processes. Furthermore, there is engagement, connection and interdependence within department (intra-group) and between departments (inter-group). Since an organisation comes with innate anxiety, SP focusses on identifying, exploring, and interpreting organisational defence processes (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005).

### **Systems psychodynamics behavioural constructs – CIBART model**

A series of literature has established that a system and its sub-systems are subjected to an array of anxieties (Cilliers & Pienaar, 2019), conflict and uncertainty (Oosthuizen & Mayer 2019). The constructs of the CIBART model (Mayer et al., 2018), namely conflict, task, role, boundary, authority and identity (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005), as well as containment (Bion, 1984), are utilised in this study to explain how employees experience the OT phenomena.

**Conflict** - A system in its nature is complex (with both positive and negative parts) (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005) and comes with the intrinsic unconscious anxieties, thus

giving rise conflict. Parsadh (2019) and Shongwe (2014) indicate that conflict can present itself intra-personal, for example individuals wrestling internally with emotions or interpersonal (team members discord) or intra-group (sub-groups friction) and inter-group (sub-systems and system tension).

**Identity** - Individualism (or group) differentiation through values, i.e. culture, denotes identity (Cilliers & Harry, 2012; Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012; Henning, 2009; Parsadh, 2019). Self-identity is a defence mechanism that aids in enduring difficult seasons of change (Cilliers, 2018; Shongwe, 2014). Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) testify that it is pivotal for individuals to relate with the leader, as identity is inspired by the leader. With anxiety elevated during change, the need for identity increases.

**Boundary** - Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) and Flotman (2018) define boundary as a safety contour between the main system and the external world and parts of the sub-system internally which keep it contained (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). Henning (2009) argues that a fair amount of structure encompasses anxiety and safety for the system. Boundary can manifest itself emotionally or physically (spatial) in a workplace, e.g. working hours (temporal) or mental wellness (psychological) (Cilliers, 2018; Mayer et al., 2018; Shongwe, 2014). A lack of boundaries effects conflict and struggles.

**Authority** – Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), Mayer et al. (2018) and Oosthuizen and Mayer (2019) affirm two types of authority: a system holds formal authority that induces task performance and informal (person-based) as another form of authority. The course of authority can follow top-down (manager to subordinates), bottom-up (subordinates to management) or lateral (team member to team member) (Henning, 2009). The contained experience anxiety when there is privation of authority. For instance, when there is a lack of leadership (authority), employees would experience anxiety.

**Role** – Role could refer to title-based identity (Henning, 2009) at different level (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012), or specialised tasks that are individualised to make a distinction through boundaries. The different types of role include normative (for example a job description) (Mayer et al., 2018), existential (i.e. belief of employee



and team performance), and phenomenal (projections received from fellow colleagues by an employee) (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). When the system experiences anxiety, it could result in role-identification conflict.

**Task** – According to Shongwe (2014) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016), task is a basic element of work at primary (core motive of existence of a job), or secondary (sponsorship of primary task) task functioning level (Mayer et al., 2018). Well-defined task boundaries facilitate task performance, and the contrary results in anti-task behaviour (Henning, 2009) and free-floating anxiety (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012).

**Containment** – Containment, another element of SP behavioural construct, describes a system's condition that is vital in enabling successful transformation (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Container (which represents leadership, team and operations) and the contained namely employees) are components of the containment (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Officially empowered leadership cultivates a favourable containment condition by fostering prolific relations, remodels the container in the interest of changing the contained, and helps employees to assume responsibility to develop their system. Miscarried transformation within the organisation (containment), which is experienced by the employees (contained), translates to fear of the future (uncertainty).

### **Systems psychodynamics behavioural constructs - basic assumptions group behaviour (defences)**

This research employed the five basic assumptions of group behaviour manifested by employees (Cilliers, 2018; Cilliers & Harry, 2012) in reducing and containing anxiety (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). These include dependency, fight/flight, pairing (and splitting), one-ness or we-ness, and me-ness (Bion, 1970; 1996; Hirschhorn, 1993; Lawrence, 1999; Lawrence et al., 1996; Turquet, 1974). Flotman (2018) further notes that basic assumptions are used to explore relationship and interrelatedness in systems (this includes the organisation and its employees).

Dependency is depicted as a bonding to ideal parent figure that nurtures (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019), for example an organisation and its employees having

a need for a safety net or protection (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012). Stapley (2006) indicates that absence of the safety net is expressed in frustration, powerless and helplessness (Mayer et al., 2018). Fight/flight are seen as opponent responses (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) and refer to system performance anxiety. Examples of fight responses include intra and inter-aggression, for example jealousy, while reasoning or justification are reactions of flight (Flotman 2018; Gould et al., 2006), manifested physically, for example illness.

Dealing with anxiety of seclusion is indicative of pairing (Bion, 1961; Flotman, 2018), while disunion of favourable from the unfavourable is an example of splitting used by a group to team up when feeling endangered (Geldenhuys, 2012). One-ness or we-ness (Cilliers, 2018; Fraher, 2004) is a defence mechanism that relies on the inner world or pairing with a greater force to gain comfort and health (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Me-ness is illustrated by dissociation (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) from the group (external world) (Flotman, 2018), and relying on the inward world to cope with survival anxiety.

### **Research problem and objective**

The research question presented for this study is: What is the covert (unconscious) impact of OT on employees as a result of the rapidly transforming landscape within the financial services sector in the South African context? The aim of the study is to explore and describe the OT's unconscious impact on employees.

### **The contribution of the study**

Literature has shown that the complex nature of the unconscious OT behaviours leads to the subject being rarely studied (Sievers, 2009); as such, this study is anchored in the SP perspective and will aid in highlighting the gravity and complexities of the psychological (emotional, inner and physical) impact of OT on employees within the financial services sector. The findings will contribute to the knowledge consortium in the industrial and organisational psychology and human resource profession. Furthermore, the findings will help organisations to design employee change initiatives, develop policies and strategies that address the

unconscious anxieties and behaviours of the system in relation to the psychological health of employees (Ghislieri et al., 2018).

The next section provides the context and contour of the research approach and methodology employed for this study. Subsequently, the findings of the study will be presented in five main themes (context that manifested in a panoptic system, persecutory, volatile and uncertain system, conflicted system resulting from OT, dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT, and finally surviving hardship and conquering). Under each theme, the sub-themes are delineated. Finally, the study is concluded with a discussion of limitations and recommendations for the forthcoming studies.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

Relativism is the ontological belief that frames this research, which supposes that multiple truths may exist, since truth is perceived as relative (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). The epistemological stance linked to this ontological worldview is social constructivism. This stance assumes that comprehension of reality is self or ego-constructed and the truth or knowledge is created from the apprehender's lived experience (Creswell, 2014; Oxford, 1997; Warrick, 2001). According to O'Neil and Koekemoer (2016) and Nieuwenhuis (2016), hermeneutic phenomenology is a paradigm consistent with the social constructivist epistemology which depicts the person's "lived experiences" with the motive to uncover the meaning of the experiences of the individuals. This aligns with the aim of the study, namely to explore and describe the employees' lived experience of OT.

Having been exposed to the phenomena in question, I will discuss my axiological assumption which refers to ethical consideration relating to qualitative study. The write-up of this research study will be in the first person, indicative of rhetorical assumption, and participants' lived experiences will be articulated highlighting the research methodical assumption of this qualitative research. To describe the employees lived experiences of the impact of OT (Creswell, 2014), I will employ the descriptive and explorative research strategy (Wilson & MacLean, 2011) founded in

hermeneutic phenomenology. The research method employed was qualitative research which, according to Groenewald (2017), provides a rich and all-embracing description of individuals' experiences.

### **Research strategy**

Hermeneutic phenomenological research was employed as a qualitative strategy to collect condensed and deep reflective data (Groenewald, 2017); consequently this will help to describe and comprehend participants' lived experience of the subject. Creswell (2014) asserts that this strategy discovers the essence of individual experience. As a qualitative study approach, semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data. The hermeneutic analysis technique was employed to analyse data and to ensure quality of the research project. Ensuring rigour through trustworthiness and ethical considerations were discussed.

### **Research method**

The research process followed, mechanisms employed and procedures applied for empirical study (Creswell, 2014) will be described in this section. The sampling population, technique and method will be articulated, as well as a discussion on entrée and establishing research roles, data collection and analysis. To conclude, ensuring the rigour of the research project will be explained.

### **Research setting**

The selected and approved research setting for this study is based in a financial services industry in South Africa. A sample of eight participants who is in the employ of the research setting (financial services provider) and has experienced OT within the research setting was selected. The study was conducted virtually through MS Team as a precaution to observe the COVID-19 protocols and was conducted based on participants' availability.

### **Entrée and establishing research roles**

At the time of this study I was an intern and have been part of the research setting for the past six years. The population targeted for this study has endured various

transformation processes three times in the past decade. The most recent OT event experienced by the population and sample group is the disruptive and unanticipated COVID-19 that coerced organisations to implement remote working processes for employees. This picture highlights that OT has been a reality and extensively experienced by targeted participants. For this reason, approval was obtained from the organisation to conduct research that observed the university's ethics policy, as well as the organisation's terms and conditions. I declared that I was an industrial and organisational psychology (IOP) intern conducting research for study purposes. In addition, I highlighted to the participants that I obtained permission from the organisation to conduct research. Participants (who were mostly in leadership roles) gave consent to be interviewed and most expressed that this was a good study and that they hoped it would help the organisation to deal with issues of OT.

### **Sampling**

Since not all units of the population had equal opportunity to form part of the study (Etikan, 2016), a non-probability sampling technique was employed. To select the sample size of eight participants, the purposive sampling technique was utilised (Patton, 2002), which is based on my personal understanding and traits of the research setting, including the nature of my research aims and the inclusion criteria (Etikan, 2016). To determine key participants, purposive sampling is generally used in qualitative study (Patton, 2002).

Delineation of inclusion criteria included all employees in the employ of the organisation. This takes into account all employees whose services were once terminated for whatever reason and were once again re-affiliated into the system. Only employees who volunteered to be part of the research participated in the study. The exclusion criteria are defined as all employees who worked for the organisation but have never experienced any form of OT. An invitation to participate in the research was sent out to employees of the organisation by e-mail. Snowballing as a sampling technique was also applied by asking participants to refer employees who might be interested in the study. Eight employees participated in the research and no new themes emerged by the fourth interview. The data required was established and I stopped collecting data when themes were saturated (Charmaz, 2006; Wium &

Louw, 2018). Saturation was reached by the eighth participant when subjects did not introduce new themes.

**Table 3.1**

*Details of gender, race, tenure, leadership level and business units*

Gender	Race	Tenure	Leadership Level	Business Unit		
				Banking	Financial Services	Functional
Male	Indian	15	Senior		*	
Female	White	7	Junior			*
Female	White	5	Junior			*
Male	Black	6	Senior	*		
Female	Indian	15	Senior		*	*
Female	Black	20	Senior	*	*	
Male	White	5	Senior			*
Female	Black	4	Senior		*	

### **Data collection method**

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data as they enabled a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee and aided the researcher in uncovering the meaning of subjects' lived experiences of OT (Creswell, 2014).

An interview schedule entailing three sections (participant's "change story" or OT story, participant's "experience of OT", and the "impact of OT experience) was structured for data collection. The first section captured the nature of change, followed by the impact of change on employees, and finally the unconscious experiences and defence mechanisms as experienced by participants. Open-ended questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) were used as they allowed dialogue between interviewer and participants. This is consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenology research paradigm that follows explorative and descriptive research (Wilson & McLean, 2011) and seeks to uncover the meaning of the experiences for the individuals (Nieuwenhuis, 2016; O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). Follow-up questions that enabled the researcher to probe participant on their deep thoughts, feelings and beliefs relating to the OT construct were used, where applicable.

## **Recording of data**

In order to adhere to the COVID-19 protocols, data was collected virtually utilising the MS Team platform. Additionally, I took notes during the interviews; I used the MS Team audio recording functionality (no video recording) and a cellular voice note as a backup to record data. After the interviews I transcribed data verbatim, and to ensure rigour, I compared my notes of the interview, the audio and verbatim transcription. Participants consented to recording using both MS Team and voice notes. To analyse data, I used the audio, verbatim transcriptions and notes I took during the interviews.

## **Data analysis**

The study made use of the hermeneutic analysis technique (Bhattacharjee, 2012) to analyse the qualitative data. This is content analysis which entailed interpretation of the idiosyncratic meaning of the OT construct within the financial services provider (organisation). This is done through the process of continuous recapitulation between a singular interpretation and a holistic understanding of the context to develop a fuller understanding of OT in its situated context.

The first stage of data analysis involved simple hermeneutics analysis (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). This phase entailed studying the text, language, and selection of the themes from the data (Cilliers & Pienaar, 2019). This process helped to examine, categorise and comprehend the transcribed data (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Content analysis was conducted next to make meaning of the underlying text. The third stage (double hermeneutic) involved interpretation of the data and context of the research using the SP perspective (Cilliers & Pienaar, 2019). At this level the hermeneutic circle was achieved as the holistic interpretation of all three stages (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Prasad & Mir, 2002) was done to interpret organisational (macro), group (meso) and individual (micro) behaviour separately and collectively (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Theory and literature was integrated with the findings to illuminate the SP behavioural constructs, namely CIBART model, which looked into the impact of OT on employees and basic assumptions of SP which were used by employees as coping techniques for dealing with the anxieties.

## **Researchers' role**

Before and during the study I declared my “dark matter” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) with the gate keeper, university’s ethics committee, supervisor and research participants. All parties were informed of my exposure to the research setting and related experienced of the OT phenomena. At some stage in the interviews, when some participants related their OT story, they referred to me as part of the cohort that experienced and understand the pain of transformation. Most participants thanked me towards the end of the interview, indicating that the talk has helped them to release the emotional pain they have been feeling; furthermore, that they appreciate that someone who understands their pain gave them an ear to listen and they felt much lighter after talking. This behaviour can be read to mean that participants perceived the researcher as someone who underwent the OT phenomena, someone who was open to listening and understood their pain. This could be interpreted as participants seeing the researcher as a possible parent figure, peer or sibling who created a safe space for them. In the initial stages of analysing data, I acknowledge that my anxieties increased as I became aware of the similar experience of the impact of the OT phenomena. When I felt this way, I stopped and started analysis again when my mind was clear. During the interviews and when analysing and interpreting data, I was mindful to remain aware of my bias by not projecting my own disquiets.

## **Strategies employed to ensure quality data**

Authors such as Creswell (2014), Locke et al. (2013), and Terre Blanche et al. (2006) voiced that qualitative research by nature raises concerns like sensitive ethical issue (i.e. interviewing peers in the “backyard” setting), reliability and validity of, for example how data is obtained and recorded, or imposing researcher’s subjective views (Gibbs, 2007). To address accuracy, moral and ethical concerns of data (Van Eeden, 2005), as well as validity, reliability and concerns relating to backyard research that is rich in description (Creswell & Miller, 2000), “trustworthiness”, which employs multiple validation strategies, was applied (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The first validation strategy applied is “researcher’s lens” or reflexivity, where I divulged what Merriam and Tisdell (2015) refer to as “dark matter”. That is my experience, bias and values relating to the study. The second



strategy is “participant’s lens”. As a researcher in the employ of the organisation where research is conducted (backyard research), I spent prolonged time within the research setting observing the context, culture and building connections. This helped to authenticate data that may be distorted.

Dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability are additional measures applied to achieve rigour and trustworthiness for this study. Bhattacharjee (2012) defines dependability as reaching the same conclusion after observation of the phenomena by the researcher at different intervals. Through the study's repeatability, which is determined based on the study's description and methodological approach, I demonstrated dependability. Credibility, which is likened to internal validity (Parsadh, 2019; Shongwe, 2014), was realised through the application of theoretical motivation in the interpretation of the research findings (Creswell, 2014) and prolonged exposure to the research setting. To ensure transferability, also known external reliability (Bitsch, 2005; Parsadh, 2019; Tobin & Begley, 2004), participants were purposefully selected and comprehensive narratives of the participants' experience of the phenomena were provided to ensure application of the findings to other settings.

Finally, to ensure conformability, which alludes to thoroughness in data collection in a study, the data collection procedures were outlined to allow interested parties to track the process (Shongwe, 2014; Yin, 2009). In addition, data collected through the MS Team platform was recorded and transcribed. I made use of a semi-structured interview schedule during my interviews to ensure meticulousness of data collection to ensure conformability. Peer debriefing was carried out to ensure that the qualitative study does not distort the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was achieved through exposing myself to other peers in a way that resembles an analytic session, with the goal of examining parts of the investigation that may otherwise remain simply latent in the inquirer's consciousness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, all parties involved in the study were alerted of my bias, from the planning stages and throughout the study (Shongwe, 2014).

## **Methods to ensure ethical principles**

Three steps were employed to ensure the ethical quality obligation for this study. I obtained the gatekeeper's permission to conduct research, and ethical clearance through my academic institution (CEMS, Research Committee, 2010) – certificate number: NkwanaS – 2020/CEMS/IOP/028. Further steps taken to ensure ethical consideration included obtaining participants' signed informed consent, participation in the study was on a voluntary basis for participants and I agreed to anonymity and confidentiality of sensitive information with both gatekeeper and participants (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms. I used passwords to store all electronic information, signed informed consent forms, recordings and transcribed data.

## **Reporting**

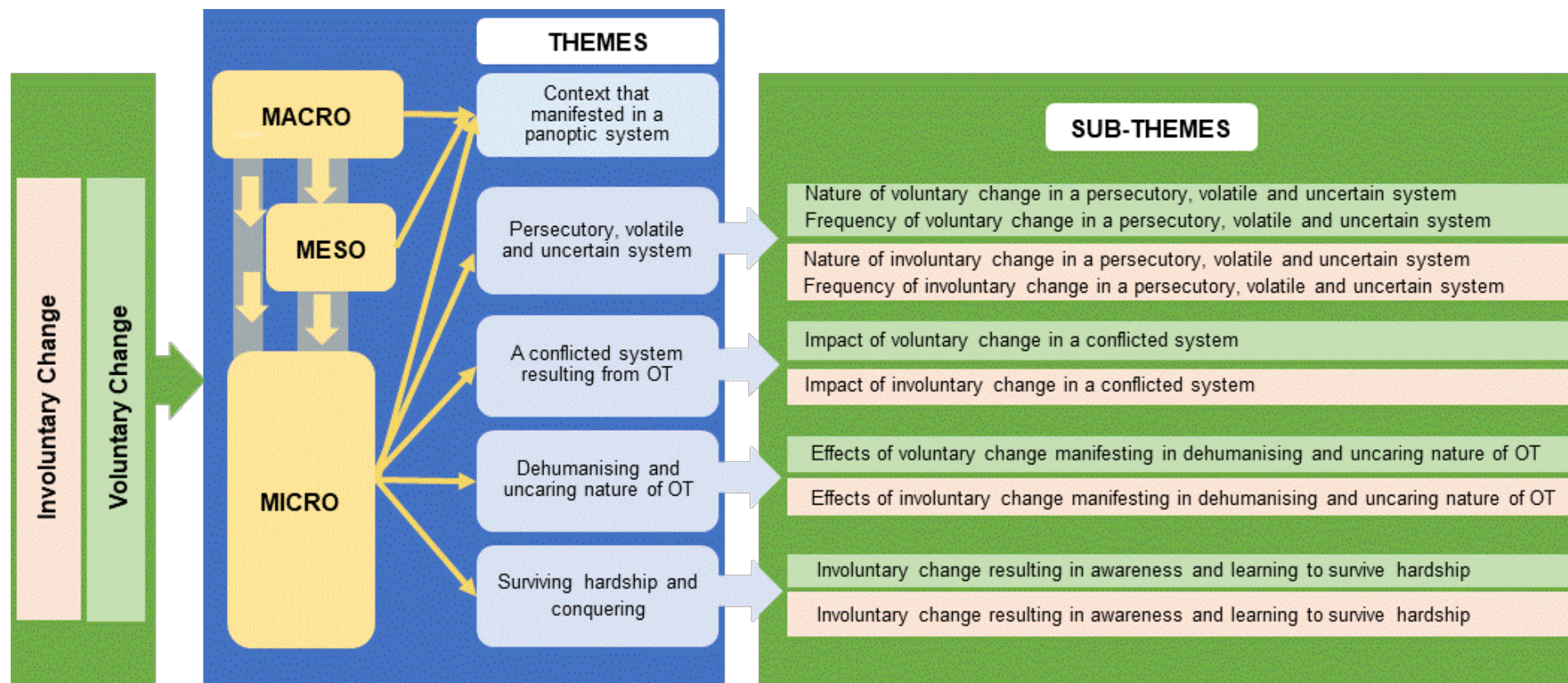
This study employed inductive research that utilised the bottom-up approach, working back and forth between data until rich data was realised and comprehended. To describe the richness of the phenomena and its context, Figure 3.1 is used to identify the themes and sub-themes and this is followed by further discussions on each theme and sub-theme. In addition, participants' verbatim transcriptions were incorporated as part of the evidence for the various themes highlighted. Letters and numbers are used to indicate the participant and line where the verbatim is located.

## **FINDINGS**

This section encompasses a discussion on the findings from the data analysis. The discussion includes explorative descriptions and deliberations of the themes and sub-themes depicted from the participants' responses (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1**

*Themes and sub-themes that emerged from voluntary and involuntary change*



The next section deliberates on all the themes and sub-themes (see Figure 3.1). The first discussion is on the first theme, “context that manifested in a synoptic system”, and its sub-themes, core and functional business units, geography, team capability and culture.

### **Theme: Context that manifested in a panoptic system**

Participants started off by describing the context of the system that portrayed the organisation’s landscape. The description mainly highlights the different business units (banking sector, insurance sector), segments (retail, private and business bank), functional business units human resources (HR), Tech) and geographic spread. This was followed by participants expressing a culture or the atmosphere of a lack of trust, fast-paced, volatile and a disjointed organisation that is less people-oriented.

Core business: “I worked as an analyst in the banking space and later on in my career I took up the role of regional manager in the insurance distribution space.” (P1)R4C2

“I worked as RM in private banking and 18 months later I was approached for a segment head in Retail banking.” (P3)R5C2

“2009/2010 ... was approached to become a regional sales manager for non-advice. In 2012 I was also approached to apply for an RM role in financial advice (insurance).” (P6)R9C2

This narrative from participants indicates that the organisation has various business units comprised of the core business units, i.e. banking and insurance, which is also known as client-facing business or profit-making unit. Participants also described movement of employees across the core business units, either on their own accord or being approached. This can be read as employees having an appetite for change.

Function unit: “With the restructure, I changed roles from segment head in the retail banking space to a functional role in data and insights which is a support function.” (P3)R6C2

“I started as an intern in Tech Africa space then moved to people partner in people function space.” (P4)R7C2

“I joined the organisation in the COO operations space. Later on, I got appointed in a role as people partner but in Distribution BU.” (P7)R10C2

In addition to the core business (sales environment) highlighted in the first evidence, participants presented evidence on functional business units that provide support services, such as HR and technology, and movement of employees between the various functional units, just as in the core business units. Once more this can be read as an internal appetite for role changes.

Geographic: “I left my role as adviser assistant in KZN to take up a new role of HR consultant in Johannesburg.” (P5)R8C2

“I moved from Johannesburg to take up a role in Mpumalanga Nelspruit. Another opportunity came up in the insurance space and I moved back to Johannesburg to take up a regional manager role.” (P1)R4C2

“... worked from home due to COVID-19.” (P2)R5C2

This evidence indicates that not only does the organisation have different business units (core and functional), but that it is spread across different geographic areas. The evidence presented above shows the different provinces, i.e. Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Mpumalanga. The golden thread of appetite for change by employees is also noted in this evidence.

Team capability: “In 2016 I worked in ‘Team Change’ focussing on separation projects and organisation required change management capabilities, i.e. stress

management. In 2019 there was another priority shift and the team focussed on organisational development (OD) projects.” (P2)R5C2

P2 is the only one who expressed the team capability sub-theme as they are the only participant working in this team. This part of the evidence reveals that the context is fluid and changes according to the need in a particular point of transformation. The evidence expressed shows that at one point the focus was on separation projects and at a different point the focus shifted to change management capabilities.

Culture: “For example, when I moved from banking to insurance distribution it felt like I joined a totally new organisation.” (P1)R4C2

“... there was an element of caring for people but the focus has always been about business.” (P5)R8C4

“The soul of the organisation I work for is not the same and is still under construction. Reflecting on our culture there is a pervasive culture theme around fear.” (P3)R6C4

“... I felt like an adopted child.” (P2)R4C3

The final evidence presented in this theme portrays the “smell of the place”. The system itself is universal and it comprises specialised sub-systems that are geographically spread and are designed to operate as one through its employees, but are disjointed. Furthermore, the business focus seems to be more on enterprising than on the people aspect, occasioning a pervasive culture of fear. It seems that in the organisation trying to bring in newness, the element of culture of fear is more prominent than that of caring for people.

### **Integration of context that manifested as the panoptic system**

Participants’ accounts of the context seem to describe a system that is broad, all-encompassing topography with different structures that employees are placed in according to their skills and roles. Furthermore, the transformation of the organisation seems to present opportunities for employees to move or grow into new

roles across the different business units and topography of the organisation. The other interesting finding is on the team capability narrative that depicts a context that is fluid and is based on the organisation's needs. P2 expressed that at one point, focus was on separation projects, and at a different point, the focus shifted to change management capabilities; as a result their team structure and capability transformed to cater for the immediate need.

Finally, participants expressed how different business sectors have different cultures. P1 expressed that "moving from banking sector to insurance felt like I totally joined a new organisation". This can be interpreted to mean that the different business units within the whole organisation function in silos, which make each sub-system seem like a different organisation. P3 voiced that since the organisation is still under construction, the culture is a pervasive culture theme around fear. This may imply that participants experienced an atmosphere of despair and despondency and an element of caring.

The next section describes details of the second theme, "persecutory, volatile and uncertain system", and sub-themes "nature of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system", "nature of involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system", "frequency of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system", and finally "frequency of involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system".

### **Theme: Persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

Participants expressed a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system that was instigated by either voluntary or involuntary change. First I will present the findings from voluntary change, followed by involuntary change.

As voiced by participants, voluntary change is initiated by participants themselves. It is motivated by career growth and the pursuit of new career opportunities in the organisation which led to change in roles. In some instances, the participants were approached (head-hunted) for promotion or role change. Sub-themes include nature of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system, nature of

involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system, frequency of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system, and finally, frequency of involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system.

**Sub-theme: Nature of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

Under voluntary change, participants articulated types of change as role change, other types are career growth and passion-driven, and finally, instances where they were head-hunted (HR term used to describe offering a job to someone who is already has a job).

Organisation and role change: “Joined in 2000 1st September as foreign exchange consultant.” (P6)R9C2

“I joined the organisation from another financial services institution to a role I was comfortable.” (P8)R11C2

The evidence presented can be read as most participants joined the organisations in a quest for change in the environment and roles. P6 joined the organisation to take up a new and different role. P7 came from a consulting company to a financial services institution and took up a new role as a people partner. P7 took up the same role in a different organisation.

Growth: “I took on my role as a regional manager for personal growth.” (P3)R6C2

“I started in my role as an adviser assistant and took up an opportunity as a broker consultant.” (P5)R8C2

“After my internship, I was offered an opportunity in HR and I took up an HR business partner role in Tech Operations.” (P4)R7C2

The narrative indicates that participants willingly and proactively explored roles for their own personal and career growth.



Passion for a job: “I started as an intern and after 12 months and joined the learning and development team as I expressed my passion for human behaviour.” (P2)R5C2

In this instance, participants pursued roles that were driven by their passion. P2 expressed her passion for human behaviour.

Head-hunted: “I joined the organisation as a regional manager for private bank role and 18 months later I was approached for a segment head role.” (P3)R6R2

This is another type of voluntary change where participants were approached within the same organisation and took up roles for growth purposes.

It is interesting to note that all eight participants experienced some type of voluntary change. Firstly participants changed roles when joining the organisation. P6, P7 and P8 expressed that they joined the organisation in new roles or the same role but in a different environment (organisation). The second type of change communicated is based on growth. P1 expressed that they moved from being a banker to various managerial positions and different business units. Here again, we see the context element coming in to provide participants with wide-ranging role opportunities. P3 indicated that they took a managerial role for personal growth, while P4 took up a business partner role after their internship. The next type of change is presented from a passion perspective, for instance, P2 expressed her passion for human behaviour. This supposes that OT brings about voluntary change such as career growth opportunities for employees.

Finally, in other instances, change is initiated by the organisation (head-hunting) but willingly embraced by participants as it promotes their career growth. P3 joined the organisation in one role but was later head-hunted internally for a segment head role. This can be understood as participants experienced the organisation positively. Since the context is quite broad, as indicated in the first main theme, participants had opportunities to expand their careers by changing roles within the various business units and even geographically. In a different way, OT presents career growth opportunities by approaching proactively employees and the employees take up the opportunities voluntarily.

### **Sub-theme: Frequency of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

Participants expressed that **the frequency of voluntary change** occurred within six to 12 months of starting in new roles and ranged between two to three years.

Six to 12 months: "... expressed that I did not enjoy the training environment. Within the same team (L&D), change role from developing material to 'agile coach' for another 6 months." (P2)R5C2

"I started off as adviser assistant in KZN in the AIFA then known as Absa Brokers for (11 months)." (P5)R8C2

"Within six months of being in a role as a foreign exchange consultant, I was promoted to general consultant role." (P6)R9C2

Evidence presented by participants points out that most roles were in a support function and operational in nature. Furthermore, the change rate occurred within a space of six to twelve months.

Twelve to 36 months: "I worked 18 months in the regional manager role and 3 years in the segment head role." (P3)R6C2

"I worked 2 years as a banker and then proceeded to a managerial position and I was in an operations manager role for 2 years 6months and thereafter 3 years as Suite manager," (P1)R4C2

"I have been in the RM role 3 years now." (P8)R11C2

It seems that the change rate of managerial positions occurred between 12 and 36 months. P3 worked as a regional manager for 18 months and 36 months in the segment head role. P1 worked as operations manager role for 30 months and thereafter 36 months as Suite manager.

For this sub-theme, all eight of the participants seemed to have experienced the six to 36 months change rate. The frequency for voluntary change at operational (administrative) or banking specialised role is shorter compared to transitioning to a managerial role or strategic role. P2, P4, P5 and P6 held operational or specialised roles and experienced change between six to 12 months, whereas P1, P3, P7, P8 held managerial experience with changes occurring between 12 to 36 months.

Next is a presentation of the same theme (persecutory, volatile and uncertain system) and sub-themes instigated by involuntary change. It is worth noting that some sub-themes in involuntary change manifested differently to those in voluntary change.

Participants expressed involuntary change as change that is imposed on employees (the contained) by the organisation (the container). All eight participants described what **involuntary change** they encountered.

### **Sub-theme: Nature of involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

Types of involuntary change expressed by participants include restructuring, operational changes and leadership changes. Restructuring is described by participants as changes implemented to functional organisational structures in various business units and at different levels, whereas operational changes encompassed changes in operational model, remuneration model and separations and brand changes. Leadership changes were associated with changes made at line of authority.

Restructure: "In October 2017 we went through a separation change." (P2)R5C2

"... there was a restructure within the group and I went through a process of section 189." (P3)R6C2

"End of 2016, my own structure changed where I now reported to a new leader." (P7)R10C2

Seven of the eight participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7) experienced the organisation's restructuring process in the banking sector and a group level or in their teams. Some even went through the process more than once (P1, P5, P7).

Operational change: "... the insurance space we went through changes to professionalise the industry. A new remuneration model was introduced." (P6)R9C2

"2019 April organisation changed its operating model and we had to decentralise the area and put the function back into the business." (P7)R10C2

"The recent changes were with COVID-19, where overnight we had to change ways of working and work from home." (P5)R8C2

"... frontline like RBB which is a profit centre is hit hard by COVID-19, unlike HR which is a cost centre for example. We worked from home." (P4)R7C2

Once more, seven of the eight participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7) endured changes related to operations. I noted a trend that it is the same participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7) who experienced the multiple changes. Operational changes entailed a change in remuneration model, operating model, virtual working due to COVID-19, implementation of new systems and separation projects.

Leadership change: "... the were changes at the leadership level. The old executive team was moved and we had a new executive." (P7)R10C2

"2018 came and new leadership came in and there we a lot of changes." (P6)R9C2

"In 2020 we had leadership change in our immediate team, people/line manager left which now left me reporting to my co-worker in the interim." (P4)R7C2

Seven of the eight participants not only experienced restructuring and operational changes, but also went through leadership changes. P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 and P8 all went through leadership changes in their respective business units.

COVID-19: “With COVID-19, emotions are high, people were frustrated. leadership ensured there was sustainability, gave comfort (provided financial support) and confidence that doors are still open (i.e. virtually operation).” (P1)R4C3

“... In the same year, the focus shifted to COVID-19 and projects in our team changed again.” (P2)R5C2

It was interesting to note that only four participants (P1, P2, P4 and P5) made mention of changes effected by COVID-19. In their narrative, most participants only voiced changes related to restructuring, operational changes and leadership changes. This could mean that all other changes had much more impact on participants compared to the COVID-19 change that was experienced most recently.

Juxtaposing to voluntary change, it seems that participants who experienced involuntary change have no control over this type of change. These findings indicate that all participants were subjected to numerous forms of inadvertent change. It is suggested that change is possibly enforced on employees by the organisation as a result of variations such as operating models, leadership, technology, organisational processes, including external factors like COVID-19. It is further suggested that change that occurred mostly at macro level had a ripple effect and impacted on other levels (i.e. micro and meso levels). P8 expressed that changes that happened at the group level led to changes in the operating model, thus decentralising functional business units. It is also worth noting that only four of the eight participants referred to changes due to COVID-19. This can be read that the changes relating to restructuring, operations and leadership had a heavy impact on other participants and that at the time of the study the impact of COVID-19 had not resonated with some of the participants.

### **Sub-theme: Frequency of involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

According to participants, **involuntary changes** occurred almost every two years at the group level and even more frequently at the business unit level. For instance, at business unit level, some participants experienced two changes in one year.

More frequent (six months and above):

“In October 2017 we went through a separation change. 2018 we went through a brand change and there was another line leader. March 2019 priority shifted from change management to organisational development. July 2019 was another change and I was placed in a permanent position. March 2020 was another executive leadership change that led to restructuring in our team. In the same year, the focus shifted to Covid-19 and projects in our team changed again.” (P2)R5C2

Six of the eight participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7) experienced changes within their business functions at times twice per year (P5 mentioned that their HR consultant role was short-lived as six months of being in a role the BU shut down, P4 was in a tech operations role for eight months) and others every year (P7 went through various OT in 2017, 2018 and 2019).

Two years and above: “... in the business banking space, every two years there was a restructure.” (P1)R4C2

“Thereafter to HR partner role for 3 years. In 2017 HR Function went through another restructure. In 2019 the organisation decentralised the business functions.” (P4)R7C2

“Another leadership change took place in 2017. In 2020, we had COVID-19 impact.”(P8)R11C2.

Just as in frequent change (multiple changes in one year or every annum), I continued to note the same trend from six of the eight participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, P7 and P8) experiencing change every two years. Additionally, participants P4, P5, P6, P7 have endured frequent (six months and above) and less frequent (two years and above) changes.

Participants’ narratives on the frequency of involuntary change indicate that in the past decade, change has been regular. At the group level (macro), change takes place every two to three years, while at the meso level change could occur even

twice a year. P1 expressed that in the banking space, there were changes every two years; P4 said the HR function went through changes in 2017 and again in 2019; P5 highlighted changes in 2005, 2008/2009 and then again in 2021/2015; P6 highlighted BU changes in 2013 and again leadership changes in 2018; and P8 mentioned leadership changes after three years.

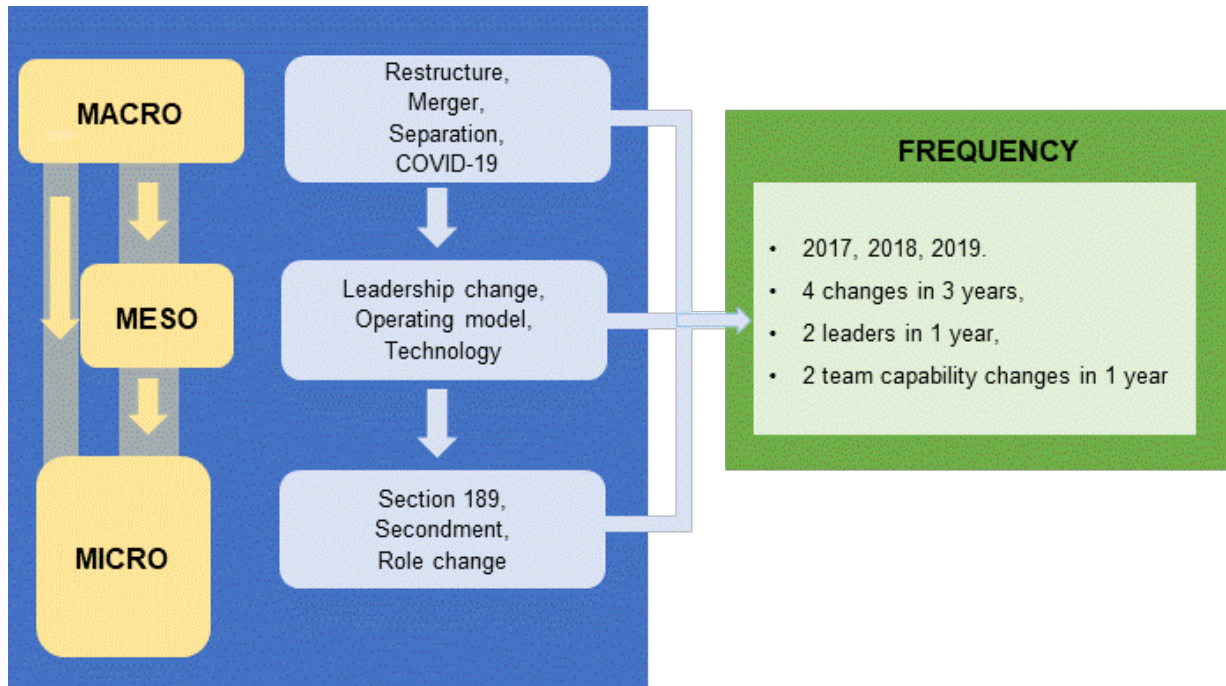
As the years progressed, change was more frequent (twice a year or even every year) at the meso level (business unit level). P2 uttered that in October 2017 there was separation, 2018 brand change, March 2019 team capability changes due to demand of change management, July 2019 another change and the participant was moved to a permanent position, March 2020 COVID-19 and leadership changes. P4 narrated that after their internship they lasted eight months in a tech operations role before changes were made; P5 expressed that within six months of being in a role the department closed; P6 highlighted that there was a merger of roles between 2007 and 2008; P7 articulated that there were changes in mid-2016, end of 2017, May 2018, July 2018, beginning of 2019, May 2019, and June 2020. The rate of change suggests that there are external and/or internal factors that compel organisations to go through the persistent OT phenomena, and as a result, participants are subjected to rapid and chronic OT and being change fatigued.

### **Integration of persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

Based on the narrative, the nature of change (voluntary and involuntary) and the nature of frequency (voluntary and involuntary), including the description of the panoptic system, participants shared their “change journey” stories and all eight participants described OT at the macro, meso and micro level and how change at the macro level impacted on the meso and micro level (see Figure 3.2). The participants’ narratives of the panoptic system and the nature of change (voluntary and involuntary) can be understood that the organisation holds authority at the macro level that presents two opportunities for change. The first one is participants’ voluntarily initiating the change and the other is imposed on employees by the organisation. Furthermore, participants’ experiences of the organisation are that the organisation is not offering an environment for employees to process change during the rapidly transforming system.

**Figure 3.2**

*Macro, meso and micro OT impact*



Following is a discussion and analysis of the third theme, “a conflicted system resulting from OT”, which yielded sub-themes “impact of voluntary change in a conflicted system” and “impact of involuntary change in a conflicted” as expressed by the participants.

**Theme: A conflicted system resulting from organisational transformation**

As with the second theme, participants described the impact of change that is incited by either voluntary or involuntary change which resulted in a conflicted system. The change experience was described as either direct or indirect and had a positive or negative impact. Sub-themes “impact of voluntary change in a conflicted system” and “impact of involuntary change in a conflicted system” are discussed in the following paragraphs.



### **Sub-theme: Impact of “voluntary” change in a conflicted system**

Participants described “direct impact” as change that affected them personally and that may have had a positive (constructive) or negative (adverse) effect on them. This type of OT is related to career advancement or role change.

It appears that participants who underwent voluntary change experienced the personal impact of the phenomena. P1 to P8 have experienced the personal impact of voluntary change. This occurred when they joined the organisation or changed various roles (this finding is also evident under the “type of change” sub-theme). Furthermore, although the change was initiated by participants, it yielded either pleasant (positive) or undesirable (negative) experiences. Examples of pleasant and positive experiences were expressed by P1, “... impact for me was positive as I applied for a role and was successful”; P3 indicated that they were “... challenged to use a part of the brain they don’t normally use”; P4 learned that “... things don’t always work their way”.

The undesirable impact was expressed by P2, who voiced that their “... work was not progressing due to a lack of sponsorship and leadership”; P3 expressed that they “... had to deal with rejection”; P4 indicated that they were “... stressing as things were not in their control”. It is worth noting that in certain instances, participants (specifically P3 and P4) experienced both a positive and a negative impact. I observed that P5 to P8 did not express how the voluntary change impacted on them. Furthermore, for voluntary change, participants only highlighted **direct** (first-hand experience) impact that either had positive or negative effects.

### **Sub-theme: Impact of “involuntary” change in a conflicted system**

For an involuntary change, participants described the impact of the lived experiences as **indirect**, referred to as second-hand experience or vicarious, seeing/feeling the experience through other individuals’ experiences, and either had a **positive or negative effect** on them. While most participants explained that they understood why OT had to take place, they also expressed feelings of anger, bitterness, and uncertainty.

Indirect/positive: “BUT 2007 restructure was a bit more supportive in that every single person was accommodated in business.” (P1)R4C3

Indirect/negative: “Thank goodness I have never experienced a nasty restructure but the way it is done, it’s like ruthless, it is like a blood bath. I mean there is no human or caring component when it comes to restructuring. This is just from the experiences I have heard of.” (P2)R5C3

Indirect/negative: “I think the people aspect was secondary; I say this because I see a lot of carnage. I see with a lot of people it impacted, people still this day have not recovered.” (P3)R6C4

Indirect/negative: “... frontline like RBB which is a profit centre is hit hard unlike HR which is a cost centre for example. I have seen a bit of restructuring in pockets as a result of COVID-19 and we will probably see huge restructure as an aftermath.” (P4)R7C2

Indirect/negative: “Some people were impacted negatively. They were bitter and upset. I know some who ended in hospital.” (P5)R8C3

This evidence highlights that six of the eight participants suffered a second-hand impact (through experiences of others) that was mostly negative. Of the six participants, only one (P1) interestingly was able to show that the 2007 restructure was a bit more supportive compared to what their colleagues went through in the recent restructure, where colleagues were impacted on negatively psychologically and mentally. The other five participants only highlighted the negative impact.

Participants also described the impact of their own lived experiences as **direct** (first-hand experience) that either had a **positive or negative effect** on them.

Direct/positive: “... the impact for me was positive in that I applied for a different role and I was successful.” (P1)R4C4

Direct/negative: "... we had three leaders and had no direction and this impacted a lot, with changes in my team and line managers we never moved forward in our work because of a lack of sponsorship and leadership." (P2)R5C3

Direct/negative: "... and the same process repeated itself where I was told there is duplication of roles and I was reassigned to another role I did not sign up for. Again, another dehumanising and kind of a demoralising process." (P3)R6C3

Direct/negative: "2018 restructure was a lot more intense obviously which brings great feelings of uncertainty." (P7)R10C2

Six of the eight participants voiced that they experienced the direct and negative impact of the involuntary change. P1 indicated that the impact came with opportunities for them as they applied for other jobs and were successful; however, in other instances the impact was negative. For example, when there was a change in leadership they had difficulty relating with new leaders. P5 highlights that "the impact took them out of their comfort zone".

In contrast to voluntary change where participants experienced the direct impact of the phenomena only, findings indicate that participants who underwent involuntary change experienced change first-hand, as well as through change experiences of their colleagues (second-hand experience). Based on the findings, it seems that the indirect impact experienced by participants is predominantly negative compared to the direct impact that manifested a balanced experience of both positive and negative impact. The emphasis of negative indirect impact is on the inhuman process of the OT phenomena. Analysis of indirect negative impact is that the system (organisation) implements change with less focus on the human component (employees), thus resulting in negative psychological and physiological impact. P1 expresses that there is no hand-holding through the process; P2 describes the restructuring process as "ruthless, like blood bath with no human caring component". P3 recited that the "people element is secondary".

### **Integration of a conflicted system resulting from organisational transformation**

The participants' lived experiences that are described as the direct and/or indirect impact that either had a positive or negative effect on them can be read as participants experiencing conflict. It is further understood that although employees experienced conflict as a result of exposure to the bad and good side of the organisation, some employees experienced constructive conflict (helpful or beneficial). One participant highlighted that although other employees were impacted on negatively, change for them came with a positive outcome. Participants indicated that the rapid change of senior leadership made them uncertain. Participants being unsure and uncertain led to participants' need for security being compromised. This can be read that the organisation and leadership as an authority figure in the workplace are not creating a stable work environment for employees, thus creating an insecure environment.

The fourth theme "dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT", and sub-themes "effects of voluntary change manifesting in a dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT" and "effects of involuntary change manifesting in a dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT" are discussed in the following section.

### **Theme: Dehumanising and uncaring nature of organisational transformation**

This theme highlighted anxiety experienced at an individual level and the defences thereof in dealing with the anxiety inherent to the workplace as a result of OT. Effects of voluntary change manifesting in the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT and effects of involuntary change manifesting in the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT are the sub-themes discussed in the next paragraph.

**Sub-theme: Effects of “voluntary change” manifesting in a dehumanising and uncaring nature of organisational transformation**

In the second last stage of the interview, participants were asked to share their emotional state and psychological effects of their OT journey. The following are the participants’ narratives of the effect of voluntary change manifesting in the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT.

“... I applied for a different role and I was successful.” (P1)R4C4

“... I have been challenged to use a different part of my brain that I naturally have not been trained to do.” (P3)R6C3

“As an Ops manager, I actually blossomed in this role.” (P5)R8C4

“...reflecting on a career change, I had to be taken back to who am I, why am I here, where am I going. I had clarity of thought and decision.” (P8)R11C4

Effects of voluntary change findings manifested in good and/or bad emotions. While four participants experienced good emotions, for instance P1 was successful in applying for the role, P3 was challenged, P5 blossomed through the different roles, P8 had clarity of mind, and the other three participants experienced bad emotions. P2 experienced an emotional breakdown, P4 was stressed. and P3 dealt with rejection. One participant, P3, experienced both bad and good emotions. P3 expressed that they needed to grow in their career and their new role challenged them to apply a different part of the brain while experiencing feelings of rejection.

**Sub-theme: Effects of “involuntary change” manifesting in a dehumanising and uncaring nature of organisational transformation**

For the effects of involuntary change manifesting in the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT sub-theme, it is worth noting that most participants described the personal (financial, health and physical) and workplace (disengagement, inhumanity, lack of trust) effects. When probed further, the psychological (stress, sadness, anxiety) influences came to the fore.

Physiological: "... caused me to be absolutely disengaged, I was less energised and enthusiastic and excited to get up in the morning. My mood would change and I would skip a day of exercise, I would start eating cake or ice cream." (P2)R5C4

"Mentally and emotionally I was not in the best state of mind. Anxiety was at an all-time high and I had to go on medication. It was a struggle." (P3)R6C4

"I had no idea I was stressed or had anxiety. Through all of that, I had a mini-stroke." (P6)R9C4

"... you are negative about everything, you are moody, you sleep a lot, you don't eat properly, don't take care of yourself, it has a negative impact on your body, mind and environment. I binged on food." (P8)R11C4

All eight participants expressed the physiological effects of the negative impact of OT. P2, P4, P7, and P8 mentioned the physical effects, such as being disengaged, less energised and enthusiastic, mood swings, a lack of exercise and bad eating habits, irregular sleep patterns, while P3, P4, P5 and P6 highlighted that stress and anxiety affected their health (i.e. on medication, another ended in hospital and low immunity, mini-stroke).

Financial: "I feel that with the restructure process due care must be given as it impacts on people's livelihood." (P1)R4C2

"2018, I mean you have a responsibility, you are an adult, you've got financial responsibility and you've got family responsibility and suddenly you have a letter in front of you saying you are about to go through sec 189." (P7)R10C4

It was interesting to note that only four participants spoke of the financial effects of OT. P3 highlighted the pain of losing a job and not being able to provide for their family. P5 expressed that they were determined to succeed, as they had. This could be read as that the other five participants had financial backup or support.

### Psychological effects:

“I had to sacrifice my own joy, peace and excitement. I was demotivated. I had an emotional breakdown. I had feelings of resentment that I did not belong. I started to doubt myself and my capability. I had anxiety and uncertainty in myself.” (P2)R5C3

“Between 2016 to 2018 that was quite a severe and scary change. I had to deal with all the uncertainty, I had to deal with all the fear of what is going to happen. There was resentment and anger because you think what is all this stuff.” (P7)R10C11.

Seven of the eight participants expressed the psychological effects of the OT. Most participants described their psychological effects as stress, anxiety, uncertainty, fear, emotions of resentment, breakdown, self-doubt, despair, frustration, helpless and anger. P3 describes that many were battered and bruised emotionally, that the change process was dehumanising. P4 voiced that it was a shock to their system. P5 expressed that they did not know they were stressed.

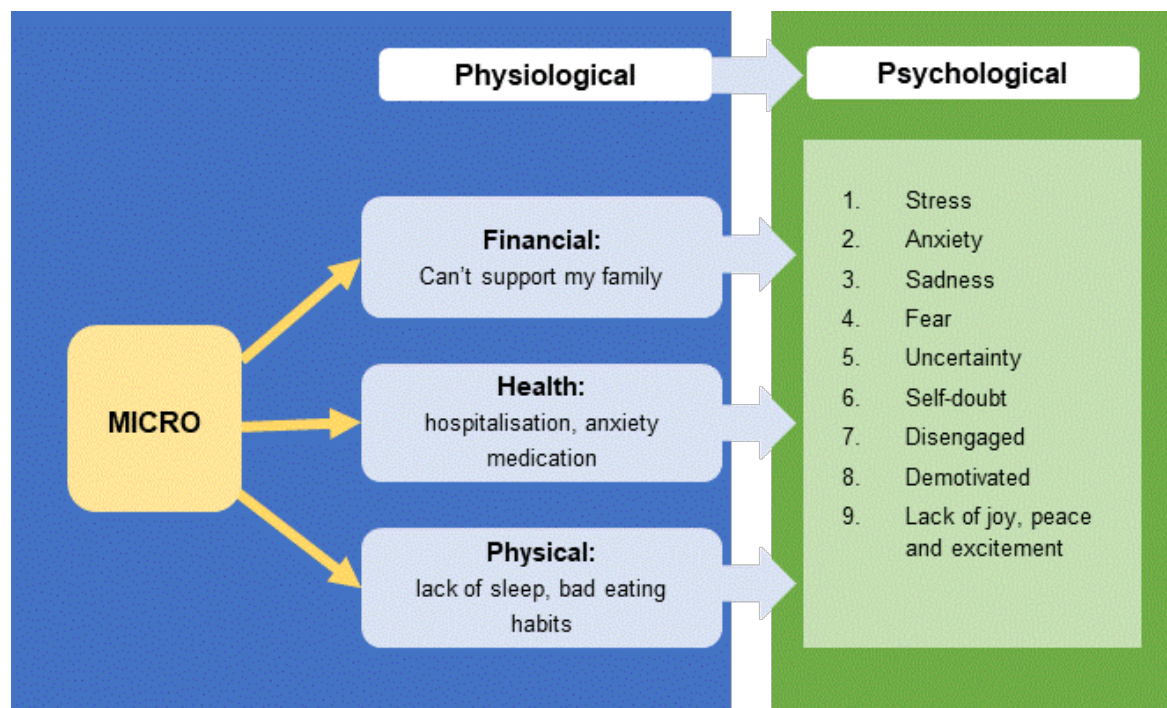
Based on the narratives provided, it may imply that all eight participants were affected on two levels (physiological and psychological) (see Figure 3.3). At this stage of the interviews, I could sense the heaviness experienced by the participants in their voices. One of the participants had a lump in their throat as they described how the system’s OT caused health issues. Physiological effects were expressed by P2, P4, P7, and P8, who mentioned the physical effects as disengaged, less energised and enthusiastic, mood swings, a lack of exercise and bad eating habits, and irregular sleep patterns. P3, P4, P5 and P6 highlighted health effects as being on medication, others ended in hospital and experienced low immunity, and one had a mini-stroke. Financial effects were expressed by four out of eight participants and this could be understood as the other four participants had financial backup support. Once more the majority of participants described their psychological effects as stress, anxiety, uncertainty, fear, emotions of resentment, breakdown, self-doubt, despair, frustration, helpless and anger.

## Integration of the dehumanising and uncaring nature of organisational transformation

The participants' descriptions of the personal and physiological (financial, health and physical), workplace (disengagement, inhumanity, lack of trust), as well as psychological (stress, sadness, anxiety) effects (see Figure 3.3 below) can be comprehended as participants manifesting some form of anxiety as a result of OT.

**Figure 3.3**

*Physiological and psychological impact of OT*



It is understood that participants directly (through their own experiences) and indirectly (through their colleagues' experience) experienced the positive impact of OT, seen as a new job opportunity or taking one out of a comfort zone. On the contrary, the narratives indicate that employees suffered the negative impact of OT through involuntary change. Participants described how the system's OT caused them stress and health issues. This was read as employees exhibiting some type of anxiety and signifying their organisation as an intensely hostile and inhuman workplace. The employees' experiences of the continuous OT were that of uncertainty. The effects of involuntary change within the organisation caused employees to feel insecure in their workplace, fearing that they would lose their jobs



and as a result they lived with emotions of uncertainty. The narratives further suggest that participants directed their emotions of anger and bitterness at the organisation and blaming it for creating an unstable, dehumanising workplace.

The final theme “surviving hardship and conquering” and sub-theme “voluntary change resulting in awareness and learning” and “involuntary change resulting in awareness and learning” are discussed next.

### **Theme: Surviving hardship and conquering**

In the final stages of the interviews, participants expressed how they survived the OT phenomena. The narrative continued to follow the trend of voluntary and involuntary change.

#### **Sub-theme: voluntary change resulting in awareness and learning to survive hardship and conquer**

Participants shared their insights and learnings that came with voluntary change.

“... a lot through my change journey, it builds character.” (P7)R10C3

“With the voluntary change, I did feel challenged because of routine work. We did the same work over and over again.” (P2)R5C4

“Psychologically, I was determined that I don't fall, I will succeed because I have responsibilities.” (P5)R8C4

“I realised that some of the limiting factors were brought on by me. I learned to do introspection and reflect on my purpose and aspirations.” (P8)R11C3

These narratives are understood to have come with awareness and learning that seem to help the participants deal with the effects of direct, self-initiated change. Six of the eight participants expressed their learning and awareness. P1 expressed that they learned that it was about adaptation and having a positive outlook to go through change with ease; P3 voiced that growth requires grit, determination and resilience;

P7 learned that change builds character. Furthermore, P5 expressed that the change comes with an inherent fear of the unknown; however, one can deal with change right if they have the right attitude; and P8 learned to introspect to see self-inflicted limiting factors.

**Sub-theme: Involuntary change resulting in awareness and learning to survive hardship and conquer**

Participants shared their insights and learnings that came with involuntary change.

Personal mastery: “For me it was just about adapting, having a positive outlook and making sure that you go through the change with ease.” (P1)R4C3

“... had to practice resilience, set boundaries, have positive self-talk, arrange virtual meetings with colleagues.” (P2)R5C2

“I learned a lot through my change journey, it builds character. I learned social resilience at school. When things are bad you don’t just sit and cry. You have to move on and do something.” (P7)R10C3

It is apparent from the evidence that all eight participants applied some personal mastery or resilience to cope with the negative effects of OT. Upon reflecting, P2 voiced that they had to practise resilience and positive self-talk; P3 practised self-mastery and mindfulness; P4 realised that things do not always work out as planned; P5 was determined to succeed to cater for their responsibilities. P6 mentioned that the process taught them to treat others with respect, and finally P8 reflected that some limiting factors are self-inflicted.

A second interesting observation is how some participants started relying on the greater power or force to deal with issues outside their control.

Greater power/force: “Also believing in the Almighty. For things that are out of my control, I would pray and ask the almighty to look upon me and guide me through the process.” (P1)R4C3

“... focussed more on spirituality was a massive thing that pulled me through.”  
(P2)R4C3

“Also believing that there is a greater force above me that helped me through this.”  
(P6)R9C2

Five of the eight participants expressed reliance on an external power to deal with OT. P1 prayed for guidance to the Almighty; P2 highlighted that focussing on spirituality pulled them through the process; P3 indicated that they invested a lot in their faith and being more spiritual; P4 expressed that they kept hoping; and P6 indicated that believing in the greater force above them helped them.

The third prevalent dynamic expressed by participants was placing reliance on family and colleague support as they understood what they were going through.

Family and colleague support: “I connected more with loved ones because of the isolation, I focussed more on maintaining my relationships on a regular basis.”  
(P2)R4C3

“... a team that went through a similar journey so a lot of us were battered and bruised. We found that there was strength in numbers so we had to share our motto, we shared best practices and presented a united front.” (P3)R6C3

“I have a strong social structure, social network with my family and friends.”  
(P7)R10C2

Seven of the eight participants mentioned that they received support from family, friends and colleagues. P1 focussed on their marriage and family; P4 specified that they had family support; P5 got support from friends within the organisation; and finally, P6 got support from their spouse. This can be read as that participants received little or no support from the organisation.

During the course of the turbulent change journey, participants reached a stage where they needed to cope or survive the OT phenomena and this was done at three levels (personal, higher power /force and family) Personally, certain participants coped by introspecting and realising their shortfalls. P8 highlighted that through reflecting on their life purpose, they realised that some limiting factors were self-inflicted. P3 realised that growth comes with a lot of grit and determination. P2 spoke of practising resilience. Other participants placed their reliance on a greater power or force in order to cope with things beyond their control.

### **Integration of surviving hardship and conquering**

In closing their OT journeys, the tone of the conversations took a turn from exhibiting pain to that of surviving hardship and conquering.

Most participants seem to have detached themselves from the changes experienced in their organisation and placed attention on coping with the stresses of OT. This was read as that participants looked for strategies to deal with the anxiety that comes with OT. Other participants applied personal mastery (e.g. having a positive outlook regardless of the situation) and others depended on family for comfort. A further observation made was that as participants' health, mental well-being, and financial status were threatened, they felt the need to rely on external forces or belief systems (e.g. God or the practice of prayer) to cope with the stresses of OT.

## **DISCUSSION**

Using the SP perspective, the study's aim was to explore and describe the unconscious impact of OT on employees in the South African financial services sector. For the purpose of exploring the covert impact of OT on employees, I integrated concepts that manifested from the testimonies that transpired from the themes and sub-themes. In addition, I applied the systems thinking and SP to interpret the findings, which are discussed below.

### **Integration of findings with literature**

The first four themes, namely “context that manifested in a panoptic system”, “persecutory, volatile and uncaring system”, “conflicted system resulting from OT”

and the “dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT” exhibited participants’ experiences of the OT phenomena. Following is a discussion of the first four themes with integration of literature.

### **Context that manifested in a panoptic system**

Employees’ descriptions of the panoptic organisation highlighted the concept of “group as a whole” (Mayer et al., 2018), which describes the formal work (organisation) processes and tasks, as well as the intra and interpersonal interactions. Employees described the system as being broad and diverse in terms of its structures (various business sectors, segments and functional units) and individuals within the different business units (Parsadh, 2019).

Furthermore, the description of findings depicts a system that has different levels for instance the whole organisation (macro), various business units (meso) and individuals within the system (micro), discussed in the next theme. Meyer and Botha (2000) assert that OT is guided by vision and challenges at different levels. In further research, Meyer and Botha (2000) emphasise that OT is an integrative disciplinary approach, signifying the interconnectedness and interaction of the system (Geldenhuys, 2012; Mayer et al., 2018). The panoptic system, as described above, brings to the fore that the organisation possesses boundaries, authority, roles, tasks, identity (Flotman, 2018), which contribute to good enough functioning as well as highlight below the surface behaviours (discussed under the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT due to a conflictual, persecutory and volatile system|). In addition, the complex nature of the panoptic system, which consists of the work-group (employees of the organisation) that overtly functions on the primary task, causes conflict (Mayer et al., 2018; Parsadh, 2019).

### **Persecutory, volatile and uncertain system**

The main themes expressed that OT revealed a nature of change that was voluntary and involuntary change (Shongwe, 2014). Participants’ lived experiences of OT suggest that voluntary transformation was instigated by participants, whereas involuntary transformation was enforced upon employees by the system. Furthermore, because of the rapidly changing business landscape (frequency of

change), OT was implemented regularly and had an impact on the organisation and employees at different levels (macro, meso and micro), which is parallel to Ledimo's (2012) study, confirming that change occurs at different levels of the organisation. According to the findings, transformation at the macro level had a direct impact on the meso level and this translated to changes at a micro level.

The findings highlight that the type of change characterised by voluntary transformation (at a micro level) includes career growth, role change, broadening my career, among others. Involuntary change is expressed as restructuring or operating model (at a macro level) (Baptista et al. 2020; Shongwe, 2014), leadership change, remuneration model change or team capability (at meso level), and section 189 or secondment (at the micro level). Ledimo (2012) affirms that atypical forces influence different levels, for instance, legislation and labour issues (macro level), change in strategy (meso) and issues relating to employees (micro). This narrative further suggests that change (voluntary /involuntary) triggered at macro level caused an unstable workplace (organisation) that employees experienced as persecutory and uncertain (Krantz, 2018).

Participants' descriptions of the nature of frequency point out that the rate of change for the organisation is fast-paced and impacts on employees negatively. What is evident in the findings is that there is a similarity of frequency in voluntary and involuntary transformation. Voluntary change (i.e. change in career) occurs more frequently (between 6 to 12 months to 2 to 3 years), and involuntary change occurs sometimes twice in a year and every 2 to 3 years. Ardichvili et al. (2016) assert that practices struggle to keep up with the fast pace of emerging trends. The participants' descriptions of the system and frequency of OT insinuate that participants experienced persecutory authority. Participants' responses depicted an authoritarian system (organisation) at macro level that subjected them to the involuntary transformation that manifested in persecutory anxiety (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Krantz, 2018). In this system there seems to be a problem with the authorisation boundary, which is one of the CIBART constructs. This created an unstable workplace for employees and as such participants voiced their experiences of a container (the system) that is not offering an environment for the contained

(employees) to process change during the rapidly transforming system (Cilliers & Harry, 2012; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

### **Conflicted system resulting from OT**

Participants continued to describe their experiences of OT as negative and/or positive that impacted on them directly (Parsadh, 2019) (through their own experiences), or indirectly (through their colleagues' experience). Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) reason that exposure to the good and bad parts of the system experienced by employees, as well as the anxiety (Krantz, 2018) inherent in the workplace result in conflict (Parsadh, 2019). Ledimo (2012) supports this finding by indicating that the impact of change on employees can be conscious or unconscious, as well as positive or negative. One participant highlighted that although other employees were impacted negatively, change for them came with a positive outcome. Ledimo (2012) continues to point out that the benefits of OT on employees include a better job.

Participants' experienced authority that manifested in failed dependency (Huffington et al., 2004). Cilliers and Harry (2012) describe dependency as a system (person or organisation) anxiety regarding its need for security. Dependence, referred to as relying on a parental character (Oosthuizen & Mayer 2019), was the basic assumption of dependence that was manifested by participants. Apparently employees experienced failed dependency as the organisation did not create a secure work environment for employees. Participants indicated that the rapid change of senior leadership made them uncertain. Participants being unsure and uncertain led to participants' need for security being compromised.

Participants narrated the psychological effects of OT, thus presenting free-floating anxiety associating with de-authorisation and helplessness (Cilliers, 2018; Czander, 1993; Mayer et al., 2018). Furthermore, fear of the unknown was exhibited (Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Parsadh, 2019). Participants experienced an insecure environment created by the system. Participants' resistance to change (RTC) indicates how the system's conscious events result in a strong sense of psychological effects (i.e. uncertainty, anxiety and fear).

## **Dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT**

Finally, participants enunciated their experience of the impact of OT. Most participants expressed personal (financial, health and physical) and workplace (disengagement, inhumanity, lack of trust) conscious effects. The psychological effects expressed by participants included anxiety and stress, and emotional effects encompassed intense anger, sadness, shock, uncertainty, as well as low energy levels. The findings suggest that participants manifested survival anxiety (Cilliers, 2018; Cilliers & Harry, 2012) as their health, mental well-being, and financial status were threatened. The conscious description (hostile nature of OT) by participants possibly manifested in the unconscious (survival anxiety). The participants also seem to have experienced free-floating anxiety linking to de-authorisation (Mayer et al., 2018) and helplessness (Cilliers et al., 2006; Czander, 1993; Ledimo, 2012). Participants experienced an insecure environment created by the system.

The participants' RTC could have denoted an intense, hostile and inhuman workplace that affected them psychologically and emotionally. Ghislieri et al. (2018) and Steyn and Cilliers (2016) explain that RTC is a construct used to explicate the nexus and difference between conscious and unconscious behaviour. Participants' emotions of anger and bitterness directed at the system for creating an unstable workplace were interpreted as participants manifesting another type of anxiety that is paranoid anxiety (fear of the unknown) resulting from OT (Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

Krantz (2018) supposes that the paranoid schizoid mode is birthed from the work of Melanie Klein and is described as the use of primitive defences such as splitting, denial, and projective identification to reduce troubling anxieties and feelings. Flotman (2018) and Krantz (2018) highlight that functioning for the paranoid-schizoid mode is highly ineffective as it may lead to massive projection rigid thinking or blaming. It was further interpreted to mean that participants directly (through their own experiences) and indirectly (through their colleagues' experience) suffered the negative impact of OT, resulting in paranoid anxiety and positive impact resulting in depressive mode, seen as a new job opportunity or taking one out of a comfort zone. The depressive mode is a mental state in which one maintains a connection with



both the internal and external world where resources may be mobilised to deal with these realities successfully (Krantz, 2018).

The first four themes and the CIBART model are integrated and discussed in the next section.

### **Dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT due to a conflictual, persecutory and volatile system**

In keeping with the purpose of this study, this section entails a discussion of the CIBART model employed to reveal the covert impact of OT on the employees' behaviours as they experienced OT.

This research employed the CIBART model to elucidate employees' experience of OT. The first theme suggests the diverse nature of the organisation which, according to Cilliers and Koortzen (2002) and Mayer et al. (2018) comes with intrinsic anxieties and conflict. The narration of the first four themes suggests the participants' behaviour of having experienced intra-personal battles (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Parsadh, 2019) through the voluntary and involuntary nature of OT on employees, as well as exposure to the positive and negative side of the system that was experienced directly and/or indirectly by participants.

The findings highlighted a panoptic system that suggests a complex nature of the organisation resulting in inherent anxieties that caused conflict to the whole system (organisation and employees) and presented itself intra-personal (individual emotional battles (Parsadh, 2019; Shongwe, 2014). Participants' identities were corroded as a result of conflict (Cilliers & Harry, 2012; Oosthuizen & Mayer 2019) caused by the system's OT. Additional inference is that the organisation and employees' "identity" is distorted as external factors at macro level continue to coerce the frequent OT phenomena on the system. Silva and Navarro (2012) assert that the rate of transformation (i.e. due to digitalising services) causes employees to lose their sense of professional identity.

A lack of support from authority added to the tarnished identity of participants. Frequent exposure to the OT disturbed the equilibrium of their comfort zone (known world) by introducing fear of the unknown, thus perturbing the boundaries of the system. Oosthuizen and Mayer (2019) highlight that the system experiences uncertainty and anxiety due to the rapid change.

The narrative of a “persecutory system” can be interpreted that the employees see the organisation as an authority figure that has subjected them to involuntary transformation (Flotman, 2018). Further inference is that frequent restructuring, change in leadership, operating models and processes can imply that the authority “parent figure” that defines “roles” and provides direction on the task to be performed and safety was unstable, causing anxieties for employees (Parsadh, 2019). Rapid OT did not afford time for change to be processed by the systems, employees and leadership, and consequently this created an intense anxiety, and as a result, employees self-authorized (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Mayer et al., 2018; Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). Some of the participants were unsure of what their roles entailed and others had to reapply for new jobs as the old roles no longer existed (Heavin & Power, 2018).

OT anxiety was so intense in participants that the boundary line between employees became smaller and smaller (Flotman, 2018). For instance, employees’ roles were unclear as a result of rapid OT. This can be understood that the employees experienced a lack of support from leadership, resulting in failed dependency (Flotman, 2018; Parsadh, 2019). The continuous and frequent OT threatened participants’ primary task (Cilliers, 2018), which led to employees focussing on surviving OT strains; this is interpreted as off-task. Participants’ roles became obscured as leadership kept changing and was not available to manage OT boundaries. Blurred tasks and roles created an unfavourable working environment for employees (Shongwe, 2014).

The experiences of the participants seem to suggest that leadership did not offer a safe space for employees during OT (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). As such, this implies that employees did not receive secure containment. The frequency of OT, coupled with changes in systems and processes, caused anxieties and uncertainties about

employees' future in the organisation (Cilliers, 2018). Leadership of the organisation apparently failed to put measures in place to create a supportive and an enabling environment during the OT process (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). Based on the findings of this study, the organisation's structures and leadership did not present a conducive working space for OT progressing from elementary to integrated complexity thinking (Clarke et al., 2008; Krantz, 2018; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). The system itself underwent rapid recurring OT that leadership did not have time and space to manage and nurture the workplace anxieties that come with OT.

The system, through leadership, enforced involuntary OT on the employees. Since OT at the macro level led to multiple leadership changes, this can be interpreted as the system failing itself by de-authorising leaders and operations to manage transformational boundaries. With regard to the first containment condition, namely holding the system together to facilitate productive interactions (Flotman, 2018; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016), the rapidness of OT elevated the intense anxieties for the employees (contained) that focus for the contained was to deal with stresses of OT, and as such there was no productive interaction.

The organisation went through various OT processes, for instance change in structure or leadership. This second containment condition "changing the container" (Parsadh, 2019) was expressed by the participants to suggest that the focus was being on the organisation rather than on the employees. These findings can be read to imply that the organisation and its leadership paid attention only to facilitating changes in structures, processes and procedures (Cilliers, 2018; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016, p. 4), but missed the mark relating to staying mindful of employees' need for stability, consistency, homeostasis and reliability, as well as their excitement of novelty, surprise and curiosity. Interpretative findings of the study express the high level of uncertainty and fear of the unknown by participants. This may suggest that the system did not change from within (third containment condition).

Fear of the unknown creates an unstable environment which manifests in paranoid anxiety leading to ineffectiveness (Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Krantz, 2018). Employees' focus during OT was on survival and dealing with workplace anxieties. The findings do not present evidence of employees positively taking the

responsibility of changing the system to which they belong (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). One participant indicated that they felt like a stranger in the system. The fourth containment condition addresses the trade-off between the container and the contained. The leadership or processes within the organisation (container) is given authority to create a favourable containment (Shongwe, 2014). The findings of the study highlight the negative impact of OT. This can be interpreted to suggest that the containment was not being provided (unfavourable working place) or conducive for employees to be effective in the workplace. This was further caused by the frequency of OT.

While the study was not focussed on highlighting the change that is brought about by the employees, it can be interpreted that acknowledgement of the employees to stay relevant and to keep up with the continual change of the business landscape (highlighted under awareness and learning theme) is the realisation of the employees that they could equally bring about change within the system (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). The final containment condition refers to the use of the maternal nature of supporting and handholding (Flotman, 2018). Once more, the findings of the study point to the opposite, where participants expressed that they did not get much support from the system; however, they relied on colleagues, family and friends for support throughout the series of OT. This can be interpreted as that leadership did not pay attention to employee's dreams, fantasies, myths, paradoxes, ambiguities and other illogicalities without memory, desire or judgement (Cilliers, 2018; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020).

The next section is a deliberation and integration of the findings and literature with the basic assumptions on the last theme, "surviving hardship and conquering". This theme manifested the defence mechanisms applied by participants as a means of surviving OT anxieties.

### **Surviving hardship and conquering**

The last theme that manifested from the findings, namely "surviving hardship and conquering", highlighted how employees coped with the anxieties of OT. Participants' awareness and learning that transpired from the OT phenomena can be

read to suggest that participants employed the basic assumptions (Petriglieri & Petriglieri., 2020) as a means to dealing with the anxieties that come with the pains of workplace as a result of the OT phenomena.

At the end of the interviews, participants' OT stories changed to that of being victorious by the application of defence mechanisms such as self-reliance in order to cope with the unconscious stresses (Huffington et al., 2004). To cope and manage the unconscious anxieties of OT, it is supposed that participants applied three basic assumptions (Flotman, 2018; Oosthuizen & Mayer 2019). First, participants applied me-ness (Cilliers, 2018; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020) as a defence mechanism, as they isolated themselves from the system and maintained self-reliance to cope with the workplace anxieties. These findings extend a recent study (Flotman, 2018) that highlights that individual withdrew to their internal world for self-defence.

Another basic assumption that is similar to Steyn and Cilliers' (2016) and Oosthuizen and Mayer's (2019) findings that was employed by participants as their defence against the pains of workplace anxiety (fast-paced and impersonal OT demands) is one-ness. Participants expressed that praying or having hope in the powers above, relying on greater supremacy, i.e. God or spirituality (Coetzee et al., 2016; Koltko-Rivera, 2006), helped them to navigate through the storms of OT and to be agile and stay relevant to the rapidly changing workplace (Coetzee et al., 2016; Koltko-Rivera, 2006). One participant expressed how they relied on their Almighty for things that were outside their control. Other participants rationalised the existence of ongoing transformation by stating that it builds their social resilience. This behaviour supposes that participants exhibited the "flight" behaviour, which is the third basic assumption as a defence mechanism which overlap the finding in Flotman's (2018) study. Employees expressed that they experienced a lack of support from leadership and relied on each other for survival. This behaviour can be seen as pairing or one-ness-we-ness as a form of coping with anxiety.

Figure 3.4 gives an overview of the findings integrated with the SP constructs by looking at the interrelationship between the themes.

Participants depicted the organisational context as a panoptic system that is multifaceted and according Mayer et al. (2018) comes with inherent conflict and anxieties. As illustrated in the main blue circle of the panoptic system, the participant's lived experience of OT was described as voluntary and involuntary change (depicted in the figure as orange and green circles) which caused conflict to the system as a result of the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT and resulted in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system (demonstrated as the 3 blue circles within the light blue square in figure 3.4).

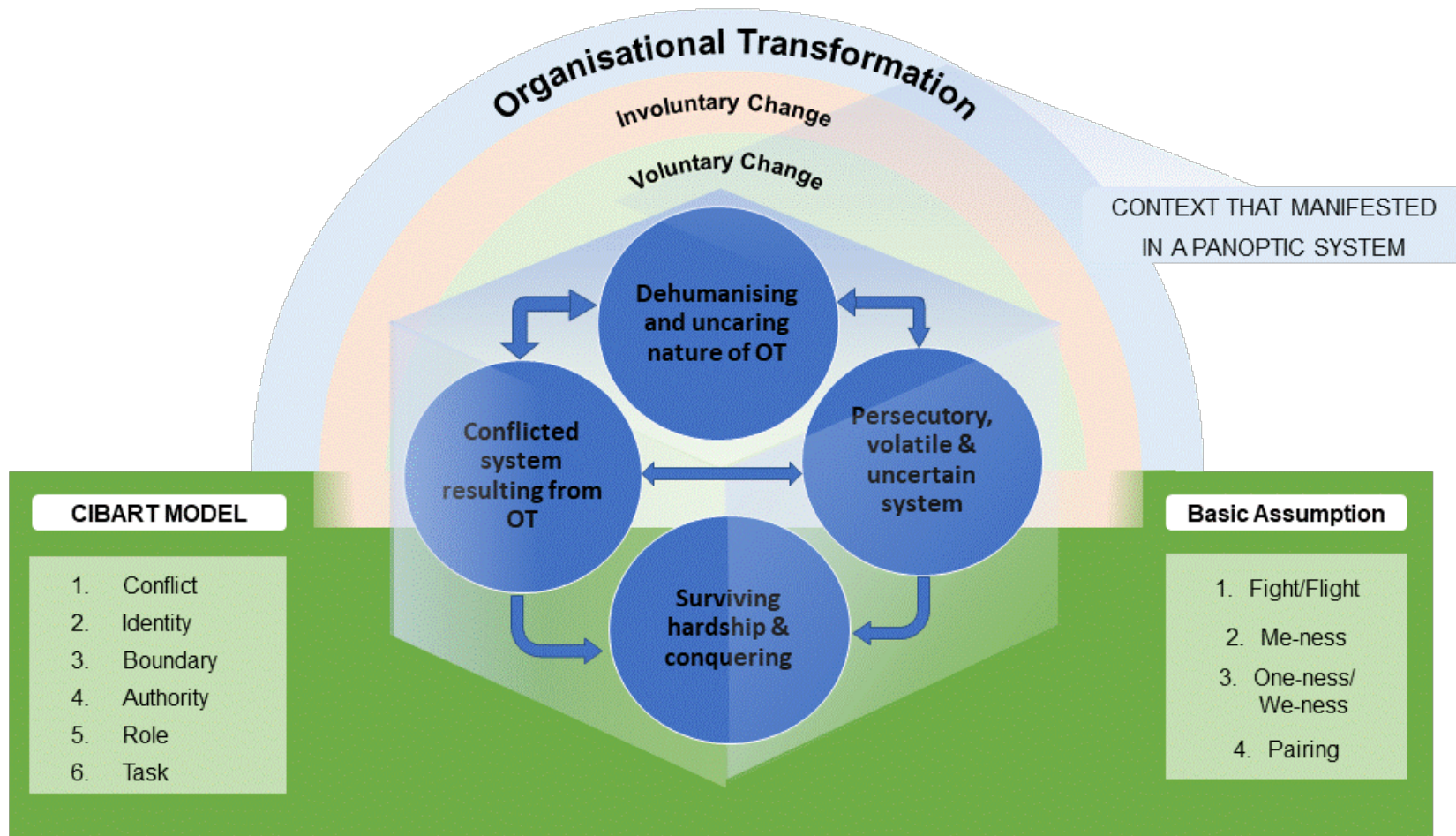
The figure also depicts how the SP constructs being CIBART model and basic assumptions were utilised by participants to describe the unconscious impact of OT and to cope with the OT impact as shown in the lower part of the figure (green rectangle). The CIBART model was applied to illuminate the participant's experience of covert impact of OT themes and this was highlighted in the first four. The system (organisation and participants) experienced anxieties and were conflicted as they did not experience support from authority as a result of the dehumanising nature of OT, this in turn tarnished the participant's identify. The frequent nature of OT created a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system causing fear of the unknown which disturbed the system's boundaries by causing uncertainty. In addition, the ongoing nature of OT (voluntary and involuntary change) led to lack of containment where authority figures define tasks and roles causing conflict for participants.

It was supposed that participants experienced anxieties because of the dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT due to a conflictual, persecutory and volatile system, and to survive and conquer the hardship of OT, as described by participants' basic assumptions were applied as defence mechanisms (fight/flight, me-ness, one-ness/we-ness and pairing, as presented at the bottom right of the figure).

**Figure 3.4**

*Integration of findings with SP constructs*

**Cover impact of OT on employees within the financial services sector**



Literature highlights that SP utilises various theories and models to reveal below-the-surface systems' behaviours. The integration of the findings with literature and SP behavioural constructs (CIBART model and basic assumptions) describes the covert impact of OT on employees. The participants' narrative of their lived experiences of OT revealed a work-group that possesses CIBART boundaries (conflict, indemnity, boundary, authority, role and task). The CIBART model also showed that if these boundaries are not in place different anxieties occurs which manifested in survival, free-floating, performance and paranoid anxieties that resulted in a dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT due to a conflictual, persecutory and volatile system. To cope with and contain these anxieties employees utilised basic assumptions defences (fight/flight, me-ness, one/we-ness and pairing). Finally the finding highlighted how employees coped with these anxieties to survive and conquer hardship of OT.

In line with the aim of the study, the findings of the study described the covert impact of OT on employees within the financial services sectors in the SA context through the SP approach.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since the findings revealed how precipitous OT occurs as a result of various business elements, such as services being digitised, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and change in economic factors due to flu strains, it is recommended that the organisation engage in ongoing research of digital transformation (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) to comprehend the frequency, dynamics and intensity of transformation and the impact it will have on employees. In addition, the organisation should engage in a facilitated focus group with relevant stakeholders to gain further insight into the unconscious experiences sustained by the system (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Special attention must be placed on understanding and creating a favourable containment.

The findings of this study can be used by the IOP professionals within the organisation utilising research-based strategies (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) for the ongoing development of current and relevant change management drives and



organisational development (OD) models that will help employees to experience minimal anxieties and cope with the frequent OT. For example, through partnership with IOP professional, leaders (line managers) could learn about the system (organisation and employees) behaviour (Cilliers, 2018) and employ the use of tested approaches, such as CIBART model constructs to understanding the covert impact of OT on employees and do line managers coaching (Flotman, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

The main objective of this study was to explore and describe the unconscious impact of OT on employees as a result of the changing business landscape within the financial services sector. Finally, the study aimed to make recommendations on interventions and future research that will aid employees, managers, OD consultants and IO psychologists before, during and after OT.

The participants viewed the system as persecutory, volatile and uncertain, causing conflict and uncertainty (fear of the future) to the whole system (organisation and employees). The study concluded that the nature and frequency of OT endured elicited the participants to experience conflict and perceive the system as uncaring and dehumanising in how it implements OT. Subsequently, the study resolved that the impact of OT on the system manifested free-floating, survival and paranoid anxieties (Krantz, 2018). The study further concluded that to cope with the anxieties which manifested in the theme surviving hardship that came with the impact of OT on participants gained insight (awareness and learning).

The first four themes (“context that manifested in a panoptic system”, “persecutory, volatile and uncertain system”, “a conflicted system resulting from OT” and “dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT”) highlighted the impact of OT on participants that exhibited the constructs of the CIBART model (Parsadh, 2019). The anxieties that came with the nature of OT caused conflict for the system and as a result the system’s identity was corroded (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). Further, with conflict causing fear of the unknown, it upset the boundaries of the system. The persecutory system denoted an authority figure which failed the system (Flotman, 2018). The frequent nature of OT resulted in repeated leadership changes which

then blurred the tasks and roles of participants. The account of participants' lived experiences of OT denoted that the employees (contained) experienced the organisation (container) as persecutory and uncertain, and consequently creating unfavourable working conditions (containment) (Shongwe, 2014; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

To reduce and contain the unconscious anxieties, participants applied the basic assumptions of SP (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019). The first adaptive defence that was noted was "me-ness" (by detaching from the system and relying on self-reliance or mastery) and "one-ness" (placed reliance on greater power such as spirituality), "flight" (rationalising pain) and pairing (relied on each other and family for comfort) (Flotman, 2018).

### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The first limitation is that the participants included only employees in leadership roles, indicating that other employees' voices were not reflected in the study. Interpretative bias (Van Niekerk, 2011) may possibly be another limitation as I have prior knowledge and experience of the phenomena within the research setting. Prior and during the study I declared possible bias, I applied reflexivity by discussing my views under the researcher's role, and theoretical reviews were used to support the findings and ensure conformability and transferability. As such the outcome of the study may be transferable (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016) to other financial institutions.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

As indicated above under limitations, the findings of the study reflect only the voices of employees at the leadership level. It is therefore recommended that future studies include employees across all corporate levels to ensure that findings are more representative. I further propose that future research be conducted across all financial institutions to confirm the findings of a diverse sample.

In addition, I propose a frequent ongoing study of the unconscious impact of OT (using the SP perspective) to expand on comprehension and knowledge of the phenomena as the business landscape transforms at a rapid pace. Consequently,

ongoing research will aid organisations and IOP professionals to continually develop current and relevant tools to assist management and employees to manage the impact of the phenomena. The findings of this study can be used to debate whether existing change management models are sufficient to aid with the unconscious impact of OT experienced by the employees. In addition, it will aid in determining if the change management models are still relevant to deal with the current and unpredictable nature of OT. This will result in developing new models for understanding the covert impact of OT on employees

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## **CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, CONTRIBUTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The last chapter positions the conclusion, limitation, contribution and recommendations. The literature review, research findings and interpretative study's conclusions were compared and verified with the research aims. The contribution of the study founded on the research findings will be considered and this will be followed by a discussion on the limitations of both literature and the interpretative study. Finally, recommendations for future research and the organisation are presented.

### **4.2 CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of the literature review and interpretative study is articulated in this section.

#### **4.2.1 Conclusion drawn from the literature review**

Specific aims concerning the literature review were:

- (1) to conceptualise OT
- (2) to conceptualise the SP
- (3) to conceptualise the covert (unconscious) impact of OT on employees from a system psychodynamics perspective.

##### *4.2.1.1 Conceptualising organisational transformation*

Discussion of the literature review on OT, including various definitions and the root cause were deliberated. It was determined that OT refers to a continual process of change in organisational structures, capabilities, departmental redesign and employment as a result of external or internal dynamics (Jabri, 2015). For this research, OT was narrowed down to refer to change in the structure of the organisation such as restructuring, down-sizing and/or a merger of organisations. What was considered is the impact of OT, i.e. Section 189 on the surviving employees who were not affected by OT. It is also worth noting that most

researchers highlighted that OT is fundamental to sustain the demands of the rapidly changing business landscape.

The literature review contemplated the root cause of OT. Contemporary literature highlighted that industry 4.0, digitisation, globalisation and competitive advantage are some of the factors behind the hasty OT (Ledimo & Martin 2014). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic is identified as the most recent disruptive force causing OT (Kuckertz et al., 2020). Furthermore, literature emphasised that the source of OT can occur at different levels (macro, meso and micro); secondly, change at one level has a ripple effect on the other levels and respective levels; and finally, the source of OT can follow a top-down or bottom-up course.

According to Ledimo (2012), external national drivers mostly impact on the macro level, changes implemented by the organisation as a result of changes at the macro level impact on the meso level, and finally changes at the macro and meso levels directly impact on employees at the micro level (Cummings & Worley, 2008). Based on the literature, the cause of OT can follow a top-down or bottom-up course. An example of a top-down course is COVID-19 lockdown restrictions forcing employers to implement remote working strategies that impact on employees. The bottom-up course includes employee needs, such as training needs during the lockdown. Organisations are forced to implement virtual training as opposed to face-to-face training.

This study indicated that OT was mostly induced by changes taking place at the macro and meso levels, and as a result, it impacted on employees at a micro level as they underwent involuntary change, namely restructuring, which resulted in employees losing jobs. The introduction of new legislation, de-merging and the COVID-19 pandemic are some of the changes mentioned at the macro level. These changes effected changes in operating models, organisational structure, remuneration models and change in leaders at a meso level. Section 189 is the main factor that affected employees at a micro level.

#### *4.2.1.2 Conceptualising systems psychodynamics*

To understand the unconscious impact of OT on employees, the theoretical foundation of the SP perspective, using the specific behavioural constructs, was explored. A body of research indicates that the concept of SP was developed by the Tavistock Institute, which was then introduced by Miller and Rice's (1967) seminal work. Cilliers (2018) states that the SP is rooted in social psychoanalytic, group relations object relations and open system theory. It was determined that integration of three elements, namely the practice of psychoanalysis, theories and methods of group relations, and open system perspective make up SP.

It was determined that various researchers played a role in the theoretical background of SP. The foundation of psychoanalysis (focus on individuals) was laid by Freud. Klein's work was inspired by Freud's contribution and initially focussed on children and later on developed into adults and groups. Le Bon observed large unorganised groups and theorised that individuals sacrifice part of their individuality in a group, are easily influenced, and susceptible to suggestion (Fraher, 2004). McDougall (1920), a social theorist, expanded on Le Bon's work and believed groups were emotional, impulsive, violent, and suggestable. He added that a mental shift comes with a marked change in group behaviour in an organised group that is task-oriented. He states that the shift leads to deepened emotion in individuals that is seldom attained under any other condition and can be harnessed (control/use).

Group relations became prevalent after World War I, where a notable shift from psychoanalysis to group relations is observed. Hayden and Molenkamp (2003) define the second element of SP group relations as an inquiry of group dynamics as a holistic system. Post Le Bon's and McDougall's work, Bion made the second contribution in developing a new method of working with groups to detect group behaviour and this shift is rejecting the traditional psychoanalysis and embracing group as an entity.

The third contribution on group relations was made by Kurt Lewin (1948), who drew from experiential learning hypothesising that individuals learn more effectively from interactive experiences (Fraher, 2004). "Open system" being the third element of SP,



was explored after World War II by the Tavistock Institution. This element fixated on task and boundary awareness (Rice, 1965; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Churchman's (1968) (task and boundary scientist) theoretical development of the system's approach encompassed five rudiments, namely developments in psychophysical systems, field theory methods, the understanding of social systems as defences against anxiety, open systems thinking, and sociotechnical approaches.

The study embarked on understanding the covert impact of OT on employees by exploring the organisation as a holistic open and social system (Mayer et al., 2018). The study denoted the organisation as a holistic system that is arranged into sub-groups. The sub-groups (Parsadh, 2019; Shongwe, 2014) are signified by the various core (banking, financial service or insurance) and functional business units (human resources, etc.). Within the sub-groups are individuals (employees) who relate with one another (group relations). The study further highlighted the diverse group dynamics, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and advancement and use of technology (Bostan et al., 2020; Carbó-Valverde, 2017) that are predominantly external factors that impact on the organisation (Ledimo, 2012). Within the organisation are dynamics such as changes in structure, processes and operational models (Mhlungu et al., 2019) that consequently affect the employees at a macro level. Group dynamics experienced at the individual level is the involuntary change that impacted negatively on employees and few participants expressed a positive impact. Group behaviour observed from the study is how the social system protected itself from anxiety.

#### *4.2.1.3 Conceptualising the covert (unconscious) impact of OT on employees from an SP perspective*

After exploring the theoretical foundation of the SP construct, the study continued to consider the components of SP to gain an understanding the unconscious impact of OT on employees.

The study determined that the "unconscious mind" was coined by Freud (Bargh & Morsella, 2008) and is traditionally within the cognitive psychology context defined as the behaviour or processes that is inadvertent in nature. The contemporary

operational description is expressed as the absence of awareness or knowledge of the impact of a triggering stimulus (Bargh & Morsella, 2008) and not of the triggering stimulus itself (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Kihlstrom et al. (2000) indicate that a body of research has demonstrated that the unconscious information can affect the subsequent processing of conscious information.

In the theoretical foundation of the SP discussion, it was established that SP presents an open system approach, and Cilliers (2018) highlights that SP centres on the exploration of the conscious and unconscious behaviour. Furthermore, SP is characterised as a scientific study adapted to describe the behaviour in the organisation, including expression of the unconscious. Steyn and Cilliers (2016) expand the thought by suggesting that SP seeks to comprehend the organisation's constructs and its relationship to deep-rooted, unconscious and implicit individual, social and organisational anxiety.

The current study explored what OT is by defining the construct and discussing the root cause thereof. Further determination articulated in this study is that literature and empirical studies suggest that OT is disruptive to employees. For instance, Krantz (2018) points out that the emotional toxicity of employees is an outcome of OT. In their preceding study, Nohria and Khurana (2010) suggest that most employees, being hierarchically the furthest away from the core of OT decision-making, may be more stressed than individuals who are directly involved in change decisions. Cilliers et al. (2006) assert that OT has an unsettling effect on employees, encroaching on individuals' personal and work boundaries. This is supported by Schafer (2003) and Cummings and Worley (2008) by reasoning that OT for employees is accompanied by weighty stress anxiety of shifting out of the comfort zone into the new unknown.

It was also determined that OT on employees can either be conscious or unconscious, positive or negative (Ledimo, 2012). According to Levy and Merry (1986), the positive side of OT includes a "better job" and "innovation" that could bring about a new vision that promotes creativity. The contrary is resistance to change and an adverse impact on psychological and physical well-being, as stated by Hayes (2007), with relationships between people being destroyed (Ledimo, 2012),

and denial and projection (Huffington et al., 2004). An empirical study conducted on eleven banks in Brazil evidenced that OT due to technological advances resulted in employees experiencing elevated physical and mental stress (Silva & Navarro, 2012). Other studies emphasised that employee performance was adversely influenced, manifesting in declining cognitive ability (a lack of concentration) and emotional instability (depression, anger, exhaustion) (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016) and poor interpersonal relationships (Jabri, 2015).

Through literature, it was established that the anxieties of employees can manifest in distinctive ways (Huffington et al., 2004), including free-floating, survival, performance and paranoid anxiety. According to Steyn and Cilliers (2016, p. 3), free-floating anxiety is defined as “a pervasive unrealistic expectation unattached to a clearly formulated concept or object of fear”, survival anxiety is expressed when an employee has the assumption that their existence is threatened, performance anxiety is demonstrated when the employee assumes that their worth is lower than what is believed at the specific time, and finally, paranoid anxiety is based on the belief in a potentially harming enemy.

Henning (2009) points out that an organisation and its people undergo several forms of anxiety, conflict and uncertainty at some point or another. Through literature, it was ascertained that the SP behavioural constructs employ the CIBART model to establish how employees manifest their experiences of OT. Based on the model, there are five constructs, namely conflict, identity, boundary, authority, role and task (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Containment is described as a system’s condition that if the behavioural aspects of the CIBART model are correctly in place, then the leadership of the organisation can provide an effective containment for employees.

According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), “conflict” manifests in three ways, namely intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and inter-group. When experiencing anxiety, employees struggle with emotions within themselves, which then escalates to tension between team members, discord between sub-groups and friction between business units or larger groups. The findings of the study showed that most employees experienced anxiety that manifested in various emotions affecting them personally, mistrust between team members or leadership. When the system

(organisation) experienced some form of OT, this would impact on other functional business units.

Cilliers and Harry (2012) explain “identity” as how the system relates or separates itself from another based on values and culture. It is the self-identity that endures amidst volatile times of change.

“Boundary” is defined as the line between and around parts of the system that keeps the system safe and contained. According to Henning (2009), a fair amount of structure embodies anxiety and safety for the system.

“Authority” alludes to formal influence and power held by the system to perform a task and can flow top-down or bottom-up.

“Role” entails an individual’s activities that are differentiated from others through boundaries. According to Steyn and Cilliers (2016), role can manifest in various ways; the conscious and explicit content known as the normative, the employee’s introjected past experiences and psychological features, such as values and preferences (existential), and the projections that the employee receives from significant others in the organisational system (the phenomenal part).

“Task” refers to the primary or secondary task functioning in which employees may be involved. Henning (2009) states that task performance is enabled when there is precision, while anti-task behaviour results from confusion.

The final construct that forms part of the model is “containment”, which refers to a condition of a system. Within the system are the leadership, team and operations (container), and employees, referred to as the contained. A favourable containment condition entails leadership that is officially empowered to enable fruitful relations within the system, change the container with the aim of transforming the contained, change the system within by helping employees take charge of modifying the system to which they belong.

Finally, it was acknowledged that the SP basic assumptions group behaviour is applied as a defence mechanism to reduce and contain anxiety. Five basic assumptions identified include dependency, fight or flight, pairing, one-ness and me-ness (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). Dependency is defined as system anxiety regarding its need for security, and if not met, the unconscious manifests frustration, powerless and helplessness (Stapley, 2006). Fight or flight is referred to as a system performance anxiety and fight reactions are displayed in a form of aggression against self and others (jealousy, competition or fighting for a position within a system). Conversely, flight responses manifest “physically” (being ill, resigning, avoiding others and “psychologically”, for example rationalising and intellectualising) (Gould et al., 2006). Pairing is an indicator of coping with the anxiety of isolation or loneliness. One-ness is also known as we-ness and relies on the inner world, ignoring the reality of the outer world. Me-ness is illustrated by detachment from the system’s struggles to cope with survival anxiety.

#### **4.2.2 Conclusion drawn from interpretative study**

Subsequent to the literature review aims, this research was intended to answer the following questions:

- (1) To explore and describe the unconscious impact of OT on employees as a result of the rapidly changing business landscape.
- (2) To make recommendations on interventions that help employees, managers, OD consultants and IOPs after OT.

The study managed to accomplish the interpretative study aims, firstly, to explore the unconscious impact of OT on employees that results from the rapidly evolving business landscape.

Secondly, it explored and described the participants’ lived experiences discussed under the five main themes and sub-themes and enabled the development of recommendations that would aid employees, managers and the IOP to manage the impact of OT, particularly with retrenchment.

#### *4.2.2.1 Context that manifested in a panoptic system*

Participants of the study portrayed the system (organisation) as cosmic. The system comprises specialised sub-systems that are geographically spread and is designed to operate as one through its employees; however, the participants describe it as disjointed. For instance, participants described the sub-systems as two main systems, the core business units (banking and insurance), which is front-line and generates income, and the functional business units (human resource, IT, etc.) which provide support to the main business. In addition, the system is spread nationally in provinces (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KZN, etc.). Within each sub-system is the sub-system made up of varied team capabilities that possess different cultures. The team capability narrative depicted a context that is fluid and adapts based on the organisation's needs. Furthermore, the business focus seems to be more focussed on enterprising than the people aspect, occasioning a pervasive culture of fear.

#### *4.2.2.2 Persecutory, volatile and uncertain system*

The second theme, "persecutory, volatile and uncertain system", was discussed under the sub-themes nature of voluntary and nature of involuntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system. Voluntary change was expressed as a transformation that is initiated by either the system or the employees, and is motivated by a need for career growth or professional development of employees. This change is expressed by participants as non-obligatory or discretionary. Examples of this type of change were vertical moves (promotion, being head-hunted for a higher position) or lateral (moving to a different role in a different province but on the same corporate grade). Emphasis made by participants was the positive aspect that comes with the vastness of the system that it created opportunities for employees allowing them to grow professionally.

Based on the findings of the study, OT that was experienced by all participants and had the most impact is the involuntary nature of OT. This was depicted as an inadvertent transformation that is imposed on the contained (employees) by the container (the organisation and leadership) (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). The type of involuntary change expressed by the participants includes restructuring (separation,

BU mergers), operational change (operating model, remuneration model, etc.), leadership changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic (virtual or remote working, work-life imbalance) (Baptista et al., 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020). The study concluded that changes occurring at a macro level had a ripple effect on the meso and micro levels (Ledimo, 202). Similarly, changes emerging in one business unit may affect the different sub-systems and team capabilities. The involuntary change had a contrasting finding to voluntary change; that is the intricate nature of the system caused employees anxieties and stress.

There is a clear distinction drawn from the findings between the two main themes, voluntary and involuntary change. The study concluded that the nature of voluntary change is mostly initiated by employees and is motivated by the need for career growth, which led to changes in roles, while involuntary change causes employees anxieties and stress (Huffington et al., 2004). In addition, involuntary change is seen as employees are subjected to numerous forms of inadvertent change that are enforced on employees by the organisation as a result of variations, such as operating models, leadership, technology, organisational processes, (Baptista et al., 2020; Shongwe, 2014) including external factors such as COVID-19 (Kuckertz et al., 2020).

The sub-themes “frequency of voluntary change in a persecutory, volatile and uncertain system” and “frequency of involuntary change under in persecutor, volatile and uncertain system”, highlighted that both voluntary and involuntary change occurred every two to three years at a macro level, while at meso and micro level change occurred every one to two years and sometimes occurred twice in one year. The study established that in the previous decade, the frequency of change at a macro level took place every second year, and as the business landscape evolved, the more frequent change occurred. At the meso and micro level employees experienced multiple changes at a more rapid pace. Some participants experienced change twice a year. While employees were being accustomed to the newly implemented change, new changes would be implemented at the macro level within the various Bus (Ledimo, 2012).

#### *4.2.2.3 A conflicted system resulting from organisational transformation*

The impact of OT experienced by participants emerged in the sub-themes “impact of voluntary change” and “impact of involuntary change”. It was determined that the employees’ lived experiences of OT were direct and/or indirect and either had a positive or negative effect on them (Ledimo, 2012). Accordingly, it can be concluded that participants experienced conflict. According to Cilliers et al. (2006), exposure to the good and bad parts of the system experienced by employees, as well as the unconscious anxiety inherent in the workplace, result in conflict.

In contrast to the impact of voluntary change, where participants experienced the direct impact of the phenomena only, findings indicate that participants who underwent involuntary change experienced change first-hand, as well as through change experiences of their colleagues (second-hand experience). Based on the findings, the conclusion can be expanded to note that the indirect impact experienced by participants is predominantly negative, compared to the direct impact that manifested a balanced experience of both positive and negative impact. Leadership also played a role in the impact experienced by participants. Some participants expressed that leadership caused a positive impact, while others expressed the inverse. Direct positive change narrated by participants linked to insight and awareness. (P5 expressed that involuntary change took them out of their comfort zone.)

The emphasis of negative indirect impact is placed on the inhuman process of the OT phenomena. Analysis of indirect negative impact is that the system (organisation) implements change with less focus on the human component (employees), thus resulting in a negative psychological and physiological impact. Authority is another system psychodynamics behavioural construct that was expressed that manifested in failed dependency (Huffington et al., 2004). Dependency is described as a system (person or organisation) anxiety regarding its need for security (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). Participants indicated that the rapid change of senior leadership made them unsure. Participants’ need for security was compromised due to participants being unsure and uncertain of their future within the system.



#### *4.2.2.4 Dehumanising and uncaring nature of organisational transformation*

The effects of OT experienced by participants is revealed by the sub-themes “effects of voluntary change” and “effects of involuntary change” that manifested in a dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT. The chronicle relating to participants’ lived experiences of OT established that employees experienced personal/physiological (financial, health and physical), workplace (disengagement, inhumanity, a lack of trust), as well as psychological (stress, sadness, anxiety) effects. The study resolved that participants manifested free-floating, survival and paranoid anxiety (Parsadh, 2019).

Participants’ resistance to change (RTC) indicates how the system's conscious events resulted in a strong sense of uncertainty and an insecure environment. This resulted in employees experiencing free-floating anxiety linking to de-authorisation and helplessness (Cilliers et al., 2006, Czander, 1993; Ledimo, 2012). Participants’ emotions of anger and bitterness directed at the system for creating an unstable workplace were explained as participants manifesting paranoid anxiety (fear of the unknown), another type of anxiety resulting from OT (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). Krantz (2018) supposes that functioning for the paranoid-schizoid mode is highly ineffective as it may lead to massive projection, rigid thinking or blaming. Participants directly through their own experiences and indirectly through their colleagues' experiences suffered the negative impact of OT, resulting in paranoid anxiety, as well as positive impact, realised as a new job opportunity or coming out of a comfort zone. Participants described how the system’s OT caused them stress and health issues. This was translated as survival anxiety exhibited by participants.

#### *4.2.2.5 Dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT due to a conflictual, persecutory and volatile system*

The CIBART model as an SP construct that reveals the unconscious behaviours was utilised to describe the employees lived experiences of the impact of OT. The first theme (context that manifested in a panoptic system) highlighted the complex nature of the organisation, which consequently caused conflict to the system (Parsadh, 2019) as participants dealt with intra-personal struggles due to OT. The studies of Cilliers and Koortzen (2002), as well as Mayer (2018), confirm that the complex

nature of an organisation inherently comes with conflict and anxieties to the system. The findings suggest that participants' identities were tarnished firstly due to the conflicted system (described in the third theme) resulting from the voluntary and involuntary nature of OT (Oosthuizen & Mayer 2019). Secondly, employees' identities continue to be tarnished due to the frequent nature of OT that was influenced by external factors emanating from the macro level. These findings align with Silva and Navarro (2012), who confirmed that employees lose their sense of professional identity as a result of the rapid nature of OT (for example digital transformation). Finally, employees' tarnished identities were exacerbated by the absence of support from authority.

The boundaries of the system were also disturbed (for example, lack of direction on primary tasks to be carried out, failure to provide leadership support and unclear roles) on account of the periodic nature of OT (Cilliers, 2018; Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) described in the third theme (persecutory, volatile and uncertain system). Participant's narrative suppose that frequent involuntary change (change in structure, leadership and processes) was enforced on them by the organisation as the authority figure that provides guidelines on tasks and determine roles (Flotman, 2018). Participants narrative indicated that employees were uncertain about their roles while others had interview for new roles (Heavin & Power, 2018) which suggests that the task are also impacted. Shongwe (2014) states that adverse working conditions are caused by vague tasks and roles.

It is further inferred that there was inadequate containment (stable working environment) due to lack of support from leadership (Cilliers, 2018) as the focus was changing the structure and processes of the system. The participants' narratives seem to suppose that leadership did not provide a safe and secure environment (Cilliers & Harry, 2012). In addition, frequent nature of OT resulted in uncertainty (fear of the unknown) within the system and subsequently causing paranoid anxieties for employees (Krantz, 2018) as described by participants in the fourth theme (dehumanising and uncaring nature of OT).

#### *4.2.2.6 Surviving hardship and conquering*

How participants dealt with the anxieties of OT was discussed under the sub-themes “voluntary change resulting in awareness and learning to survive and conquer” and “involuntary change resulting in awareness and learning to survive and conquer”. At the end of their OT journey, participants’ attitudes shifted from presenting a picture full of pain to that of surviving hardship and coping with the current climate of constant change within the system. Participants placed attention on self-reliance by detaching themselves from the system in order to cope with the unconscious stresses (Huffington et al., 2004). A conclusion was reached that participants demonstrated basic assumptions of group behaviour (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016), as their defences against the pains of workplace anxiety. Me-ness (attention on self-reliance) is one of the defences employed by employees. Participants also idealised the need to be agile and relying on transcendental forces (Coetzee et al., 2016; Koltko-Rivera, 2006) to cope with the fast-paced and impersonal OT demands. Another assumption of group behaviour employed by participants is one-ness (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016) as participants renounced their individuality and depended on omnipresent forces. Participants exhibited survival anxiety (Cilliers & Harry, 2012; Steyn & Cilliers, 2016) as their health, mental well-being, and financial status were threatened.

#### **4.2.3 The research hypothesis developing from the interpretative study**

The research hypothesis suggested by this study is as follow:

Based on the five main themes and sub-themes, it can be concluded that both the container and contained experienced persecutory anxiety (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Krantz, 2018). The convoluted nature of the system comes with the inherent anxieties for both the container and the containment. The participants’ narratives of the context and nature of change (voluntary and involuntary) were interpreted that the organisation is an authoritarian parent at the macro level imposing implementation of OT on employees. In addition, participants experienced the container that did not offer the contained (employees) an environment that is conducive to process change during the rapidly transforming system (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009).

### **4.3 LIMITATIONS**

Consideration relating to the limitations of the literature and interpretative study will be deliberated in detail.

#### **4.3.1 Limitations of literature review**

Copious research on the impact of the OT phenomena is available; however, majority of the studies on transformation and change in organisations focus on leadership viewpoint (Hughes, 2015) as well as change management initiatives planning and implementation from a leadership perspective. An accumulation of the OT research studies focusses on the conscious behaviour utilising quantitative research designs and is described from an applied social and individual psychology and humanistic viewpoint (Henderson & Boje, 2015). The unconscious OT behaviours are rarely investigated in organisations owing to their difficulty to measure (Sievers, 2009). Extensive interest (research) in OT conscious behaviour infers that little is known about the nature and severity of transformational anxiety "below the surface" of consciousness (Huffington, et al., 2004). This study focussed on the unconscious impact of OT on employees.

#### **4.3.2 Limitations of the interpretative study**

Since this is a qualitative study that by nature employs a rationed sample, transferability of the study was ensured.

The participants primarily included only employees in leadership roles (to ensure trustworthiness), indicating that other employees' voices were not reflected in the study; however, transferability was ensured.

Interpretative bias (Van Niekerk, 2011) may possibly be another limitation as I have prior knowledge and experience of the phenomena. From the onset of the study I declared my "dark matter" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Throughout the study, from the collection of data to the analysis and interpretation of data, I was aware of my bias. I also used theoretical literature in the interpretation of the data.

## **4.4 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

This research is anchored in the systems psychodynamics perspective which observes the collective. In this instance, the findings of the study will contribute to the profession of psychology and human resource, the organisation and employees. By understanding the evolution, gravity nature and frequency of OT, this study contributes further to an understanding of the dynamic covert impact of OT (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). This will enable the IOP profession to engage in continuous development of appropriate scientific models (Oosthuizen & Mayer 2019) that can help organisations to create an effective containment through the process of OT.

### **4.4.1 Contribution of the findings for the researcher**

As an individual, I have always been curious about matters below the surface with every aspect of life and people. Conducting this study provided me with scientific tools and methodologies to go about comprehending the unconscious world, thus developing me as an aspiring IOP professional. Another nugget of wisdom from conducting the study and the findings is being ethical and authentic while documenting findings, recognising the impact and influence of the information shared with the public.

### **4.4.2 Contribution of the findings towards the IOP profession**

The findings of this study focus on exploring the nature and intensity of transformational anxiety “below the surface” of consciousness, thus contributing to the body of knowledge of the qualitative studies on the phenomena.

### **4.4.3 Contribution of the findings towards organisations**

This study is need-based as it will assist professionals participating in organisations to amend policies, apply forward-thinking, develop relevant and appropriate change initiatives and proactive planning with regard to the organisation's workforce, particularly employee wellness. Ghislieri et al. (2018) indicate that work is pivotal for the psychological health of employees. Appropriate change management processes and amended human resource policies will ensure employee wellness; organisations will have healthy and engaged employees.

## **4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

One of the aims of the research was to make recommendations that assist employees, managers, OD consultants and IOPs post OT, based on the findings of this study.

### **4.5.1 Application of the findings with organisational practices**

Recommendations congruent to the findings of the study will be discussed for employees and organisations. Additional recommendations will be made for the IOP profession on how it can assist employees and businesses to remedy the problems identified and also contribute to the field.

- (1) For this study, it is recommended that organisations use the findings and run a focus group (Cilliers & Pienaar, 2019) with employees who have undergone the phenomena. This will help organisations and leadership to process the findings of this study and have a better comprehension of the unconscious anxieties the system is experiencing so as to create a favourable containment (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).
- (2) Considering the frequency of OT within the financial service industry, the organisation should embark on continuous post-OT studies through culture surveys (Martins & Coetzee, 2007). Outcomes of the study will help to minimise the unconscious stresses the system experiences as OT continues to be implemented.
- (3) It is further recommended that change champions (Ledimo, 2012) within the organisation or external consultants lead the studies, employing the scientific and proven methodologies that will provide valid and reliable data, as well as developing contemporary and relevant tools and initiatives that will help manage the below the surface anxieties. Transformation officers can use the findings to help the organisation and employees to cope better with the unconscious anxieties experienced during OT. SP coach can provide leadership coaching for managers and assist with peer coaching for employees to better understand and cope with the anxieties of OT (Flotman, 2018).

- (4) According to Schreuder and Coetzee (2010), academic research in South Africa is more focussed on data availability and is not needs-driven. Universities and the profession of IOP need to collaborate closely with organisations to share knowledge that will aid in OT phenomena.

#### **4.5.2 Recommendations for future research**

It is suggested that future studies include employees across all corporate levels to ensure that findings are more representative. I further propose that future research be conducted across all financial institutions to confirm the findings of a diverse sample. In addition, considering the recent unforeseen disruptions of business and rapidly transforming business topography, I suggest an ongoing study (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019) of the unconscious impact of OT to expand on comprehension and knowledge of the phenomena (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016). Perpetual research will encourage organisations and IOP professionals to continually develop scientific-based, relevant and contemporary tools that will help employees manage the impact of the phenomena (Oosthuizen & Mayer, 2019).

Conclusions and insights emanating from this study can be used to do further research and debate whether existing change management models are sufficient to aid with the unconscious impact of OT experienced by the employees. Furthermore, to get better understanding of the covert behaviours caused by OT.

#### **4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The aims of the study were reflected upon to frame the conclusion, limitations and recommendation.

This chapter focussed on articulating conclusions in alignment with the literature review and interpretative study. Deliberations on limitations were discussed and recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

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## **APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT**

### **Covert impact of organisational transformation on employees in the financial services sector: Systems psychodynamics**

#### **PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER**

Sarah Nkwana

Unisa Student: 30782368

076 062 5509

Snkwana911@gmail.com

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being requested to participate in a research study and it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and make an informed decision before participating in the study. Read the information below carefully and please ask me if there is anything that you do not understand, or you need more information.

The business landscape has, been rapidly transforming and some of the changes are unforeseen and disruptive. Industry 4.0, digitization, globalization and competitive advantage are some of the factors behind the hasty OT. Furthermore, in recent decades flu pandemics have coerced business into disruptive change. The Corona Virus also known as COVID-19 is a recent example of the flu crisis that has forced the whole world into economic lockdown resulting in a significant impact on business and its employees. Both the organisation and its employees, have been thrust into a whole new way of working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on the background above, I would like to better comprehend your oblivious experience of OT. Outcomes of this study will contribute to and aid organization to develop improved contemporary change management activities as part of business efforts to help employee adapt and manage change.

## **STUDY PROCEDURES**

The study will be conducted within the organisation. Permission was obtained from leadership for the study to be conducted as it purely for study purposes.

Invitation will be sent out to employees of the organisations and participants will be asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Accepting the invite means that a candidate voluntarily wishes to participate in the study

Since this is a qualitative study, research will take place in a form of an interview. The participants will be me and the interviewee.

The session will take approximately an hour.

The interview will be conducted virtually via MS Team or Zoom.

The interview will be recorded with the consent of the participant as it will be used for data analysis and referencing purposes.

Participant's identity and data will be kept confidential. Since data will be stored electronically, passwords will be used to protect the data.

Outcomes of the research will be used for study purposes only and will be published in a scholarly article and thesis. Where necessary pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the organisation and participants.

Open ended questions will be asked to understand to understand the participant's unconscious experiences of OT.

## **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks. This is an in-depth interview seeking to understand participants lived experiences of OT. There is no wrong or right answer and encourage freedom of expression and authentic responses.

Should you feel uncomfortable to answer any questions, you may decline to answer or withdraw from the study anytime during the interview.

## **BENEFITS**

Outcomes of this study will contribute to and aid organization to develop improved contemporary change management activities as part of business efforts to help employee adapt and manage change.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your responses in this interview and the report writing i.e. thesis and scholarly article will be anonymous. I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality including the following:

State measures taken to ensure confidentiality, such as those listed below:

- Pseudonyms or assigning code/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Safe keeping of records: interview notes /transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information will be saved on the laptop and will be password protected and only known to me.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where I am legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Should you have any questions regarding the study or your rights as a participant of this study, you can contact myself on 076 062 5509 or snkwana911@gmail.com. As a research participant, you are also welcome to contact the Institution's Review Board on engelm1@unisa.ac.za for any further questions you may have relating to this study.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

This research is for study purposes therefore your participation is voluntary, meaning you have a choice whether or not to participate in this research. You have the right to

withdraw from the study at any point before or during the interview and no reason is required. Should you wish to withdraw from the study, this will not affect the relationship you may have with me. Any data collected prior to your withdrawal will be destroyed or returned to you should you wish so.

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## **CONSENT**

This serves to confirm that I have had an opportunity to read, understand and ask questions on the information provided in this document. I understand that my partaking in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **Covert Impact of Organisational Transformation on employees in the financial services sector: Systems Psychodynamics Perspective**

The business landscape has, been rapidly transforming and some of the changes are unforeseen and disruptive. Industry 4.0, digitization, globalization and competitive advantage are some of the factors behind the hasty OT. Furthermore, in recent decades flu pandemics have coerced business into disruptive change. The Corona Virus also known as COVID-19 is a recent example of the flu crisis that has forced the whole world into economic lockdown resulting in a significant impact on business and its employees. Both the organisation and its employees, have been thrust into a whole new way of working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the macro, micro and meso system (government, business and people) is opening up to a potentially 'new ways of work', it is faced with many challenges of working remotely i.e. mindset shift, setting up latest virtual platforms connectivity issues, home working space and work life balance to name a few. Transformation also comes with the pro's i.e. less time in traffic, flexibility and more time with family. Large scale transformation can be challenging, it requires mobilizing business system and employees towards new possibilities and to understand current experiences and perspectives.

Based on the background above, I would like to better comprehend your oblivious experience of OT. Outcomes of this study will contribute to and aid organization to develop improved contemporary change management activities as part of business efforts to help employee adapt and manage change.

The survey below presents a forum for you to express and narrate your authentic and real lived experiences and thoughts of OT.

## **Setting the scene**

1. Reason for interview – I am currently in my second year of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) master's degree and doing research for my dissertation.
2. Purpose of study is to comprehend and describe the unconscious impact of OT(e.g. digitization, Covid-19) on employees.
3. Request participant to give consent (sign consent form). Also indicate that interview is confidential and that it will not be shared with other unauthorized parties unless consent is given.
4. Outcomes of research will be published in thesis and scholarly article. To protect client confidentiality pseudonyms will be utilized.
5. Inform participant that the interview will be recorded for data analysis and referencing purposes. Reassure participant that data will be confidential.
6. Inform client that there is no wrong or right answer and encourage freedom of expression and authentic responses.

## SECTION 1: PARTICIPANT'S STORY (15 MIN)

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1. Share with me your story or journey with the organisation
  - When did you start working for the organisation?
  - Positions held
  - Reason for changing position

## SECTION 2: PARTICIPANT'S EXPERIENCE, OPINIONS, BELIEF (30 MIN)

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2. If you were to give your story a title, what title would you give your story
  - Why did you choose that title?
  - Take me through your experience of the change journey
    - o What actually happened
    - o What were your thoughts
    - o Reflect on what helped
    - o Reflect on what made it difficult
3. Did you understand why that change had to take place?
4. What was the outcome of the situation?
5. Did you get support through the change journeys?
6. Did you understand the benefits of the changes?
7. In your story, reflect on the ease of doing things during the transition journeys, how easy or hard was it to do your job daily tasks?

### SECTION 3: IMPACT OF EXPERIENCE – FEELING/SENSORY EXPERIENCE (20 MIN)

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8. Reflecting on your story still, if you were to choose a picture or weather patterns/seasons or metaphor which would you choose to describe your change experience and why?
9. How did you feel about changes?
  - Reflect on psychological impact
  - Reflect on energy and motivation
10. Reflect on your change experiences. What did you do during these events?
  - Did you eat, sleep, work, exercise
11. What impact did the change events have on you?
  - values and purpose,
  - organization,
  - people
12. During your change experiences, did your organisation focus on?
  - What was right e.g. following policy
  - Impact on people
  - The situation at hand
13. Did you feel your organisation supported you through the change process?
  - Elaborate, why do you say so
  - Give examples of what organisation did

### CLOSURE (5 MIN)

Thank the candidate for making time for the interview and reassure them of the ethical consideration i.e. information will be kept confidential and will not be shared without the candidate's consent.

## APPENDIX C: DECLARATION FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR



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Monica Botha  
T/a I'Avenir Consulting  
PO Box 32945  
WAVERLEY  
0135

Cellular: 083 269 0757  
E-mail: monicabo@iavnet.net

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that I have edited and proofread the dissertation entitled

**Covert Impact of Organisational Transformation on Employees within the  
Financial Services Sector: Systems Psychodynamics Perspective**

prepared by Ms Sarah Nkwana in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Administration in Industrial and Occupational Psychology at the University of South Africa, according to the prescribed specifications, where available, and the latest standards for language editing and technical (computer-based) layout.

Editing was restricted to language usage and spelling, consistency, formatting and the style of referencing. No structural writing of any content was undertaken.

As an editor I am not responsible for detecting any content that may constitute plagiarism.

All references have been provided in the prescribed format.

I am not accountable for any changes made to this dissertation by the author or any other party after the date of my edit.

*(Electronically signed – actual signature withheld for security reasons)*

**MONICA BOTHA**

2 December 2021

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Sole Proprietor: Monica Botha

*Business Planning    Corporate Systems Engineering    Corporate Document Standards  
Business and Academic Document Technical and Language Editing*