

**AN EXPLORATION OF FUNCTIONAL AND
NUMERICAL FLEXIBILITY IN SOUTH
AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY IN TWO TEXTILE
FACTORIES IN CAPE TOWN**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
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By

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WHEN A MAN PUTS HIS OWN SELF INTO HIS
WORK, HE IS LIVING, NOT MERELY WORKING

(D.H.Lawrence)

ABSTRACT

During this research, an attempt was made to gain an understanding of management and their employees' perceptions regarding functional and numerical flexibility practices within South African organisations.

To achieve this, twenty-six people, comprising of a variability of positions within the organisation, were interviewed in the region of the Western Cape.

It was found that, although extensive research on the two forms of flexibility have been globally conducted, South African literature, particularly on the part of numerical flexibility, is limited. It is thus believed that this study will present a valuable basis to pursue in further research. Literature that was consulted was found to be supportive of the theoretical notion that South African organisations, in order to be globally competitive, have had to restructure and redefine themselves by ensuring that they make the most efficient and effective use of their human resources.

The study found that whilst functional flexibility practices benefit employees in that they experienced increased job satisfaction and job mobility, it was the area of numerical flexibility which raised many dissatisfactions, including those of immense job insecurity and remuneration, both financial and otherwise.

The study findings suggest a need for a more comprehensive and employee integrated approach by combining organisational with individual oriented initiatives, and ensuring the trade union's involvement in all facets of functional and numerical flexibility initiatives.

The thesis ends with recommendations of various strategies for addressing the concerns of management, employees and the trade union in order to ensure full and proper utilisation of human resources so that the end product, namely job satisfaction, leads to organisational success.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This research is concerned with investigating the extent to which functional and numerical flexibility have been implemented within organisations in South Africa today. The researcher decided to examine this particular field of study in light of the fact of new and emerging market conditions within South Africa, which has necessitated rapid changes in both organisational design and management practices. In addition, the South African labour market tends to be characterised not only by high and rapidly rising levels of unemployment, but low productivity and high union activity.

Flexibility, in its widest sense, refers to both the labour process and labour market restructuring, as well as to greater adaptability of new technology in production. The term 'flexibility' has been used in many organisations in a wide variety of ways. In addition to this, there are different forms of workplace flexibility currently in practice. In light of the above, the researcher stresses that this thesis is concerned primarily with functional and numerical flexibility. According to Horwitz and Franklin (1991:13), numerical flexibility "relates to varying the size and structure of the workforce in response to changes in the level and pattern of demand". Functional flexibility is defined as "the ability of workers to be multi-skilled and display high task adaptability" (Atkinson in Ackroyd and Proctor, 1998:172).

This paper attempts to examine the impact which flexible work practices have on both labour and the organisation. As a result of trade liberalisation, South Africa is undergoing rapid and fundamental changes in its economy. Due to the fact that functional and numerical flexibility practices vary from county to country, this paper examines these concepts in a unique and vastly changing South African industrial relations society. The importance of flexibility is that it essentially helps the organisation to re-deploy its human assets as the market dictates, as well as help them think about where they currently stand, and what it is they should be doing to most effectively work with the labour force of the year 2001. Flexibility, in its broadest sense, offers companies new ways of thinking about potential strategic benefits they stand to reap.

It is clear that many firms are facing pressures to improve the performance and reliability of their products, increase the variability of products and respond more quickly to a wider range of customer orders. A large part of the debate on the new methods of production organisation has taken the form of a contrast between the production system characteristic of Western economies in the early 1960's to the 1980's, and those found in Japan, parts of Italy and Germany and to a lesser extent, Sweden (Humphrey, 1990:327).

The mechanical innovations of the early 1960's brought about the simplification of work, increased the division of labour, and made obsolete many specialised skills. Ford's mass production paradigm essentially served to separate 'execution' from 'conception' in a particular job/task. Each person was assigned a particular job and performed it religiously. Thus, allocating precise functions to each person's job paved the way for the scientific organisation of work.

The introduction of Japanese methods, with the notion of multi-skilling, has paved a dramatic change in relations between capital and labour. The words 'autonomous', 'self-regulating' and 'work teams' appears in stark contrast to the predominately unitarist orientation of South African managers' approaches, which tended to emphasise strict control, rules and regulations governing workplace activity.

South Africa would not, at first sight, seem to be fertile ground for this type of change. Studies of capital-labour relations in the 1980's and even early 1990's emphasised the high degree of management control over labour and the authoritarian attitudes displayed by management. This was largely due to trade union immobility and the adversarial relations between the two parties, controlled by a predominately capitalist government. However, with the introduction of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, the situation seems to be taking a three hundred and sixty degree rotation forward. Workers are afforded more equitable rights and participation schemes in the form of workplace forums have been legalised and implemented. The aim of these forums is that, by giving workers more control over their working lives, job satisfaction would bring about an increase in productivity, which would benefit both workers and management alike.

Essentially, proponents of functional flexibility would argue that, by giving the worker more autonomy in their work and increasing the skill variety attached to their particular job, it would result in a multi-skilled workforce whose benefits are numerous to both parties.

While the worker experiences an increase in morale and a positive change in attitude towards more self-fulfilling work, the manager experiences a rise in productive capacity and consequently improved competitiveness.

Thus, raising educational requirements and providing more extensive training are also part of the approach of companies re-organising production. Firms are seeking to create labour forces which are able to perform many different operations. This means raising educational qualifications and investing heavily in training. However, improving the quality and loyalty of the labour force through training is seriously impeded by deficiencies in basic education, namely the literacy rate in South Africa. The apartheid policy of 'Bantu' education of the previous government has resulted in a serious, if not catastrophic situation on hand, where well over half the current labour force is illiterate. Those companies that are therefore willing to invest in training in order to uplift the skills profile of the workforce are faced with an ominous challenge, not only in terms of cost, but also of time.

According to Hildebrandt in Knights and Willmott (1993:52,53), the current firms' objectives are the offering of customer- specific products, rigid deadlines, high product quality and cost optimisation. The firm attempts to offset such external demands through internal flexibility. We can therefore see that the re-organisation of the work process does the following: Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it changes the social organisation. This implies that thought domains and communication among personnel is undergoing rapid adjustments. In order for functional flexibility to succeed, communication between management and employees is becoming vitally important. Thought domains are also shifting in perspective, from a very narrow-bound thinking to one that is more integrative of the work process at hand. Secondly, it requires a change in the understanding of one's roles and of the conduct of one's work. What this means, is that workers, on moving from being single-skilled to multi-skilled, have to adjust their perception of their work roles to one that is all-encompassing. Thus, the change in mindset seems to be just as important, if not more so, than the change in the physical attributes of the work itself.

To obtain the full benefits from these multi-skilled workers, managers need to stress the importance of broadened responsibilities that individuals are being given and to create reward systems that value these new skills in order to overcome the personal identity problem. It is the latter concept that is particularly important and thus requires further clarification.

It has been the general conclusion from the various authors consulted in the literature review that a multi-skilling design in the workplace must be accompanied by an adequate, fair and equitable reward system in order to ensure that employees will be aptly motivated to continue to perform at high levels.

Thus, Ewert (1997:39) stated that firms wishing to adopt world- class manufacturing, post Fordism or lean production, depend on workers who are less specialised in their skills and fit easily into the work team. When they enter the factory, they need to have fewer recognisable skills. In addition, they are expected to possess dexterity, enthusiasm and an ability to fit into the team. In turn, flexible specialisation involves general-purpose machinery, a flatter organisational hierarchy, broadly trained workers, integrated conception and execution, varied tasks and broad job classification.

Proponents of various theories of work organisation have all used the car industry as an example to support their case. The notion of employee participation is seen as a conversion in terms of managerial thinking. Due to workers rising educational standards and consequent aim for industrial democracy (worker participation schemes), organisations are forced to be more committed to their employees, not only in terms of more rewarding work, but also in terms of job security. According to Burrows, Gilbert and Pollert (1992:3), there are five aspects of the new flexible firm: adaptability of productive organisations, ability of workers to move from one job to another, laxity of legal constraints governing the contract of employment, adaptability of wages, and the possibility for companies to reduce some of their social and fiscal payments. While the former two concepts refer to functional flexibility, the latter three refer to the second aspect researched in the paper – that of numerical flexibility, which is discussed below.

If there is a single word to describe what many individuals view as both the inevitable and desirable line of development in the operation of the labour market, it is numerical flexibility (Beaumont, 1998:547). There seems to be a strong universalist perspective in much of the discussion as to why employers are increasingly seeking numerical flexibility. From the literature provided, it seems to be that, particularly within the South African context, the high unemployment rate affords organisations the golden opportunity to adapt to rapid product lifestyle changes by varying the composition of their workforce. It can therefore be seen that it is due to changes in both the internal and external labour markets which has necessitated organisational restructuring.

Numerical flexibility affords the organisation the capacity to vary their headcount according to changes in the level of demand so that there is an exact match between the number of employees needed, and employment. According to Conroy, Castells and Benner (1997:37), work that is more closely related to the core activities of the business appears to be conducted increasingly by full-time, standard employees, with non-core services being contracted out. Alternatives to typical or standard employment have been held to be inevitable trends, strategic choices to be made by managers, a source of workforce empowerment, and as practices that would undermine the hard-won gains of the labour movement.

It is this type of flexibility which seems to be the main concern for the trade union movement. The unions' central and primary objectives are to protect their members from any unfair labour practices by management, negotiate wages and benefits, working conditions and, above all, maintain job security. However, it is the latter concept in particular which is threatened by the advent of numerical flexibility. Unions tend to argue that temporary and sub-contracted labour threatens their permanent members, not only due to the fact that they accept lower wages, but, as Conroy et al (1997) mention, that they undermine the gains made during collective bargaining and negotiation with management, such as wage increases. Thus, if management is able to obtain a peripheral workforce that has considerably fewer rights than the core employees, they will attempt to enlarge this source of labour and so threaten job security. Trade unions have come a long way in negotiating benefits for their members. However, with a growing number of temporary or contract labour, their bargaining power with management almost seems to be undermined.

Trade unions also advocate that access to training and skills improvement for the non-core workers is virtually non-existent. It would seem to be therefore, that it is managers who predominately gain the upper hand through numerical flexibility practices. Although flexible workers do receive employment, which is particularly scarce within the South African market, it is one characterised by immense instability and job insecurity. Furthermore, since these workers are viewed as 'temporary', management sees no legitimate right to invest their time and money in activities, such as training, which would reap no foreseeable future returns/benefits. It is of the opinion of various authors consulted that, although numerical forms of flexibility are currently on the increase, they seem to hold very few benefits, apart from the obvious employment opportunities that they afford the unemployed worker.

Rapid technological changes have thus dramatically altered both the structure of the labour market and that of the organisation. Beaumont (1998:103) states that ambiguities in management-labour policies may reflect genuine doubts and uncertainties. The consequences of the technologies should not be treated as having precise effects that are known to the actors involved. Because of this, management may, as the rate of technological change rises, increase the involvement of its workers.

In light of the above, flexible work practices are receiving more attention with economic and political change in South Africa. The new Labour Relations Act of 1995, along with other government legislation, is attempting to level out the playing field between management and labour, the power balance historically being biased toward the former. In this regard, they are also aiming to protect the interests of all employees, be they permanent or temporary. Horwitz and Franklin (1996:13) state that the government's Green Paper on minimum employment standards was premised on the concept of 'regulated flexibility' – trying to balance the protection of minimum standards and the need for labour market flexibility.

Numerous authors are also in agreement as to the fact that there is a relationship between organisational size and flexible work practices. They state that larger organisations may be more attuned to international developments and best practices. With relation to functional flexibility, they advocate that larger organisations may have greater numbers of skilled and knowledgeable workers with both a potential and a need for flexibility.

It is therefore both functional and numerical flexibility that the researcher believes to be the key to an improvement in productivity and hence competitive advantage. There is a move towards a new, more enabling organisation which is induced by globalisation and slower economic growth.

In the manufacturing sector, particularly within the organisation concerned, there are a variety of articles being produced, with frequent batch changes comprising a variability of materials. This process demands flexibility of response in production, which requires human initiative, skill and competence. It is this feature that is regarded as one of the pivotal points of discussion for this study. Aspects such as education, training and the trade union's response were examined in light of the current circumstances prevailing within South African organisations, due, in particular, to the lack of adequate education and consequently training provided to the historically disadvantaged.

Training and educational implications of flexible working are considerable. From the literature provided, it seems that most theorists would agree that the costs of training are lower for more highly educated workers.

Thus, the genesis of this study is concerned with developing a clearer understanding of the nature and extent of numerical and functional flexibility within South African organisations. It also highlights some of the problems and challenges which both management and labour face with the implementation of these two forms of flexibility. It will examine, inter alia, the roles of education, training and the trade union's response to the new 'flexible firm', in order to gain a broader perspective of managements' and workers' opinions regarding their perceptions on the topic under investigation.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overall goal of this research was to obtain a clearer understanding of the nature and extent to which functional and numerical flexibility have been implemented within South African organisations. In addition to this, the researcher also wished to examine the attitudes of management and employees with regards to the two forms of flexibility in question, as well as their perceptions with regards as to how and why they should be implemented. To this end, experiences and attitudes of a sample of various levels of management, supervisors, shop floor workers and trade union officials were explored. This process entailed a detailed examination of the following:

- 1.2.1 The reasons behind the implementation of functional and numerical flexibility.
- 1.2.2 The satisfactions and / or dissatisfactions experienced by both management and workers with regards to the two forms of flexibility.
- 1.2.3 Training (and the differences thereof) provided to both permanent and temporary employees.
- 1.2.4 The role that education plays in the implementation of functional flexibility.
- 1.2.5 The trade union's response to the two forms of flexibility.
- 1.2.6 The attitudes of permanent employees to their temporary counterparts.
- 1.2.7 The roles and responsibilities of management to their temporary employees.

- 1.2.8 The link between job security, promotional possibilities and the two types of flexibility in question.

The above-mentioned objectives will, on the whole, enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of management and their employees' experiences of numerical and functional flexibility. This will furthermore allow the researcher to examine any possible links between job satisfaction / dissatisfaction and the two types of flexibility, which would ultimately translate into an improvement in productivity. If the researcher highlights areas of concern, the researcher aims to suggest recommendations to improve these.

1.3 ANTICIPATED VALUE OF THE FINDINGS

- 1.3.1 It is anticipated that a clearer understanding of both management and their employees' perceptions regarding both forms of flexibility will be highlighted.
- 1.3.2 It is hoped that this study will raise managements' awareness of the problems facing temporary workers in terms of training, skills acquisition, job security and remuneration.
- 1.3.3 This study will highlight the importance of the trade union's role in terms of protection for its members and thus their vital integration into the programme, relating to both functional and numerical flexibility.
- 1.3.4 It is believed that the findings of this study will support the theoretical notion that the implementation of numerical and functional flexibility is vital to improve productivity and thus increase organisational competitiveness.
- 1.3.5 It is anticipated that this study will indicate to management that their responsibility lies to all categories of workers, be they permanent or otherwise.
- 1.3.6 To encourage organisations to become more aware of the importance of multi-skilling their workforce, as well as highlighting the impediments relating to its implementation in the South African context.
- 1.3.7 To form the basis for future research (of an exploratory nature).

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Giorgi (1970:18), qualitative research is a “human scientific” approach, which is primarily concerned with the understanding of the human experience. In line with this view, the researcher chose the qualitative research method, which involves various issues and experiences in the lived world. In addition, it examines the underlying meaning and understanding of the human experience.

The category of research design used in the study is exploratory-descriptive, since the aim of the research is to explore and describe the experiences of functional and numerical flexibility in the workplace. As McKendrick (1987:256) explains, the main objective of an exploratory research design is to broaden understanding, construct general ideas and highlight avenues for further study regarding the research topic. This research design is also used to develop questions and hypotheses for further research.

Grinnell (1988:186) furthermore states that qualitative research focuses on describing and comprehending the subjective meanings of events as the individual experiences it. Thus, the researcher chose this particular method, as the research topic involves the gaining of in-depth, first hand data from which one respondent’s responses may vary from another’s responses. In addition, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research involves the gathering of non-numerical information which, as Marlow (1988:10) states, uses words instead of numbers, and focuses on underlying meanings.

The research was carried out over a period of two months. It draws its findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with twenty - six subjects, each of whom represent a different hierarchical level within the organisation concerned namely: top and middle management, supervisors, trade union representatives and shop floor workers (both permanent and temporary). These subjects were selected on the basis of their expertise and interest in the topic, as well as the relevance of their position within the company to the topic in question.

The semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate method with which to conduct the research owing to the open and flexible nature of this particular research tool. This element is essential, as it allows for the accurate documentation of perspectives not usually represented.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interview enables one to explore issues that may prove too complex to investigate via quantitative methods. The researcher felt that quantitative measures might simplify phenomena and misrepresent the nature of the questions under investigation (Banister and Burman, 1994:50,51).

Inclusion in the sample was determined by willingness to participate. The sampling procedure utilised in this study was non-probable purposive sampling, as a specific sample for the research has been chosen. As Grinnell (1988:251) highlights, non-probability samples are suited to exploratory studies where we are merely interested in obtaining as much unique data on a research question as possible. The researcher selected respondents on the basis of knowledge about them. Thus, the respondents were purposely chosen.

An interview schedule comprised of both open and closed-ended questions was constructed, with each of the questions addressing the key issues of flexibility. Bailey (1985:93) defines an interview schedule as an instrument that is not given directly to respondents, but is filled in by the interviewer, who reads the questions to the respondents. Thus, the researcher was able to clarify the questions if needed. No pilot study was conducted; other than that the first interview was used to test the schedule for timing, ease of response and clarity.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY

Limitations to qualitative research are many and varied, yet the researcher tried to overcome many of these by constructing an interview schedule that is applicable to all subjects. The sample size, twenty-six (26) was small, yet relatively diverse with respect to age, population group, present position within the organisation and level of experience. It should be noted that the sample is limited to two textile factories, focusing exclusively on a single, concentrated area, Cape Town, thereby comprising only a certain population. The results are therefore not generalisable, due to the typicality of the data, and further research will need to be conducted to gain additional insight into various other industries.

In addition, the researcher found that, whilst all topics were addressed, not all respondents explored the various questions in the same way.

The researcher concluded that some of the respondents were hesitant in stating their true experiences, perhaps for fear of the possibility of being victimized by management and/or colleagues at the organisation in which the respondents are employed. The researcher therefore realised that there is a risk that the information obtained from the interview is not entirely accurate. This decreased the generalisability of the findings. Every effort was made to ensure the confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants.

The exploratory-descriptive design used in the study limited the validity of the findings, as this design may not provide conclusive answers to the research questions, but rather, further insight. However, the aim of this research is to explore the respondents' experiences of flexible work practices, rather than to provide conclusive answers. It is thus suggested that this study develop questions and hypotheses for further research.

1.6 PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED WITH THE STUDY

- 1.6.1 One problem experienced by the researcher is the variation in the languages of the subjects. All interviews were conducted in English, the second language of those subjects whom were Afrikaans speaking. This can result in misinterpretation of questions and answers by the subjects and the researcher respectively. In order to overcome this difficulty, one feedback session per person or group was allowed for in order to clarify information to the satisfaction of the researcher and the subjects.
- 1.6.2 The second difficulty encountered involved the subjects themselves. Initially, twenty - eight (28) consented to participate in the research, with the breakdown of their positions as follows: eight to represent top management, three to represent middle management/supervisors, three to represent the trade union, seven to represent permanent workers and seven to represent temporary workers. However, at the time the interviews were conducted, only twenty-six subjects could participate owing to complications two subjects experienced with their timetables. This reduced the potential amount of data to be obtained.

- 1.6.3 A possible bias also exists in that those willing to be interviewed could have different experiences and perceptions to those that were unwilling to be interviewed. The researcher did however, interview at least one person from every position (of interest to the topic) within the organisation concerned.
- 1.6.4 Due to busy work schedules and time constraints (it was nearing year-end for the organisation concerned), the interviews were conducted within the organisation itself and, in some cases, on the production line. The researcher feels that this may have been a problem, as the researcher observed that several of the interviewees seemed hesitant to answer various questions, particularly those relating to organisational factors.
- 1.6.5 Initially, in the research proposal, the researcher stated that the interviews would be taped and transcribed. However, several respondents asked not to be recorded/taped. Due to the request of these individuals, the researcher chose to make exclusive use of note - taking for each interview.
- 1.6.6 The research proposal initially stated that two textile organisations would be researched. However, the researcher decided to have an in-depth analysis of one textile organisation concentrating on a broad spectrum of employees in order to gain more meaningful insight. It should be noted however, that this particular organisation comprised two factories, each with its own distinct functions and managerial levels.

1.7 DEFINITIONS OF THE CONCEPTS

The following are definitions and concepts central to the research:

Researcher: The term has been used interchangeably to refer to the author and researcher of this thesis.

Respondents/Subjects: These two terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis to denote the interviewees.

- Experience:** Knowledge or skill resulting from practice or learning (Longham Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry 1988 sv “experience”).
- Job satisfaction:** “...a worker’s attitude about various aspects of the job” (Krueger,1986:5).
- Functional flexibility:** “...a managers right to redeploy workers between activities and tasks as products and production require” (Slabbert, Erasmus and Brink:1999:89).
- Numerical flexibility:** “A manager’s capacity to vary the headcount according to varying levels of demand in order to ensure a match between the numbers needed and employment” (Slabbert, et al:1999:89).

1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis is set out in the following manner:

Chapter one introduces the research topic and provides an overview of the study. The following areas are outlined:

Background of the study; specific objectives of the research; anticipated value of the findings; research design and methodology; scope and limits of the study and specific problems experienced with the study.

Chapter two consists of a literature review of available literature and past studies regarding the research topic. Definitions of functional and numerical flexibility, their advantages and disadvantages, the South African context as well as training and education were focused on and examined in this chapter.

Chapter three deals with the design and methodology of the research. The sampling procedure and the selected sample population are explored. In addition, the instruments of data collection and the analysis of data are examined. The limitations of the study, as well as problems experienced, are further explored in this chapter.

Chapter four contains a general background of the organisation concerned. The findings of the study are also presented and discussed within the categories of those presented in the literature review.

Chapter five closes with several recommendations and conclusions made by the researcher, based on the preceding findings.

Appendices and the bibliography follow the main body of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The 1990's have seen major changes in the world of work. The old mould in which production was cast is cracking in the face of mounting pressure on organisations to increase productivity and become more competitive. In light of this, organisations have to be able to adjust quickly to the constantly changing demands of the market. In order to meet these challenges, employers must have the freedom to shape their workforce composition. The aim is to free business from its regulatory shackles. Experiences elsewhere show that responses to these challenges include flexible work practices, which essentially form part of organisational restructuring (Ray, 1997:24,26 and Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:12).

A new orthodoxy seems to dominate the sociology of industry and organisations. Previously, according to Piore and Sabel (1984:27), the reorganisation of production was identified as a mechanism for the mass destruction of jobs. The 'mass production paradigm' became sanctified as a universal recipe, dominating economic institutions, technological innovations and patterns of industrial relations.

In 1913, science entered the factory and insinuated itself into people's minds. This ideology spilled itself over into new areas when, little by little, labour was perceived to be essentially similar to the objects of study of other sciences. The worker became an analysable object, his movement broken down and then counted. Everything contained within the factory became uniformly quantifiable. Science claimed to suppress the arbitrary nature of individual choice. The division of labour was natural. Thus, with inhuman impartiality, it designed a place for everyone and kept everyone in his or her place (Schweitzer in Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1992:66).

However, this competitive edge that Western companies once enjoyed in mass production is no longer attainable.

The new industrial competition from the East, particularly Japan, has led to a profound re-examination of cherished Western managerial beliefs. The Japanese advantage has to do with the new flexible firm (Giles and Starkey, 1988:126).

Thus, changes in both the product and the labour market have made mass production methods a recipe for failure rather than success. Most of the products factories make now, be they candlesticks, cars or clothes, come in small batches designed to gratify fleeting market whims. The notion of the flexible firm is best treated as an ideal type which accentuates key elements of changing employment practices (Burrows, Gilbert and Pollert, 1992:5).

To cope more effectively in this highly competitive, complex and fast changing environment, organisations are reviewing the traditional approach to organisational design. Traditional structures resulted in narrowly defined tasks or jobs, which are grouped and confined to particular areas of expertise in rigid, defined functional boundaries. As a result, employees are immobilised, and the organisation is unable to redeploy them rapidly when required. Thus, the trend is to create broader work areas that re-integrate the total work cycle into natural work units. This, in turn, raises the task identity and task significance and, by combining tasks, will raise the skill variety (Gathercole, 1992:10).

Flexibility necessitates a transformation in the role of labour within production. Employers today increasingly appreciate that the productive potential inherent in new technology can be realised only by developing workers' knowledge and expertise, and harnessing these to the objectives of the company. The flexibility offensive is directed not just against the rigidities of work rule, but their often fixed costs in terms of compensation and movement (Hyman in Pollert, 1991:269 and Thompson and McHugh, 1990:190).

The trend is thus to increase labour value. For managers, this means continuously retraining employees for more complex tasks, enhancing worker creativity and taking into account employees' concerns for job security. For employees, this means accepting flexible job classifications and work rules and generally taking increased responsibility for the efficiency of the organisation. People must become the primary source of value - added for a flexible and adaptive organisation (Gathercole, 1992:9).

2.2 DEFINING FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

The notion of functional flexibility dates back to the Japanese motor industry in the 1960's, where the introduction of technologically advanced equipment caused considerable changes in the workplace. This renewal of machinery brought about a division of labour where machine operators worked a large variety of machine tools. One operator was able to manipulate at least ten different machine tools. Multi-functional workers had been an important feature of Toyota since 1948. Versatility to deal with many jobs was developed by on-the-job training so that workers could be transferred easily inside or between the work processes. As for the worker himself, he could have a chance to climb up the promotion ladder step – by - step, and improve his ability to cope with many jobs in the enterprise he worked for (Okayama in Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1992:178,182,183).

The car industry provides the central point of reference for much of the recent literature on functional flexibility. Instead of producing a standard car by means of highly specialised workers with narrowly defined jobs and dedicated machinery, the tendency is to produce specialised goods by general-purpose resources (Katz and Sabel in Hyman and Streeck, 1988:298).

The claim that Fordist methods of labour management are now obsolete rests on the premise that flexible specialisation both permits and requires analogous flexibility within the workforce. Employees must possess the readiness and ability to perform a variety of functions, and to acquire new competences as techniques and products evolve. These new demands placed on labour are held to be associated with an increase in skill levels and a greater degree of co-operation and trust between management and labour. According to Kaplinsky (1988:33), a “highly skilled and, perhaps of even more significance, a multi-skilled labour force, has become essential to compete in global markets” (Hyman in Hyman and Streeck, 1988:49).

In line with this argument, Atkinson proposes that such flexibility is desirable and profitable for any company. Functional flexibility refers to the ability of managers to redeploy workers between different tasks. It requires the employment of multi-skilled employees who are capable of working within different areas of the firm. Such flexible workers form the ‘core’ of the workforce. They are usually employed full-time (Haralambos and Holborn, 1993:347).

Thus, the concept of functional flexibility, in its widest sense, refers to employees performing more than one function or task, or being able to do jobs other than the one they do regularly. Functional flexibility can exist at several levels. Horizontal job enlargement aims to broaden the number of tasks performed by employees at an equivalent skill level: a sideways expansion of a job, by the addition of a few extra tasks, can create a multi-skilled craftsman. Vertical job enlargement, on the other hand, involves either increasing the skill and competence of a worker, or it can involve a skilled worker taking on semi-skilled operative functions (O'Reilly, 1994:86-87).

Atkinson's functional flexibility theory proposes that core workers within an organisation receive a level of job security and favourable employment conditions in return for the right of management to deploy them between activities as production requirements dictate. It is directed primarily against 'rigidities' in work rules previously bargained between capital and labour, including those affecting job protection, demarcation and movement. The rationalisation behind this is to produce a knowledgeable and skilled workforce aimed to reduce idle time, as well as increasing the organisation's operating efficiencies (Thompson, 1989:220-221).

Thus, the notion of functional flexibility has involved people accepting more responsibilities and hence improving the quality of output. It has considerable impact over and beyond the productivity increase resulting from individuals working more consistently. Changes in work systems may genuinely foster and increase knowledge through increasing the number of jobs to which an individual is exposed. It also increases workers' involvement in problem situations calling for diagnosis and considered judgement, and increasing workers' awareness of aspects of the production system beyond their immediate and narrowly defined role (Wood, 1989:31-32).

Multi-skilling is a complex issue and must support a clearly defined business strategy. Often, two broad objectives for implementing multi-skilling are given. Firstly, to improve productivity, customer service, overall standards and efficiencies through a more broadly skilled, flexible workforce. Secondly, to provide an opportunity for employees to realise their full potential by acquiring new skills and thereby extending earning capacity. One needs to look very closely at organisational specifics before considering multi-skilling. Some of the questions that need to be asked are: how does the current skills profile compare with that which is required? Are employees' qualified/certificated in their current jobs?

Thus, a clear understanding of the potential impact of multi-skilling is critical. This would include a current skills audit before finalising the multi-skilling design (Mather, 1996:27-28).

According to Gathercole (1992:10), multi-skilling is based on the following assumptions and values: people want to work hard, perform well, learn new skills and be involved in decision making that affects their jobs. It also ensures that creative talents are widely distributed at all work levels of an organisation, and that increased participation can lead to quality decisions and commitment.

Various debates centre around the positive and negative attributes concerning the impact of functional flexibility on employers and workers alike, which will be discussed below.

2.3 ADVANTAGES OF FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

Flexible specialisation provides the route to a new interest accommodation between capital and labour – it is predicted on collaboration. Employers obtain a system of production best suited to commercial success; workers, through their willingness to move between jobs and train for new ones, enjoy more secure employment prospects in their company, as well as more challenging and responsible work (Hyman in Hyman and Streeck, 1988:53).

Kelly in Knights, Willmott and Collinsen (1988:42) argues that a successful job redesign scheme is one that has been modified through negotiation so that both labour and capital derive benefits, as well as sharing costs. Management gains improved quality, rapid adaptability to changing production requirements, and a reduction in labour costs.

From managements' perspectives, idle time is greatly reduced. Also, increases in productivity translate into greater profit margins. It allows the employers turn around time and therefore a reduction in costs. An example of this is that Toyota in Japan managed to reduce the time taken to change the dyes in the body press from eight hours to two minutes through the use of multi-skilling (Wilson in Knights and Willmott, 1993:85 and Kaplan, 1991:52).

Specialised maintenance functions are decentralised and attached to particular production areas. Certain routine maintenance tasks may be transferred directly to production workers. This is used to free up maintenance worker time and to make the worker feel responsible for their machine. Also, minor improvements can only be located by the direct production workers, as only they know the work they do in sufficient detail. This greatly enhances the reliability of the quality of output (Humphrey in Knights, Smith, Thompson and Willmott, 1990:332).

Functional flexibility encourages higher levels of engagement in the activities and relationships that make up a job – and as a result, can produce better work performance. In addition, it results in increased morale, decreased absenteeism and a decrease in labour turnover, which every organisation ultimately strives for (Hall and Parker, 1993:6).

From the employees' point of view, theorists of flexible specialisation link employment status to the possession of polyvalent competences. Multi-skilled people see flexibility as making an interesting and future-oriented demand on them. It also tends to increase one's sense of responsibility, therefore it causes a greater interest in one's work, as it leads to a greater variety in the work process. Due to the often extensive training which employees have to undergo, a range of competencies and knowledge base acquired add to one's sense of job satisfaction. Additionally, the new skills that they gain are highly valued, not only within the organisation itself, but also within the external labour market. Thus, employees are open to new and diverse job opportunities. For semi-skilled workers in particular, flexibility appears to be a clear benefit, offering both greater technical skills and a whole set of new challenges, with accompanying boosts in rewards and potential job mobility (Hildebrandt in Knights and Willmott, 1993:57 and Wilson in Knights and Willmott, 1993:78,81).

2.4 DISADVANTAGES OF FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

It is important to note that, while workers do experience an increase in work autonomy, Hyman in Pollert (1991:54,55) warns that delegated management does not equal self-management, nor does an expanded portfolio of competences necessarily equal enhanced skill.

Employees who can perform a variety of functions will doubtless be of greater value to the employer, but their own sense of meaning and control in their work may reveal no significant improvement.

To implement cross training, workers will have to either leave their jobs for schooling, or go to other areas of the plant. This will make manpower levels low during this training period. The effect carries on after training, as the worker must leave their regular job to help out in other areas. Reductions in manpower will be used to cover the costs of training, as no staff member promoting multi-skilling will introduce a cost without a compensating reduction in expenditures (Saunders, 1999:1).

Furthermore, by giving a worker additional tasks/responsibilities, many argue that this is, in fact, done by adding on further deskilled tasks, or extra ancillary duties, which does not make a substantial difference in the work content. Thus, the jobs they are given are the same; they just have to do more of them (Thompson and McHugh, 1990:218).

It is often noted that older workers do not generally feel themselves equal to the task of being retrained, which causes a great impediment. Although flexible work practices lead to intrinsically rewarding work, they also contribute to an increase in the level of stress experienced by workers due to the burden of greater/increased responsibilities (Hildebrandt in Knights and Willmott, 1993:85).

Research findings suggest that many managers view flexibility as the loss of control over employees. Also, new forms of flexible employment may be detrimental to long run economic performance if they are associated with the under-valuation of training investment. It may also lead to status anxieties for supervisors and middle managers, who may no longer be in 'control'. Lastly, although labour cost reduction, per se, may result in short term efficiency gains, it does not necessarily create increased output, product and service quality and job commitment (Arulampalam and Booth, 1998:522 and Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:29).

2.5 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Applying flexible work practices in a developing country such as South Africa, with a high unemployment and illiteracy rate, raises particular issues and priorities. It remains questionable in an economy such as South Africa, as to how far workplace flexibility can be implemented. Research indicates that approximately sixty percent (60%) of the formal sector workforce does not have a high school education (Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:6).

The history of 'Bantu' education resulting from the apartheid regime has implied that an educational level that ought to indicate literacy proved not to have the skill, which, in turn, has limited managements' options to train them. It has been stated that the low skills level of black workers, and the jobs which they have traditionally done, do not fit the needs of employers introducing new productivity-enhancing technology. Eddie Webster, who heads the Sociology of Work Unit at Wits University, explains that, in the past, employers used passive flexibility, with apartheid restricting black workers to moving between unskilled jobs. Thus, although they could be shifted between tasks at little cost to the employer, it remained of little significance to the worker himself, as there was no accompanying increase in the level of skill required (Ray, 1997:26).

As Smith and Wood (1998:492) point out, before changes that began in the 1990's and accelerated after the 1994 elections, issues of flexibility with respect to jobs occupied by Africans were dealt with through direct (often rude and abrupt) command, therefore flexibility in the use of African employees was very limited. For, while neither law nor union power effectively prevented managers from redeploying African workers, what could be asked of them was greatly restricted by their poor education and lack of training. An increase in skills required reading graphs, but the educational weaknesses of most of its African employees made teaching these skills difficult.

The pressure for affirmative action made it necessary to advance Africans. White artisans were provided with African artisan aids. In the wider economy however, the fact that Africans trained in craft skills would have to work with a distinctly conservative set of white artisans, decreased the attractiveness to them of that particular career route.

Thus, the changing mixture of skills needed on the shop floor has led to a skills shortage in South Africa. There has been a massive movement of black workers into semi-skilled and skilled jobs.

But many employers complain that these workers lack the numeric and technical understanding they need. Employers require workers who can easily be retrained on-the-job. Ken Hartshorne, a leading educationalist, strongly stressed the need for flexi-skilling. He states that the real root of the problem lies in the general inadequacy of black basic schooling. Having operative labour who do not possess enough numeric and communicative language skills means there is nothing to build on. What there is definitely a shortage of is black men and women who have a sufficient platform of background education, which can enable them to take-off and benefit from something more than simply that limited skill. There is thus a shortage of skills upgrading potential. In addition, he also states that many white workers lack the managerial and industrial relations skills needed for their new positions as shop floor supervisors and managers (Kraak and von Holdt, 1990:19).

Finegold and Wagner (1998:475) go on to say that although South Africa's training and educational systems and the types of skills it produces are well suited to diversified craft production, they are hindering South African firms' abilities to adapt to the new competitive conditions. Specifically, the high degree of specialisation among skilled workers and the narrow functional orientation of South African managers from different disciplines, for example, manufacturing and engineering, make it difficult to establish the multi-functional teams on the shop floor.

A study conducted by Maree (1994:8,11) in the textile industry further illustrates the points made by Finegold and Wagner above. He contends that South African industries can not even begin to compete with the newly industrialised countries in the Far East, who have much lower labour costs due to higher productivity levels. However, the future of the spinning, weaving and finishing segments rest on the development of the higher value-added, differentiated product. To this end, Maree states that the organisation of work in South Africa is outdated, and that multi-skilled employees are required in order to target niche markets and thus become more globally competitive. These threats arising from the external environment require a restructuring of work processes in order to ensure optimum use of labour.

2.6 THE SKILLED ARTISAN – A DYING ART?

According to Smith and Wood (1998:490), there is an inflexibility of craft (artisan) employment and unlimited flexibility across other jobs.

There have been many reasons cited for this; the most important being that craftsmen in one particular line of work usually secure higher earnings and may have a more secure position, both in the company and the labour market. Specialised education and training have led to artisans occupying specific niches in the market place. With their supply being limited and their demand (prior to the advent of the new flexible firm) high, the basic laws of economics stipulated that the price paid for these workers would necessarily be high. However, with the advent of multi-skilling, where each worker produces a combination of semi-skilled and skilled work, the status of the craft worker would seem to be diminishing (Wilson in Knights and Willmott, 1993:85).

The strong occupational orientation of South African workers' training, and the identity this creates, rather than the level of skills, appears to be the main barrier to the formation of multi-functional work teams. Without a strong craft identity, these workers generally embrace the move towards more self-managed teams and the accompanying opportunities for greater rewards. Craft workers tend to resist the adoption of lean production techniques precisely because it tends to undermine their identity. Thus, workers openness to work redesign appears to be governed by what they may gain or lose as a result of the restructuring. With craft workers asserting their unique position, it seems to be that they stand to lose more than they gain (Finegold and Wagner, 1998:477).

For South African skilled workers, the shift to multi-functional teams could threaten their identity by reducing the comprehensive technical responsibilities that have been the assurance of job security, high status and high wages, while increasing the demand for more 'general' skills. Thus, it would appear that flexibility, at least in part, tends to undermine the remaining areas of craft control in maintenance and extends managerial authority over labour mobility (Smith in Pollert, 1991:154 and Finegold and Wagner, 1998:479).

This can also be dated back to the 1940's, where British car manufacturing firms realised that they needed to use the machines in a versatile way, using the adaptability of the workforce. As a consequence, employers soon started replacing skilled with semi-skilled workers. Soon, the skilled engineer was squeezed out of production work. Thus, the central feature of functional flexibility is to combine the specialist knowledge of the professional with the day-to-day concrete knowledge of the semi-skilled worker (Tolliday in Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1992:41 and Wood in Hyman and Streek, 1992:114).

Saunders (1999:1) provides an illustrative example of the undermining of craft status. He uses the example of millwrights who are trained to change hydraulic pumps, hoses and cylinders. He stated that by giving them a course on heavy-duty equipment, they subsequently do not need as many heavy-duty mechanics. Furthermore, he states that if millwrights are doing the garage work, then there consequently is not really a need for heavy-duty mechanics. This leads onto another interesting, but very crucial point: if the heavy duty mechanics want to defend their current position and status at the workplace, then they will have no interest in sharing their knowledge with others, as it will undermine their position. This leads one to conclude that besides the adequate/lack of education needed to effectively implement a multi-skilling programme, a further hindrance lies in the craft workers protection and defence of their job demarcation.

Functional flexibility has featured strongly in workplace change. It leads to a combination of jobs that were formerly securely demarcated, the systematic elimination of differences within crafts and the introduction of team working involving interchangeability within jobs. Thus, employed labour contributes to flexibility as teams of semi-skilled workers performing a range of tasks and given on-the-job training. In sum, the workers move between tasks and, in the process, acquire competencies that were formerly the preserve of skilled workers. Formally skilled labour is not always eliminated, but skilled labour is generally not as privileged as it was. Skilled workers are often found in cells with multiple tasks and with different grades of labour, and there are expectations of elements of skills being passed on. There is thus a broadening of roles and responsibilities that are the antithesis of craft production (Ackroyd and Proctor, 1998:170,174,176).

Thus, functional flexibility, it is argued, comes at the expense of aggressively defensive behaviour by craft, highly skilled employees. It can be concluded that employees who are not worried about their jobs are more likely to embrace new technology and wider job descriptions than their insecure counterparts, the latter referring to the privileged craft employee. New technology has created the need for new skills. This has led to the training of hundreds of thousands of black, semi-skilled workers. For white artisans, this has been experienced as de-skilling their jobs, but for black workers it has meant massive re-skilling and a consequent increase in their bargaining power. For semi-skilled workers, the shift towards multi-functional work teams appears to be a clear benefit, offering both greater technical skills and a whole set of new challenges, with accompanying boosts in rewards (Smith, Masi, van den Berg and Smucker, 1997:34,35; Kraak and von Holdt, 1990:18,19 and Finegold and Wagner, 1998:479).

With the advent of multi-skilling, job categories will need to be more broadly defined, whereas in the past, they tended to be narrowly defined. New technology is breaking this down.

With workers becoming more multi-skilled, operators are maintaining their own machines or administering quality control (Kaplan, 1991:54).

Kraak and von Holdt (1990:17) make an interesting suggestion. They agree that there will no longer be a qualified artisan moulder due to the deskilling of certain jobs. They maintain that deskilling breaks the stranglehold white workers have over skilled jobs. By replacing white artisans with black, semi-skilled operators, employers can pay lower wages. However, they maintain that this is not necessarily to the detriment of the craftsman. Artisans can be upgraded into supervisory and managerial positions. Thus, the more semi-skilled work you can take off the artisan, the more you can allow him to advance into other skill areas, for example, allow him to become a better manager or a better planner.

2.7 FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY: THE LINK TO SKILLS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It is often argued that the success of multi-skilling depends upon raising the skills and understanding of workers. Labour's active involvement with, and consent to the new forms of work organisation are an essential component for success. Labour becomes an asset, to be nurtured and valued as a key element of a company's competitive ability, rather than a cost that should be minimised (Humphrey in Knights, Smith, Thompson and Willmott, 1990:328).

The definition of education is given by Cronje, Hugo, Neuland and van Reenen (1996:371) as "the development of knowledge, moral values and understanding which are required in all areas of life". Training is defined as "the acquisition of knowledge and skills applicable to a field of activity" (Cronje, et al, 1996:371). The concept 'skill' is defined by Littler as "the object characteristic of work routines and job knowledge such that it can be defined in terms of job learning time of the type of knowledge base of the occupation" (Littler, 1982:8).

South African workplaces are not constructed on the basis of a skills and knowledge hierarchy. They are made up of a large, relatively homogeneous group of workers with roughly equivalent skills and a small group of more skilled workers. The majority of black workers have little formal education. The implementation of functional flexibility requires higher levels of skills, numeracy and literacy. This may limit their widespread use in South Africa in the medium term. With skilled workers, there is less need for and time devoted to cross-training existing employees. Because of their broad initial training, skilled workers have already mastered the different machine operations and routine maintenance tasks. However, managers find that many semi-skilled workers do not have the general and technical skills base needed to tackle the broadened tasks (Kgobe, 1997:74; Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:14 and Finegold and Wagner, 1998:480, 481).

Heyes and Stuart (1998:464) contend that training incidence as a measure of training activity is of limited informational value, as it reveals nothing about the quality of training received. Training is an important mechanism for building operational flexibility. On the surface, training simply provides the skills people need to carry out a new task. Its ancillary roles however, are much more critical. First, training plays an important part in moving people beyond a 'this is the way we have always done it' mentality. Secondly, training builds confidence. Many people in manufacturing are reluctant to try new approaches because they are afraid of exposing their ignorance. Thirdly, it helps build an 'esprit de corps' while emphasising the growing competitive need for the right kind of flexible operation (Upton, 1995:84).

It is widely known that technical changes affect wages and unemployment through its impact on the relative demand for different categories of labour services. It thus introduces new functions which require workers to learn to perform them, through on-the-job training. If more educated workers have a comparative advantage in learning to perform new functions, technical changes will increase the demand for more educated workers (Kalaitzidakis, 1997:372).

Ishida, Su and Spilerman (1997:866) advocate that educated employees have better cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The skills possessed by these employees are relevant to job performance. It is the investment in high quality education that enhances individual productivity. They go on to say that the field of specialisation affects later occupational attainment. Specialised knowledge and skills may be directly relevant to the performance of certain types of jobs.

Japanese firms, the forerunners of multi-skilling, tend to emphasise generalist training and rarely create career tracks for specialists. The basis of Japan's 'leadership through quality' is based on its training system. Significant retraining provides the skills base necessary to perform multi-tasked functions. Teams are established to carry the process forward on an ongoing basis so that training is not a 'once-off' event (Ishida, Su and Spilerman, 1997:869 and Giles and Starkey, 1988:127).

Ruth (1997:44) states that an academic education, in the sense of a traditional, liberal education, does not serve the interests of a professional in the sense of a professional possessing a body of knowledge and being skilled. That can be served by vocational training. What an academic education can do, is develop the capacity of the professional to holistically assess, reflect and produce relevant knowledge.

Educational attainment however, is not the only characteristic that enhances workers' abilities to learn to perform new jobs. Workers with the same educational attainment may differ in their ability to learn and implement new technologies because educational credentials reveal little about how much or what kind of learning took place at school and what skills were actually developed (Kalaitzidakis, 1997:373).

Skills - based training should be used to build people's confidence, to convince workers that they already have skills, that they learn all the time, and that they can develop further. Thus, companies need to develop a system of training that enables workers to upgrade their skills and advance their technical capabilities to the highest level of which they are capable. It is also vitally important that vocational training is not seen in a vacuum, but as an integral part of a broader economic restructuring which aims to address the problems of unemployment, particularly within the South African context (Bird, 1990:11).

As Hilburn (1998:29) states, the costs of training are always easier to see than the costs of not training. Therefore, the question of whether employees need more training inevitably boils down to time and money. The question that companies ask themselves is whether the time and money they invest today will be repaid in terms of increased productivity, and the resultant increase in profits. However, the rapid obsolescence of today's knowledge and the soaring costs of training make it important for the development professional to be in a position to demonstrate its beneficial effect on the bottom line.

Thus, training which imparts both generalised skills and company - specific skills makes workers more mobile. This will encourage companies to hang on to their workforce if they possibly can, even when times are tough, rather than retrenching them (Kaplan, 1991:54). This is crucially important when examining the South African context, with its high unemployment and low productivity rates.

Skill formation has been central to recent debates around competitive performance and the diffusion of new production techniques. An increasing number of studies have sought to demonstrate how deficiencies in the skills base of the South African economy have impeded productivity growth. Training in South Africa must take account the legacy of 'Bantu' education which has created a poor educational base on which to build vocational training. It is necessary to develop an integrated approach which combines general education with training. Thus, only by drastically upgrading the educational system and the technical and professional skills of the entire workforce, can we solve the problem of competitiveness in exports and productivity in South Africa (Heyes and Stuart, 1998:459 and Bird, 1990:14).

2.8 TRADE UNIONS' RESPONSES TO FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

The response of trade unions to flexible working practices have been varied and heavily debated. Union involvement in this matter can be traced back to the 1980's when Fiat, due to unpredictable economic fluctuations, such as the dramatic increase in automobile demand at the time, had to negotiate with the unions over the movement of workers to meet the daily necessities of production. The unions initially resisted mobility, calling upon fellow employees to strike. However, the figures produced by those who thought that mobility destroyed the union's strength, showed the exact opposite to be true. This eventually resulted in the union's gradual acceptance of mobility in their concluding agreements with management in terms of using mobility for job enlargement, upgrading workers, and demanding a corresponding wage improvement (Contini in Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1992:154,155).

The adoption of functional flexibility certainly leads to a change in employment conditions, of which the unions undoubtedly have a crucial say in. The areas of most marked change are in the stability of employment which affords the workers, and the treatment of workers by lower level management. In a study conducted at a particular plant, workers were able to operate all the machines, monitor quality and perform routine maintenance. It thus developed a new wage and occupational system to reflect this change. However, the precise outcome of the new flexible technology depends on the corporate strategies adopted by the leading firms, as well as national differences in industrial relations and training systems. Some managers have attempted to develop more involved workforces without a co-operative strategy towards the unions (Humphrey in Knights, Smith, Thompson and Willmott, 1990:326 and Beaumont, 1998:102).

Trade unions tend to define functional flexibility as a pay shortage in the sense that employees are doing more than is required, and that there should be a corresponding wage increase. They thus believe that employers tend to exploit their workers if they do not adjust the level of remuneration appropriately. Management systems therefore need to be modified to support the particular multi-skilling design. In terms of the stated objectives, the organisational system of remuneration and rewards must allow recognition and reward for the application of previously and newly acquired skills. However, such a system must remain fair on an organisational basis, ensuring internal and external equity in terms of pay. As both flexibility and fairness are required, the value of job evaluation, say the trade unions, cannot be ignored (Wellman, 1995:213 and Mather, 1996:28).

Thus, a proven job evaluation system should be used as the framework for skill-based pay design, which the unions are in favour of. Whatever skills and knowledge are acquired, the application of these will always be within the context of a work activity/task that can be measured (Mather, 1996:29).

Many trade unions have realised that, due to the multi-skilling process, members gain additional information, knowledge and insight leading to greater job enrichment and consequently, to increased job satisfaction. One of the most prominent issues advocated by trade unions towards the favourability of functional flexibility, is the increase in the level of training provided to their members, which increases their competence, capability and confidence to better perform in their job. Trade unions have therefore placed an increasing emphasis on training, both as a path to membership renewal and as a way of maintaining employer acceptance at the workplace.

The question of union involvement in training decisions must be located in the context of a political and economic climate that has been particularly hostile to trade union activity in recent times. It should also be noted that members are more likely to receive training where a union, in addition to being recognised, actively participates in training decisions. Where there is union participation, discriminating practices may be mitigated and a more equal distribution of training opportunities ensured (Wellman, 1995:213 and Heyes and Stuart, 1998:459, 460, 462, 463).

With the implementation of a multi-skilling programme at the workplace, management will have to change their attitudes towards labour, for example, they need to acknowledge them as a resource, not merely a cost. These changes can be a source of greater power for unions, since management requires their co-operation. Trade unions should therefore ensure that training develops general skills, not only skills for specific jobs, so that skills can be put to many different, and most important, yet unknown, future uses. Jobs should also be classified and paid according to the degree of skill they entail. This skill broad -banding allows a career structure for workers, so that they can advance continuously through the additional skill/training they acquire (Kaplan, 1991:53,54).

Although the advent of new technology benefits workers in the sense that companies are re-training them, Kaplan (1991:55) points out that there are also dangers that the new technology can very easily benefit the more highly skilled workers, and widen the gap between these workers and the rest of the working class who have little/no access to training. Thus, the introduction of new technology and skills upgrading schemes should therefore be examined by the union movement, both in relation to their own membership, and in a wider context.

Lastly, it is also crucial to note that the increase in the level of skills which workers gain via multi-skilling can be seen to give them an increased sense of their bargaining power. This is due to the fact that the added knowledge increases the value of their skills to be bought and sold in the labour market (Wilson, 1993:82).

The increased range of options in the way that work is completed means that organisations are moving away from one simple method of employing people, to more complex ways of getting the task done. The more complexity there is, the greater is the need for a clear strategy that helps identify which sorts of flexibility are appropriate (Valverde, Kabst, Brewster and Mayne, 1997:604).

There has been a profound change in the labour process towards the 'flexible worker' and in the labour market, towards a 'flexible workforce'. The former, namely multi-skilling, has been discussed, and it is the latter concept that requires further clarification. For some, this change is proof of a new, vigorous economy. For others, it is the product of a new 'manpower' policy to achieve a 'core' and 'periphery' workforce. Flexibility is part of the option provided by a 'new industrial divide' to transform both production and markets from a system based on mass production to one of flexible specialisation (Burrows, Gilbert and Pollert, 1992:2).

One of the most widely discussed ideas concerning the organisation of manufacture at plant level has featured the utilisation of labour. The 'flexible firm', as put forward by Atkinson and others in the mid 1980's, makes the contribution of labour central to the effectiveness of new production arrangements. For Atkinson, the flexibility sought by management is of two kinds: functional and numerical. Thus, core workers are multi-skilled and display high task adaptability. Those in the periphery have fewer skills, but contribute to the flexibility of the firm by being pulled into or pushed out of employment as demand for products fluctuates. This is numerical flexibility. Thus, both refer to different forms of adaptability in the utilisation of labour (Ackroyd and Procter, 1998:172).

The flexible firm attempts to achieve numerical flexibility in a combination of ways: there may be a peripheral category of workers without long-term security of employment; or such a group may be formed of employees on short-term contracts, in part time jobs or job sharing. It can also be obtained by going outside the firm to secure the services of subcontractors (Burrows, et al, 1992:5).

The practice and use of numerical flexibility is by no means a new concept. This is indicated by the fact that during 1956, due to a shortage of school leavers, Toyota began to recruit temporary workers as a buffer against fluctuations in demand because they could easily dismiss them at the termination of their contract. In addition, since the temporary workers were not union members, they could not enjoy the same conditions of employment as union members did. However, due to the company's policy of recruitment, temporary workers, after a year's diligent service, might be promoted to a permanent status. This policy, management said, was adopted in order to encourage temporary workers to look forward to future prosperity and to enhance their morale (Okayama in Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1992:181).

There is therefore a close link between subcontracting (numerical flexibility) and the advanced technology and management techniques of post-Fordism (functional flexibility). While the good side of post-Fordism is that it creates a multi-skilled workforce, this does not mean that unskilled labour is a thing of the past. Large companies simply make use of temporary workers for these tasks (Klerck, 1991:47).

2.9 DEFINING NUMERICAL FLEXIBILITY

Work, in many cases, is becoming less mechanistic, requiring less conformity to a single model. Employees and organisations are necessarily becoming more responsive to changes in both their external and internal organisational environments, and organisations are starting to benefit from the contributions of a wide range of employees who bring different skills to their work. Organisational change theory suggests that the pressures on organisations to change may be internal, external or both. While external pressures include highly trained employees who demand flexibility, internal pressures, which relate to numerical flexibility, include the costs of lost productivity, absenteeism and labour turnover (Hall and Parker, 1993:8,9).

Since numerical flexibility consists of a number of various interrelated elements, it becomes necessary to define each one in turn. 'Casual' workers refer to workers employed on an occasional basis when employers need them, as well as to the legal definition of the word. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), as it presently stands, defines a casual worker as one who works for not more than three days a week, and not more than nine and a quarter hours per day. 'Temporary' workers are hired for short periods of time, for example, for the Christmas season in the retail sector. 'Contract' workers are those who are employed through an agency or middle person, such as a labour broker. Thus, the term 'numerical flexibility' refers to casual, temporary and contract workers (Rees, 1997:31).

To elaborate further, subcontracting is an indirect form of employment of groups of workers through the use of labour contracting firms. Companies hire labour contractors when they need groups of workers for specific kinds of work or periods of time. Contract workers are directly employed on legally binding terms for a pre-determined period of time, often renewable/extendable by agreement between employer and worker.

As such, the terms and conditions of their employment are accessible to the scrutiny and demands of trade unions organising in that workplace (Klerck, 1991:44,45).

Numerical flexibility is often seen as the employers' response to the gains made by trade unions in wages and conditions of employment. The dangers that flexibility poses in terms of job security, and strength in dealing with the bosses should clearly be a major concern for unions. More importantly, the growth of flexible labour is dividing the workforce. On the one hand, there are permanent, better paid workers with relatively stable and secure jobs. On the other hand, there are part-time/temporary workers who earn low wages and do not enjoy the benefits of secure employment (Volodia, 1991:50).

Guy Standing, the main author of a recent International Labour Organisation (ILO) study on South Africa, found that the South African manufacturing industry has a very high and rapidly growing degree of flexible employment. A snapshot of South African industry confirms this. Over the past decade, Standing maintains that numerical flexibility has increased in the form of temporary and casual workers, while many permanent workers tend to have less security of employment. Currently, it is the manufacturing sector which accounts for the largest proportion of firms using these kinds of labour (Ray, 1997:25).

Employers are opting for flexible employment of the numerical kind in order to cut costs, one of the firm's obvious and predominant objectives. Mass unemployment within the South African labour market, as well as competitive pressure due to globalisation, make it likely that these forms of labour will continue to expand. As companies restructure to meet the challenges of global competitiveness, more and more permanent workers are under pressure to become contract labour. For the millions of unemployed, flexible jobs are often the only option available (Rees, 1997:30).

A survey conducted by the South African Labour and Development Research Unit found, in 1994, that thirteen percent (13%) of formal employment was casual, of whom sixty two percent (62%) were African. It was also found that a far greater proportion of women than men were employed as casuals. A South African flexibility survey conducted in 1997 found that eighty five percent (85%) of manufacturing firms had employed temporaries in the recent past; forty three percent (43%) employed contract labour.

Furthermore, it was also found that, in a shop steward survey in union-organised shops in the Western Cape, forty five percent (45%) of all workers are casuals (Rees, 1997:31).

Valverde, et al (1997:597) contend that flexibility has positive benefits beyond the immediate cost benefits. They force managers to focus on ways of getting the work done, rather than on employment or headcount issues. They encourage managers to be clear about the major requirements in each area of work and it also leads to innovative, creative thinking. They also open up the labour market to people who might otherwise not be able to work, and to retain skilled workers who would otherwise be lost to them.

Many research studies have been conducted on exactly how widespread the use of numerical flexibility is in South African organisations. For example, research findings into workplace flexibility were conducted in 1996 on six hundred and twenty six (626) manufacturing organisations within South Africa. The results showed that, while functional flexibility was on the increase, flexibility occurs most commonly in the numerical category, that being contract and temporary workers, which are indicative of recent economic conditions in South Africa. Thus, there is a spread of methods used to decrease labour costs, and it has been shown that local industry has focused more on cost cutting through downsizing the labour force (numerical flexibility). This concept essentially relates to varying the size and structure of the workforce in response to changes in the level and pattern of market demand. Thus, the use of numerically flexible workers has shown a steady expansion of approximately twenty percent (20%) since the late 1980's (Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:13,14).

2.10 ADVANTAGES OF NUMERICAL FLEXIBILITY

2.10.1 ADVANTAGES TO MANAGEMENT

The primary source of advantage that numerical flexibility holds for managers is that companies can respond to unpredictable fluctuations in production without having to meet the costs of employing a large, permanent workforce. It also enables management to avoid non-wage demands, for example, pension funds, provident funds and medical aid schemes. In addition, the hiring and firing of these 'temporary' employees is not difficult.

It is simply a matter of extending or cancelling a service contract. This avoids the types of dissatisfaction, and even industrial action, that can arise with permanent workers (Klerck, 1991:45,46).

Thompson and McHugh (1990:199) agree with Klerck above, and state that numerical flexibility is an attempt by employers to vary attendance to meet fluctuations and workload, as well as helping to gain control over time-scheduling. They go further on to say that the capacity to externalise uncertainty, costs and risks to a variety of holders of labour services is the explicit rationale behind its implementation. Arulampalam and Booth (1998:521) add that the term 'labour market flexibility' has been interpreted in various ways. An example of this is that one can hire workers for as long as one wishes, without facing any additional costs in adjusting either working hours or workers at the margin.

Non-standard forms of employment create opportunities for some employers. The strategic use of different employment forms allows labour deployment to be tailored to times of peak demand and organisational restructuring. By decreasing conventional work, employers are able to gain flexibility, they are able to avoid extensive training costs, and to transfer economic risk to the labour force. Non-standard employment lies behind Atkinson's (1984) influential model, that being the core and periphery workforce. Although this model has been criticized, its basic tenets are still cited by practicing managers as inevitable trends, not only within local industries in South Africa, but world - wide (Horwitz, Brosnan and Walsh, 1998:27).

Trading patterns are continually changing, which ultimately causes an incentive for management to trim the permanent and full-time workforce to the bare minimum, so that they do not have to pay many workers during slack periods. Thus, flexible labour gives management a capacity for less costly, as well as rapid labour force adjustments. It also enables managers to hire and fire workers, according to their changing labour needs, without having to meet additional costs such as severance pay, which would be characteristic of a permanent worker's status. Managers are also arguing that these days it is becoming increasingly difficult to get workers to agree to work extended hours, and this is forcing managers to employ temporary workers. Some managers do admit that by employing flexible labour, it becomes a very useful way of protecting themselves against strikes and stayaways (Volodia, 1991:48,49).

Volodia (1991:49) also goes on to say that managers also mentioned productivity as an important issue. They felt that flexible workers were more productive than their permanent counterparts. The reason that they cited for this was that flexible workers were employed for shorter periods of time, and that they were eager to be productive in order to secure further part-time employment or even to gain permanent employment. A human resource manager in a specific organisation admitted that, although it is illegal, many employ temporaries for longer periods at lower wages. According to Valverde, et al (1998:606), flexible working is most readily accepted when there is clear equity in treatment between flexible workers and those on standard contracts. The implications for managers of this are that they should continue to involve workers in aspects of the employment relationship. This is in line with the objectives of the 1995 Labour Relations Act, which advocates that there should be a movement away from the authoritarian management approach, to one of participation of all parties involved.

2.10.2 ADVANTAGES TO EMPLOYEES

Part-time work is seen as a means to a full-time, permanent job. Many full-time workers first work at the company concerned as a temporary worker. At one company studied by Volodia (1991), all temporaries employed were university students. This was by agreement between management and workers. Workers felt that it was necessary for their children at universities to have access to part-time employment. At the same time, it was important that these temporaries did not pose a threat to the job security of the permanent workers. Thus, it was agreed that students could not exceed thirty percent (30%) of the workforce (Volodia, 1991:50).

According to Rees (1997:32), the new definition in the Labour Relations Act of 1995 makes it an unfair labour practice to dismiss a contract worker if he/she could reasonably expect an employer to renew the contract. Thus, the new Act has made it considerably more difficult for an employer to dismiss a contract worker if they regularly work for the company. In addition to the above, progressive agreements between management and employees formalise the concept of 'permanent temporaries' who may have more career opportunities, training and similar conditions of employment to full-time workers.

2.10.3 DISADVANTAGES TO MANAGERS

While there are some benefits for firms in employing non-standard workers, these benefits are often offset by enhanced difficulties in managing an atypical labour force. Thus, managers are faced with a fundamental strategic choice. On the one hand, the 'hard' model of human resource management encourages the strategic use of non-standard employment forms and the decrease in overhead labour costs. On the other hand, the 'soft' model emphasizes value - adding strategies, quality of work life, and the development of a mutual commitment between management and workers. The latter concept is an intrinsic part of contemporary human resource management strategies, even as management practice seems increasingly to depart from support for stable internal labour markets and lifelong careers for significant proportions of the workforce. The form in which such practices occur varies, with organisational size being an important variable (Horwitz, et al, 1998:27).

Labour cost reduction may result in short-term efficiency gains and healthier looking net profits. However, it does not necessarily create increased output, as well as job and organisational commitment. Numerical flexibility is also unlikely to lead to long-term competitiveness without an active human resource development policy and employee participation (Conroy, Castells and Benner, 1997:38,40).

Valverde, et al (1998:598) list several problems that managers encounter when implementing numerical flexibility, regardless of which form it takes. They state that the main aim of managers to make use of flexible labour markets is to gain a competitive edge. However, instituting this type of employment practice can, in actual fact, lead to the exact opposite of the desired effect. They explain this by stating that competitiveness requires enthusiasm, motivation, innovation and the reliability of employees. However, under contract or temporary work, the organisation makes only a limited commitment to its employees. Justifiably, it cannot automatically expect to receive full commitment in return. They therefore postulate that disinterested workers can actually create substantial competitiveness problems, and thus cause barriers in the face of global competition.

The underlying problem is thus developing a relationship of trust and commitment. Where the employer is making a reduced commitment to the employee, the risk of receiving a reduced commitment from them in return is substantial.

Whilst communication is vital, paradoxically, flexibility causes it to be more difficult as employees are working at different times to their managers, or managers have a limited time to know them before their contract expires (Valverde, et al, 1998:604).

Arulampalam and Booth (1998:521) state that the new forms of flexible employment may be detrimental to the long - run economic performance of the organisation if they are associated with the under-valuation of training investment. This can be explained by the fact that training improves a worker's skills. This is of benefit to the company as it is translated into increased productivity which ultimately affects the bottom line, namely profits. However, the direct effects that it has on the organisation are also enhanced by the indirect effects it has on the individual workers. When a worker's level of skill increases, they feel more able and are better equipped to handle their job. This ultimately serves to boost morale and thus job satisfaction. Generally, a worker who feels more satisfied in their work will be willing to work hard and thus improve productivity.

2.10.4 DISADVANTAGES TO EMPLOYEES

It has often been stated that the central objective of numerical flexibility is to render workers disposable rather than adaptable. This seems to negate the constant push of organisations to promote worker participation, maintaining trust and loyalty, and mapping out career paths for individuals. Within many companies, there is evidence of a growing dichotomy between core and peripheral workers. In service industries, peripheral status is increasingly the norm; firms compete by economising, largely at the expense of the workforce (Contini in Tolliday and Zeitlin, 1992:56).

Klerck (1991:46) states that the advantages of functional flexibility, which are used to prevent repetitive tasks, and thus boredom and fatigue, are the exact disadvantages which are bestowed upon temporary workers. Routine and repetitive jobs, requiring very little skill and offering little/no advancement opportunities are offered to temporary workers. A permanent employee becomes quickly bored and dissatisfied. Temporary employees, say proponents of numerical flexibility, can therefore be used for these jobs which can eliminate dissatisfaction, absenteeism and labour turnover in the permanent workforce. Managers therefore transfer the sources of dissatisfaction from the permanent to the temporary workers.

The attitudes of permanent workers towards their temporary counterparts should also be noted. They see temporary workers as a threat to their jobs or to the wages and conditions they have managed to negotiate. Thus, temporary workers are often shunned and seen to bear the brunt of disgruntled permanent employees (Klerck, 1991:47).

One of the most widely contested issues regarding numerical flexibility is the fact that temporary workers have less likelihood of receiving any training. Approximately one-third of manufacturing sector firms pay temporary workers less than permanent workers. They also either provide these workers with fewer benefits, a lower value of benefits, or no benefits at all. In addition to the above, in most sectors, casual and temporary labour work long hours, and on short notice. They also complain that their chances of permanent employment are remote. Permanent workers often view temporary workers as scabs who wish to take their jobs. Tensions often heighten during industrial action, as temporary/contract workers have too much to lose to go on strike (Rees, 1997:31,33).

A further problem that is experienced by flexible workers relates not only to the unfavourable attitude by permanent employees towards these workers, but also the fact that some union officials and shop stewards do not take the problems and grievances of flexible workers seriously. It has even been stated that in some cases, they tend to regard them as second - class workers, who are not worthy of the protection which belonging to a trade union would afford them. Even where these extreme views are not held at the workplace, union practices may tend to exclude these temporary workers (Ray, 1997:43).

The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 gives preference to collective bargaining agreements that are already in place within the particular organisation concerned. It has been found however, that many of these collective agreements only cover permanent employees, and thus exclude casual/temporary workers. According to Du Toit, Woolfrey, Murphy, Godfrey, Bosch and Christie (1998:175), collective agreements are the end product of collective bargaining. Consequently, in labour law, collective agreements normally have greater relevance than individual contracts of employment. Most commentators have accepted that such agreements in our law give rise to binding and enforceable contractual rights and obligations. Thus, it can be seen that the rights of permanent workers will be stipulated in this agreement, while the rights of flexible workers, in terms of numerical flexibility, is subject to the scrutiny and judgement of management.

In addition, Rees (1997:33,34) points out that the Labour Relations Act gives all workers the right to strike, but since temporary workers have no organisation that they can turn to for advice about procedures, they are most likely to be dismissed when they embark on a strike. What this essentially means, is that permanent workers have legal avenues, such as strikes, open to them should they declare a dispute between themselves and management. However, flexible workers, who are more likely to have disputes with management considering their meagre employment conditions, do not really have the strike weapon open to their use due to their limited organisational capabilities.

The current Basic Conditions of Employment Act excludes casual workers from certain basic terms of employment. This can be shown by the fact that casuals are not entitled to notice on termination of employment, leave pay or a certificate of service. This places them right at the bottom of the ladder in the power relationship between employer and employee. This will ultimately allow employers to force worse conditions of employment on flexible workers. It is also possible that in the bargaining councils, on which the interests of permanent workers are more strongly represented, trade-offs may occur, resulting in declining standards for flexible workers (Rees, 1997:34).

Variations to working practices, which involve the extension of short-term employment contracts, are less likely to be achieved through consensus. Since flexible workers have limited employment rights, they are at the mercy of managements' whims. Some people therefore find that the opportunities provided by such contracts are very attractive, in the sense that they can find alternative employment contracts elsewhere, which provides more flexibility in their day-to-day lives. However, this is often very much outweighed by the extreme disadvantages that it affords the unemployed worker who is desperately seeking employment. It is these workers who ultimately prefer permanent, secure and stable employment.

Research results have shown that workers on short-term contracts are significantly less likely to be involved in any work-related training to improve their skills base in precisely those skills that are supposed to make them more adaptable. These findings therefore suggest that there is a trade-off between expanding the more marginal forms of employment and expanding the proportion of the workforce getting work-related training. If either the firm or the workers expect job attachment to be short-term, as in the case of flexible workers, then work-related training either will not be provided (by the firm), or will not be accepted (by the worker).

Thus, the expansion of the more marginal forms of employment may exacerbate earnings inequalities since these jobs offer less and pay less. While it may be a rational response for firms not to train such workers if they are not expected to remain long at the firm, it raises the question of how work-related skills can be imparted to workers on flexible employment contracts (Arulampalam and Booth, 1998:522,523).

The above discussion has focused specifically on the disadvantages that flexible forms of employment hold for the flexible workers themselves. However, mention needs to be made of a second, yet equally important group of workers who also suffer disadvantages at the hands of numerical flexibility, namely, permanent workers. Kenny (1998:25,27) states that the process of re-segmentation of the labour market is evoking insecurity among permanent workers, even when actual retrenchments do not occur. The threat of job loss is creating insecurity among core workers, while simultaneously providing employers with a cheaper and more compliant workforce. The environment of insecurity has bred distrust of management and tension between groups of workers. Both temporary and permanent workers recognise that using temporary workers cuts labour costs from benefits established through collective bargaining, for example, temporary workers are used to gain more control, cut wages and undermine the union.

Many employees believe that using flexible workers is a means of a 'cover up' for poor management practices – high turnover rates showing managerial inability to motivate them. Furthermore, it creates communication problems, as not all workers are together at any one time. Flexible workers cannot be sure of employment much beyond the immediate future (Valverde, et al, 1998:598).

Valverde, et al (1998:606) state that arguably, one of the potential impacts of the growth of numerical flexibility will be pressure on the provision of equal opportunities. This arises partly, and simply, because of the disproportional share of flexible working time taken up by females. There seems little doubt that in many cases, organisations are failing to provide flexible workers with equal access to salaries, promotions and opportunities for training and development. Also, the increased fragmentation of the employment relationship entailed by flexibility provides a greater possibility that organisations will, knowingly or unconsciously, allow variations in working practices according to gender, race or disability to appear in their workforces.

2.11

GENERAL COMMENTS

As has been mentioned before, with numerical flexibility, the transfer of risk is passed on from the manager to the flexible worker. However, the transfer of risk also means that during periods of unemployment, between short-term contracts, for example, the State will be expected to provide support. Within the South African context, this poses innumerable problems due to the high and rising levels of unemployment. Legal and financial institutions are also not prepared for this situation, for example, mortgages are rarely granted to individuals who do not hold permanent employment (Valverde, et al, 1997:600).

Unilateral implementation of lay-off plans and organisational restructuring which could have an adverse impact on job security may constitute an unfair labour practice in South Africa. Public policy makers will need to consider whether basic employment protections for peripheral workers are needed. With an increase in foreign competition, achieving a balance between increased economic performance and work place equity will not be an easy task (Conroy, et al, 1997:41).

It can thus be seen that mass unemployment, competitive pressure and deregulation make it likely that this form of labour practice will continue. However, despite recent changes to the Labour Relations Act, not enough is being done to counter the negative impact flexible work has on workers. Indeed, government policy, in the form of privatisation, deregulation and support for greater flexibility in the (already flexible) labour market, encourages this trend. Cuts in government spending limit the pay and conditions of work that workers on public works programmes receive, the wider social benefits available, and the capacity of government departments to police legislation. Government say its policies will encourage investment and lead to job creation. In reality, as can be seen through numerical flexibility, they strengthen the hand of capital, undermine gains won through collective organisation and encourage insecure employment (Rees, 1997:30).

2.12 TRADE UNIONS' RESPONSES TO NUMERICAL FLEXIBILITY

More and more workers in South Africa are being employed as temporary, contract or part-time workers. This development poses a great and unique challenge to the trade union movement. New divisions are opening up in the workforce, and the job security of union members is being threatened by the increase in the number of non-permanent workers (Klerck, 1991:44).

As can be seen, the implications of flexible working practices on the trade union movement are immense and cannot be ignored. It is thus necessary to further elaborate on the problems, challenges and opportunities facing the trade unions in light of the new forms of flexible employment.

One of the major benefits cited by employees for belonging to a trade union movement, is the sense of solidarity they perceive by acting as a united front. Mass action is the primary means by which unions attempt to sway managers to an alternative viewpoint. However, the very nature of numerical flexibility actually creates two layers of workers – the permanent, relatively well paid and secure; and the temporary, low paid and insecure. Management can thus create a divide in the workforce which makes united action less likely. Thus, to managements' advantage, sizeable proportions of the workforce can be kept non - unionised. It becomes therefore, very difficult for the unions to establish relations with, and organise such workers (Klerck, 1991:46).

The above explanation, to a certain degree, seems to indirectly undermine the basic provisions in the Labour Relations Act. This Act states that every employee has the right to organize, join and form any trade union. However, numerical flexibility actually serves to dis-unite the workforce indirectly by ensuring two divided categories of workers with, to a large extent, very differing needs, values and aspirations.

In addition, the situation and attitudes of temporary workers themselves can make them very difficult to organise. This can be shown by the fact that, although, as has been mentioned, all workers have a right to strike, flexible workers' rights are very limited in the sense that they have no trade union open to them to turn to for advice.

Considering the very poor educational and illiteracy levels among the unemployed masses in South Africa, very few are actually aware of the rights and provisions contained in the Labour Relations Act, especially concerning strike activity. Thus, in all probability, without adequate knowledge of the correct rules and procedures to be followed when embarking on a strike action, these workers are likely to be fired as a result of their ignorance.

A further danger to the trade union movement in South Africa is that, due to limited resources, limited supply and unlimited demands (on the part of the unemployed worker), great competition exists among the unemployed and unskilled workers to be hired. These workers are therefore much more likely to accept lower wages. This, in turn, has wider implications for other workers. Due to the fact that managers have a legal avenue open to them to hire flexible workers at a lower wage rate, it undermines wages that have been negotiated between management and permanent workers in the face of collective agreements. This serves to potentially reduce the power base of trade unions, and seems to place them at an inherent disadvantage when negotiating for wage increases (Klerck, 1991:47).

Due to the fact that a worker's contract is of a temporary nature, their insecurity and extreme dependency tends to make such workers very passive. Management will undoubtedly take advantage to exploit these workers. There is also very little opportunity to build a sense, and practices, of group solidarity in relation to their immediate employers. It also becomes difficult to build up a sense of identity with the permanent workers, who regard them as a potential threat to job security and will also attempt to exploit them where they possibly can (Klerck, 1991:47).

Valverde, et al (1997:603) go on to say that trade unions oppose flexibility in the sense that it is hard to provide relevant and timely services to such workers. Although it has been previously mentioned that trade unions serve to protect the interests of their members, namely permanent workers, research has also shown that they may wish to extend their benefits to the temporary workers themselves. This can be seen in light of the fact that one of the greatest sources of power for unions, or for any group acting in solidarity, is the fact that strength comes from numbers. Many unions see the potential advantage that this concept holds for them, and will thus try to co-opt the flexible workers. The only way by which they can achieve their desired result is by ensuring that they make their services readily available to the flexible workers. However, this proves to be a difficult task due to various aspects, such as a lack of communication.

Flexibility is also an issue in conflicts over operating principles. When management's flexibility interferes with established working rules, serious disagreements between the two parties erupts. For example, the union believes that, as in the case of flexible workers, when they are assigned to a particular contract, workers should be able to work until that contract is fully completed. However, managements' point of view seems to be in complete contrast to that of the union. This is, interestingly enough, where the proponents of functional flexibility come in, and, to a certain degree, when they negate the objectives of numerical flexibility. This is explained by the fact that management advocates flexibility in the sense that some things 'might be out of their control'. However, unions state that situations are very rarely beyond managements' control (Wellman, 1995:214).

The ever-conflicting goals of union and management inevitably arise. Whereas unions want to provide work for their entire membership, management wants to have the prerogative to be able to replace workers if needed. Therefore, while managers advocate flexibility, unions depend upon enforcing the agreement to the letter.

The unions' ultimate objective is to be able to protect its workers from exploitation by management, be it in the form of wages or working conditions. Contracting and other forms of flexible employment are a way of deregulating part of the workforce by removing these workers from regulation or protection by trade unions. Thus, unions need to urgently address these pertinent issues, or the ultimate results could prove to be a disaster for the movement as a whole. If these issues are not promptly addressed, their membership will consist of a decreasing number of highly skilled workers, who enjoy all the benefits of stable employment, while the masses of workers only have access to other, super-exploitative forms of work (Klerck, 1991:47).

Clearly then, the increase in the use of flexible labour will affect the trade unions' ability to be able to use the strike weapon when disputes arise between management and themselves. Strikes have been a feature of bargaining, and shop floor workers have made substantial gains for their members through the use of this very effective weapon. Management, in the past, have often had to concede to employees' demands even though, under ordinary circumstances, they would not do so. This is due to the fact that, when workers strike, management make substantial losses in profits due to the lost working days. Eventually, a compromise has to be reached between the two parties in order to ensure that workers return to work as quickly as possible and make up for lost time.

However, flexible labour provides management with a quick and dependable source of alternative labour. This could undermine the capacity of permanent workers to take successful action (Volodia, 1991:50).

The above statement goes to show that the union movement is, or could be, in great danger. If workers believe that belonging to a trade union holds no particular benefits, such as security of employment and managements' concessions to their demands, then there will be a decline in union membership.

The use of flexible labour is encouraged by gaps in the law and by insufficient policing of the law that does exist. If workers believe that the law will not protect them, or affords them minimal protection, then there will be no advantages to them to join a trade union movement, as the law will negate some of the unions policies and practices (Rees, 1997:32).

Unions, with the help of the Labour Relations Act of 1995, have played an important role in ensuring that minimum standards of employment are properly actioned, planned and monitored. They tend to focus on permanent workers, often taking up the issues of more marginal workers, such as flexible workers, only when they threaten their members. Union officials have also complained that it has become very difficult to organise workers employed on a temporary basis because employers have the power to terminate employment contracts on very short notice (Ray, 1997:34).

The above effect needs to be analysed in terms of the effects that this has on the union itself. The union will, very often, try to co-opt the unorganised workers and gain their support for various reasons. They therefore need to provide certain incentives to these workers that will appeal to them and allow them to see the advantages of supporting the trade union in their workplace. However, it would seem to be that, due to the unstable employment contract they have, it would be almost pointless for the trade union to entice them, as they cannot provide long-term support.

Legislation that limits the power of employers to act in this way and extends rights and benefits may assist the organisation of the trade union, but legislation is not enough. It also requires political will and resources from the unions themselves.

While relative usage of flexible work practices is similar between unionised and non-unionised companies, unions may strongly influence the success of implementation. Trade union response to work flexibility initiatives may be opposition, pragmatic scepticism or an attempt to shape the agenda strategically. Most unionised employers, it would seem, tend to consult, or negotiate, or jointly decide on flexibility issues (Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:15).

An issue of vital importance to trade unions is how their power base will be affected by changing employment practices. Unionisation in South Africa has increased over the last two decades. For flexible work practices to be successfully applied in South Africa, trade unions must be involved. The Labour Relations Act provisions on workplace forums will reinforce this (Horwitz and Franklin, 1996:15).

Finally, unions argue that since sub-contracting keeps sizeable proportions of the workforce un-unionised, rights of association given to core workers are not necessarily given to subcontracted workers. Some argue that training investment may be lost due to additional layoffs and resignations of skilled employees (Conroy, et al, 1997:28).

2.13 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the authors consulted in this literature review support the notion that the issue of flexibility, be it numerical or functional, provides the route to a new interest accommodation between labour and capital. Regardless of the form of flexibility used, employers gain a system of production best suited to commercial success. The issue of contention however, lies in the value that each type of flexibility holds for the parties concerned. Functional flexibility, at the onset, appears to provide clear, articulated benefits for workers and managers alike. Employers are able to gain a system of efficiency needed for their competitive environment; workers, through their willingness to move between jobs and train for new ones, enjoy more secure employment prospects within their company, as well as more challenging and responsible work.

However, it is in the area of numerical flexibility where, from the literature provided, it is clear that managers, to a large extent, gain at the expense of their work force. While managers are able to adapt to changing market conditions by varying the size of their workforce, workers appear to receive little noticeable benefits over and beyond wages, which, it seems, are lower than that received by their permanent counterparts.

Thus, it would seem that workers openness to organisational restructuring and redesign appears to be governed, at least in part, by what they may gain or lose as a result of the change process. It should therefore be clear that continued efforts be made by all those concerned to ensure that flexibility is carried out in a consistent and fair manner, which would undoubtedly led to increased organisational competitiveness and ultimate success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

A detailed description of the research design and methodology is found in this chapter.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

McKendrick (1987:256) contends that the main objective of an exploratory research design is to broaden one's understanding, construct general ideas and highlight avenues for further study regarding the research topic. The researcher decided to use this category of research design, since the aim of the study is to explore management and their employees' perceptions and experiences of numerical and functional flexibility. Collins (in McKendrick 1987:256) adds that although the sample size is small, a wide range of data can be collected using the exploratory research design.

Grinnell (1988:220) suggests that an exploratory level design probes a subject on which little is known. Questions will therefore tend to be more descriptive in nature. The researcher wished to explore how management and their employees experience the two forms of flexibility, how this affects the level of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and, in turn, how this will impact on overall productivity and organisational effectiveness. The design utilised therefore had to be able to explore broad questions and aspects that were duly raised by the research topic.

Reid and Smith (1981:67) go further on to say that the exploratory design is used when the research aims at gaining a preliminary understanding of phenomenon or to stimulate the development of theories, concepts or hypotheses. The researcher believes that this is particularly accurate with regards to exploring functional and numerical flexibility. From the literature consulted, it is evident that research has not placed enough emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of the subjects concerned, which is what this research aims to highlight and emphasise.

It is important to note that qualitative research's emphasis on the lived experience makes it fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structure of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions, pre-judgements and pre-suppositions.

Qualitative investigation has often been advocated as the best strategy for discovery, developing hypotheses and testing to see if predictions uphold (Miles and Huberman, 1996:10).

An element of comparison was evident in the research, as the findings of the study were compared with theory consulted in the literature review. Although the research was strongly grounded in theory, exploration of personal experiences was the main objective.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design documented in this study is exploratory in nature, and was used on the basis that to understand a problem, more must be known about it. It is thus hoped that new insights will be engendered about this topic. According to Mouton (1996:168), qualitative research remains true to the natural setting of the actors, and the concepts they use to describe and understand themselves. It is thus important for the researcher to allow some of the subjects to demonstrate their machinery and how they went about performing their jobs in order to gain additional insight into their practical experience.

The researcher decided that the use of quantitative methods, based on scientific, mathematical approaches would, according to Banister and Burman (1984:50), simplify phenomena and misrepresent the nature of the questions under investigation. Based on this, the researcher decided to employ the qualitative research method.

According to Reid and Smith (1981:89), qualitative research is based on the assumption that valid understanding can be gained through knowledge accumulated first hand by a single researcher. Qualitative methodology refers, in the broadest sense, to research that produces descriptive data: people's own words and observable behaviour. The researcher aimed to look at the settings and people holistically. They are therefore not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole. Furthermore, the aim of qualitative research is to experience with the co-researcher (respondent), the lived world and to be open for whatever emerges in order to develop an adequate understanding of the phenomenon.



By experiencing the lived world, one is able to gain insight and interpretation becomes possible, which is inevitably the goal of the researcher (Rubin and Babbie, 1992:56 and Ashworth, de Koning and Giorgi, 1986:202,204).

The researcher made use of the semi-structured interview. It was felt that this type of interview would allow the researcher to explore subjective meanings encountered during the interview process. It was also felt that, as Banister and Burman (1994:50) state, as opposed to eliciting responses within a standardised format purely to facilitate comparison with other individuals or groups, the taking into account of subjective meanings would enrich the data obtained. The primary advantage of the semi-structured approach is that it allows for the tailoring of questions to the position and nature of the subjects. This proved to be of utmost importance owing to the different languages (English and Afrikaans), and varied positions within the company of the subjects, which had to be accommodated for by the interview schedule.

According to Bailey (1987:174), the central advantages of an interview is that the interviewer is present to observe all facets of behaviour, including non-verbal responses, and thus to assess the validity of the respondents' answers, which may be more informative and less normative than answers about which the respondent has had time to think.

The primary means of gathering data was half - day visits to the plant, which consisted of interviews with: top and middle-level management, supervisors/foreman, a training officer, trade union representatives and shop floor workers, both permanent and temporary. This was accompanied by observation on the shop floor to get further details on the production process, machinery layout and utilisation. Questions were broad enough to encompass a wide range of information. The same questions were repeated at each interview. The researcher made use of extensive note - taking throughout the interviews.

As stated by Reid and Smith (1981:209), the semi-structured interview is very useful in obtaining fuller answers and clarifying misunderstandings, hence its suitability with regards to the topic of this study. The nature of the semi-structured interview also makes it possible to make use of probes and to follow any interesting avenues which may be revealed with a particular respondent. The aim of the interview was to allow subjects to speak for themselves without imposing any issues.

All interviews were face-to-face for the specific purpose of observing reactions such as tone of voice and facial expressions, which could provide valuable added information. The interview format was chosen for this reason, as well as due to the adaptability and ability to react immediately to responses received. The questionnaire does not hold this advantage, as some questions possibly need to be clarified on the part of the participant, and if not clarified, are consequently ignored. Open-ended questions allow for answers to be given in greater depth, while the participant is able to express his/her feelings to the extent that they feel comfortable.

The interview length varied dramatically between individuals and was dependent on how much the subject wanted to talk, or how much pressure he/she was under to produce the job he/she was working on. In the case of some of the operators, the researcher made notes whilst the operators were working and simultaneously speaking. He/she was able to read these notes if they so wished. The average time taken for each interview ranged between forty five to sixty minutes. The interview sessions were structured according to the interview schedules (see Appendices one, two, three and four).

Twenty-eight subjects were initially selected, of which twenty-six were interviewed due to the work schedules of two of the subjects. The criteria for selecting these subjects is based on the following recommendations made by Stones (1988:33). All of the subjects have experience which directly relates to the phenomena being investigated, as all work at various levels within the organisation concerned and would experience flexibility. In addition, all are competent in communicating their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the research topic effectively. Finally, the subjects are all well informed with regards to their specific fields and areas of work and are therefore able to examine the work environment of the organisation in terms of numerical and functional flexibility.

Interviews with the subjects were conducted privately. However, as has been stated, due to the time constraints and job demands of some shop floor workers, some interviews were conducted on the factory floor itself. Upon the subjects consenting to partake in the research project, open-ended questions relating to flexibility within the organisation were conducted. The nature of the research method employed offered the researcher the opportunity of observing the subjects as they interacted with one another, their work colleagues and the work environment.

The willingness by all subjects involved to share their knowledge and expertise with, and to accommodate the researcher as best as they could (given the busy work schedules each of the subjects possessed), led to the development of an open, yet professional relationship between the subjects and the researcher. Anonymity and confidentiality were stipulated by each of the subjects and were, in turn, guaranteed by the researcher.

During the interviews, the researcher avoided using a tape recorder, rather focusing on comprehensive note-taking throughout the interviews. This was decided upon, as the researcher was aware that the research topic might be threatening to the respondents, as several of the questions focused on the organisation's role in job satisfaction. This was reinforced by the researcher's observation that several of the interviewees were hesitant in responding to some of the questions, particularly those pertaining to organisational factors such as strike activity and remuneration.

3.3 THE SAMPLING PROCEDURE

According to Tull and Hawkins (1993:494), a sample is those individuals chosen from the population of interest as the subjects or respondents in a research. Criteria for inclusion in the sample were: various levels of management and supervisors, a training officer, shop floor workers (both permanent and temporary) and trade union representatives.

The size of the sample was twenty-six. The sampling procedure used in the study was non-probability purposive sampling. As Nachmias and Nachmias (1987:185) state, non-probability purposive samples are used when a sampling population cannot be precisely defined. In addition, sampling units are selected subjectively by the researcher, who attempts to obtain a sample that appears to him/her to be representative of the population. With regards to the afore-mentioned, participants in this study were either multi-skilled or temporary employees, thus the researcher selected the respondents on the basis of specific knowledge about them. A further requirement was that the participants were willing to participate in research of this nature. It is however, the role of the researcher to choose who must answer the questions regarded as necessary in investigating the topic being studied.

3.4 INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 The interview schedules (Appendices one, two, three and four)

The interview schedules served to guide the interview, ensuring that each topic/area was addressed and understood by the respondents. It ensured that the researcher covered the same material in each interview, and kept focused on the same pre-determined topics and issues. Subjects were not limited in that they answered open-ended questions, which provided them the opportunity to speak freely, without interruption except for clarification by the researcher on certain issues. The flexibility which the semi-structured interview afforded was particularly important due to the fact that certain questions necessitated modifications as per the subjects needs. By making use of this flexible, non-standardised and dynamic tool, it was anticipated that descriptively pertinent data would be obtained from the respondents.

3.4.2 Recording Instruments

The researcher made comprehensive notes as the interviewees responded. Since many of the subjects were Afrikaans speaking, the researcher needed to clarify certain responses in order for them to be recorded as fully as possible. To ensure greater reliability, the same explanations, instructions and guidelines were repeated at each interview.

As with the selection of the sample, other variables were not controlled for. These included various aspects such as interruptions during the interview, which sometimes led the subjects astray. Noise levels were also not controlled for, particularly with regards to the shop floor workers who were interviewed in an office situated directly above the production line, as well as those interviewed on the production line itself. To overcome this difficulty, the researcher repeated various questions and requested constant clarification on answers.

3.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data analysis was done by hand, as the small sample size and qualitative nature of the responses did not necessitate computerised analysis of the data. Analysis consequently included the process of sorting, comparing, contrasting and consolidating the data. According to Atkinson and Coffey (1996:26), analysis of data begins with the identification of key themes and patterns that depend on the process of sorting and coding data. Thus, the data obtained was then organised into categories. Similarities and common themes were sought as the information in each category was compared.

Data was consequently analysed according to the structure of the interview schedule. This ensured greater validity of the analysis process. Analysing the data according to these categories correlated with the main areas identified in the literature review, which are as follows: an overview of the organisation; organisational departments; reasons for becoming a temporary employee; job satisfaction and remuneration; training; temporary employees and the trade union; the South African labour market; advantages of temporary employees; disadvantages of temporary employees; temporary employees' impact on permanent staff and the trade union; trade union's response to numerical flexibility; education (employees' and managerial perspectives); training (employees' and managerial perspectives); promotion and job security; remuneration; job satisfaction; general comments and the trade union's response to functional flexibility.

3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

3.6.1 The study is limited to two textile factories in Cape Town. However, it should be noted that the researcher decided to conduct an in-depth analysis with twenty-six participants in these organisations. The researcher felt that it would be more beneficial to examine only two organisations, but to interview many more employees in each factory, rather than focussing on only a handful of employees in many organisations.

- 3.6.2 The findings of this study can not be generalised as the sample size (26) is not representative of the wider population of those workers experiencing functional and numerical flexibility within this particular organisation. Further research could however provide a representative sample and for this reason the researcher believes that this study could lay the foundation for further research into this area. From the literature reviewed, it was evident that South African literature on the experience of functional, and in particular, numerical flexibility, is limited. Although the sample size is not representative of the population of factory workers, these findings contribute to the knowledge base, as generalisabilities could be made and this is a contribution to the limited South African literature.
- 3.6.3 There is a limited number of male machine operators on the factory floor in this particular organisation. Thus, the fact that the majority of factory floor workers interviewed were female (in terms of experiencing functional flexibility), is a limitation of this study.
- 3.6.4 A further limitation with regards to the generalisation of the findings is that different organisations in other provinces may function/operate differently from those in the Western Cape studied in this research. This could result in different findings being obtained from different organisations.
- 3.6.5 The non-probable purposive sampling method reduced the reliability of the sample, as it may have resulted in generalisations.
- 3.6.6 The exploratory-descriptive design used in this study limited the validity of the findings, as this type of design could not provide conclusive answers to the research questions, but rather further insights and possible directions. However, the insights gained from the study complimented the theories and findings consulted in the literature review.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In keeping with University guidelines on ethical standards, respondents were told, at the outset, as to the purpose of the research, which was to explore the experiences and perceptions of management and their employees of the concepts of functional and numerical flexibility. The initial motivation was that the findings, and consequently the recommendations based on the findings, would highlight avenues pertaining to job satisfaction and organisational performance.

It should be noted that all who participated in the study did so on a voluntary basis. The researcher obtained informed consent and the benefits, costs and reciprocity were spelt out in the reasons for the study at the beginning of each interview. It was important to inform the respondents as to what the aims and objectives of the study were, as well as some of the questions that would be asked. This provided the subjects with the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study or not. Issues pertaining to honesty, trust, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were fully discussed with all participants. The researcher assured the participants that any information derived from the research project which personally identifies them would not, under any circumstances, be disclosed.

In line with Bailey's proposition (1987:410), subjects were assured that should the study design or the use of the collected information were to be changed, they would be so informed and their consent re-obtained.

Finally, the researcher advised the subjects that, if they so wished/requested, a copy of the research study would be made available.

3.8 CONCLUSION

A step – by - step exposition of the manner in which the research was conducted is given in this chapter. The aim was to inform the reader how the research was carried out. In addition, this chapter mentioned some of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings and the discussion thereof are presented in this chapter. These are presented according to the main categories and resultant themes identified in the interview schedule:

- 4.1 A brief overview of the organisation
 - 4.1.1 Organisational departments
- 4.2 Temporary employees
 - 4.2.1 Reasons for becoming a temporary employee
 - 4.2.2 Job satisfaction and remuneration
 - 4.2.3 Training
 - 4.2.4 Temporary employees and the trade union
- 4.3 Management/Supervisors
 - 4.3.1 The South African labour market
 - 4.3.2 Advantages of temporary employees
 - 4.3.3 Disadvantages of temporary employees
 - 4.3.4 Temporary employees: impact on permanent staff and the trade union
- 4.4 Trade union's response to numerical flexibility
- 4.5 Multi-skilled employees
 - 4.5.1 Education
 - 4.5.1.1 Employees' perspectives
 - 4.5.1.2 Managements'/Supervisors' perspectives
 - 4.5.2 Training
 - 4.5.2.1 Employees' perspectives
 - 4.5.2.2 Managements'/Supervisors' perspectives
 - 4.5.3 Promotion and job security

- 4.5.4 Remuneration
- 4.5.5 Job satisfaction
- 4.5.6 General comments
- 4.5.7 Trade union's response to functional flexibility
- 4.6 Summary of major findings

In addition, correspondence to relevant literature identified in Chapter two will be made.

Tables have been used to illustrate distribution of the following:

Age and gender distribution of respondents

Table 4.1

Respondents' position within the organisation

Table 4.2

Table 4.1: Age and Gender Distribution of Respondents

Respondents' Age in Years	Gender		Frequency
	Male	Female	
25 – 35	7	6	13
35 – 45	6	4	10
45 – 55	2	1	3
Total	15	11	26

From table 4.1, it can be deduced that the majority of employees interviewed were males within the age range of 25 – 35 years.

Table 4.2: Gender and present position within the company

Respondents' position	Gender		Frequency
	Male	Female	
Multi – skilled permanent machine operators	2	4	6
Temporary machine operators	2	5	7
Single-skilled operators	1	1	2
Supervisors	2	0	2
Training officer	1	0	1
Shop stewards	2	1	3
Managers	5	0	5
Total	15	11	26

Table 4.2. further indicates that the majority of machine operators, be they multi-skilled permanent or temporary workers, are female. In addition, higher level positions, such as supervisors or managers, were all males.

4.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANISATION

This company was established in 1948 as a producer of a limited range of high quality men's fancy worsted suitings. In the late sixties, a plant modernisation programme was undertaken which enabled the company to spin wool and other fibre mixtures. In 1983, a second plant was built, as there was a growing market to sell its yarn. Today, eighty percent (80%) of the yarn is manufactured for the plant itself, while the remaining twenty percent (20%) is sold locally.

The company manufactures and sells spun wool and wool blend yarns in both dyed and natural forms to knitters and/or weavers, both locally as well as abroad to Europe, the Americas and the Far East. Each plant employs an average of 350 workers. The plant also manufactures high quality upholstery fabrics from both internally and externally purchased yarn.

The plant specialises particularly in menswear fabrics with some eighty percent (80%) of the company's production aimed at this market. A wide range of fabrics is produced in various weights, with different handles and finishes, from dry crisp to soft and luxurious. High design capability is the company's hallmark. Over fifty percent (50%) of their menswear production is in fancies, where a combination of weave and colour are used to give special effects.

However, the plant today has also expanded to incorporate ladieswear, and is a leading supplier of top quality soft handling fabrics in twill constructions which are used mainly for Autumn/Winter business. With accent on meeting the demands of the quality sector cloth market, the company realised that modern machinery was not the only requirement needed. Top quality people with superior skills were the most essential requirement and thus the company built up a team of experts for each facet of the operation.

Innovation is high on the company's list of priorities, as is evident from its expansion into the upholstery market, which meant breaking away from the company's traditional area of operation. This extension was needed in order to meet the demands of leading designers and interior decorators. In just a short span of time, this division has become independently successful. The company is also one of the few in the world to blend, spin and weave a fine Kid Mohair/Trevira mixture.

The company ensures ongoing innovation and product development to maintain a range of fashionable fabrics which conforms to a high technical standard for each area of use. A strong technical team, up-to-date laboratories, equipment and total quality practice help ensure attention to detail to make sure that all products are of world-class stature.

4.1.1 ORGANISATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

As can be seen from the historical overview of the company, its original focus tended to be narrow, as is evident from the fact that it concentrated entirely on menswear. However, the organisation then decided to become a leading force in the international arena. Thus, it expanded its line of operation to include not only ladieswear, but also upholstery in order to gain a competitive edge at the upper end of the contract furnishing market. The organisation has thus transformed itself from one that requires a simple level of manufacturing with a narrow and limited product line, to one with a highly complex and often specialised manufacturing capability. It thus has a rapidly developing, broad product range catering to the specific needs of the market and requiring a multi-skilled workforce. The company now deals with a wide variety of combinations of materials and products.

In addition, customer and market needs have changed since the mid-1980's. Where once they demanded large quantities of relatively few items, they now demand smaller quantities of more complicated products in a variety of combinations and colours. With competition becoming the driving force and essentially dictating companies operations, the lead-time for delivery has been dramatically shortened. Companies thus use this as a competitive advantage point, and thus those that are able to deliver the product at the shortest possible time will essentially dominate the market.

The afore-mentioned changes have thus forced the organisation to re-examine its structure, policies and procedures. It has since adopted a radical policy encompassing flexibility, firstly, to the customers themselves, and in order to satisfy customer demands, a restructuring within the organisation itself. The restructuring has taken place in the form of numerical flexibility (temporary workers), and functional flexibility (multi-skilled workers). As will be evident from the findings, this restructuring is essentially a product of necessity to cope with the competitive, international market.

A brief overview will be provided of the process which is needed to convert the raw material into its final product, namely cloth. Thereafter, a more detailed analysis will be provided, highlighting the more important departments in order to gain a better understanding of exactly what it is that the multi-skilled and temporary workers do in the various departments concerned.

The raw material (yarn) is bought in bails according to certain specifications that are a combination of price and quality. The bails are opened and the wool is fed into combing and preparation machines. At the same time, impurities are separated and removed from the wool. The preparation machines create a denser tube of wool and add a slight twist to it. At the end of the preparation process, a higher level of twist is added by flier machines, which get wound around plastic tubes. The tubes are transferred to a spinning department, where a wool-yarn is formed. From here, it is transferred to the dye-house whereby cones are placed on top of each other. They are then compressed and moved into a pressure dye container where they are kept for seven hours. At the end of the process, the right shade is achieved and the cones are transferred to a high frequency drying machine whereby the moisture is extracted. As soon as the yarn is completely dry, it is transferred to the twisting department, and thereafter to final inspection.

THE WARPING DEPARTMENT

The machines within this department are highly specialised and very complex. Thus, each operator is assigned to operate only one machine, and is skilled only in this specific product line. Training workers to operate these machines is time consuming, and thus a specific category of workers is chosen, namely those that are more educated.

THE WEAVING DEPARTMENT

The company boasts a modern weaving mill capable of satisfying the quality demands of local and international markets. High speed Dornier looms are capable of producing fabrics to the highest quality standards at output rates comparable to the worlds best. A new spacious and modern weaving shed allows the benefits of improved process flow, quick style changing and general efficiencies. There are approximately fifty machines within this department.

However, the machines are bought globally from different manufacturers, and thus there are technical differences in their operations.

This department requires that each operator learn to operate a few of the same types of machines simultaneously. However, due to the differing nature of the machines, operators are also trained to operate different makes of machines and are thus required to be multi-skilled. Since the weaving department is at the heart of the factory, people who demonstrate technical capabilities are trained to be loom tuners, as well as to work as part of a job preparation team, which ultimately attempts to make them multi-skilled at a higher level.

THE MENDING DEPARTMENT

This department consists of approximately forty employees. Skills required are excellent eyesight for picking up any fault within the material, as well as to make small mending changes very quickly. This is a routine job which has a considerable number of temporary workers. It requires enormous concentration and coordination.

THE SPINNING DEPARTMENT

This department has a capacity of some forty tons of yarn per week and boasts the latest technology in preparation and spinning. All yarn which is produced is wound, spliced and cleared on the latest auto-winding equipment and can be presented in a wide variety of package sizes and densities suitable for dyeing, knitting or weaving. Approximately seventy percent (70%) of the skilled workers are multi-skilled, each operating two to three different types of machines, and are capable of handling very large yarn counts.

THE DYEING DEPARTMENT

The company's dyeing unit is a state-of-the-art operation with high-pressure dye vessels. The complete dyeing process, including weighing and stock control, is fully computerised to optimise consistency of colour, and a well-equipped laboratory ensures accurate shade matching.

The dye house is extremely flexible in terms of lot size, is capable of dyeing fibre, yarn or fabric, and can dye a wide range of fibre types.

Two highly specialised and trained operators operate three dyeing machines, while in one machine the material is fed and spun in order to remove any excess dye and prevent staining. With a capability of over thirty tons per week production, these operators also undertake commission dyeing (consisting of various fabrics and thus requiring different operations) for other manufacturers.

THE FINISHING DEPARTMENT

The majority of finishes are all pure natural finishes and the department is highly skilled in meeting customer needs in terms of milled, semi-milled, washable wool and teflon treated fabrics. It has a high level of expertise in producing permanent finish, soft handle fabrics to customer requirements.

This department consists of eleven different types of operations, namely: washing out impurities from the cloth; setting the yarn and giving it a different level of shine and softness, to name but a few. This particular line of work requires a very high level of understanding regarding the textile side of the material, and thus a single operator operates quite a large number of the machines.

However, due to the fact that there are eleven different types of machines, this department requires that a certain percentage of its workers be multi-skilled. Training within this department is conducted over a lengthy period, as operators need to have extensive knowledge concerning the various types of material. Thus, the company requires people in this department to have a fairly lengthy service period in order to understand the machines and thus to become multi-skilled in as many machines as possible.

THE FINAL PURCH DEPARTMENT

Within this department, the final product (cloth) is unrolled in front of the operator/inspector, who proceeds to check and mark any fault according to the specifications required. This department however, does not consist of multi-skilled workers in a sense that each operator is required to operate the same machine and perform the same functions day-to-day.

This department consists of a vast number of temporary workers. However, workers within this department, particularly temporary workers, are multi-skilled in the sense that they have worked in several departments, such as the finishing and spinning departments, and can thus be transferred to them as and when required.

4.2 TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES

4.2.1 REASONS FOR BECOMING A TEMPORARY EMPLOYEE

With regards to the reasons behind many of the temporary workers' contractual basis, subjects were subsequently asked as to the reasons behind becoming a temporary worker, as well as its suitability for the employees concerned. Of the seven temporary workers interviewed, three stated that they became temporary workers as they did not have previous employment. Two of the three had actually been unemployed for eight months, and had moved from the Eastern Cape in the hope of finding employment. As one of the workers stated:

“I had been working in a factory in Queenstown for eight years and I was retrenched. They told me to go to Cape Town because it was a bigger city so I had a better chance of getting a job”.

Three of the respondents had previously been retrenched from the company under study, and were re-hired as temporary workers. One of the subjects interviewed stated that he had previously been a permanent employee in the company concerned, but had left due to the fact that he was offered better employment prospects elsewhere. However, the new organisation went into liquidation and he found himself unemployed. He then returned and approached the company under study, hoping that they would have a job for him. It was found that the company did re-employ the subject, but only on a temporary basis, and in a different department. In his own words:

“I came back praying that they would give me a job since they knew me and knew what type of worker I was. They offered me contract work so I took it – it is better than having no job at all”.

The above scenario serves to confirm, as Rees (1997:30) stated, that due to the high levels of unemployment in the South African labour market, flexible jobs are often the only option available.

The statements from the subjects themselves point to the fact that a temporary employment solution is a better alternative than being unemployed. As one subject succinctly phrases it:

“I grab what I can get”.

With regards to the second part of the question, namely the length of time that the subjects had been employed as temporary workers, it was found that five of the subjects had been on a contract from one to two months, while the other two subjects were on their sixth month.

Subjects were subsequently asked as to whether they enjoyed being a temporary employee, and whether or not it gave them the freedom to explore various alternative employment opportunities. All of the subjects interviewed categorically stated that they definitely did not enjoy being on a contract. One of the predominant drawbacks which they mentioned was that being on a contract meant that their job was not secure or stable, as can be seen from the below-mentioned responses:

- “You do not know when you are on or off – what will happen next?”
- “Even though I have a job now, I keep on thinking to myself what will happen in two months time. It makes me so worried that I feel sick sometimes and I can not even concentrate on my work.”

A further reason, which was cited as equally important, was that working on a temporary basis implied that no benefits were received, such as pension, medical aid or leave. As one subject stated:

“The only thing that we get is a wage. This is not enough. Maybe they could give us a pension plan or something”.

One subject interviewed felt particularly frustrated about not receiving any benefits. The reason given for this was that he had previously been employed for ten years at an organisation which was subsequently liquidated. It came as “a shock” after having had stable employment to work at an organisation where, as the subject stated:

“They do not really give you anything except a wage – you worry about not having those benefits that you had before.”

From the statements indicated above, it can be seen that temporary workers, in the case of machine operators, would not become so by choice. As Contini in Tolliday and Zeitlin (1992:56) state, the main aim of numerical flexibility is to render workers disposable. By not providing them with any benefits, managers are generating the conception that workers are merely another form of machinery to be used and disposed of when their function is complete, or when it becomes obsolete. Providing some sort of benefits would be an indication to workers that management show a sense of concern for their well-being. This is clearly the ideal, but not the realistic situation prevalent within this organisation.

4.2.2 JOB SATISFACTION AND REMUNERATION

In order to ascertain the subjects' levels of job satisfaction, the researcher asked the subjects as to their perceptions of their current job tasks, as well as to their remuneration as compared to that of permanent employees. Six of the seven subjects stated that they enjoyed their work. One subject indicated that her work was very routine and that she wished that she had more job variety. Furthermore, they stated that permanent workers performed the same jobs as they did, in other words, they operated the same type of machinery. Although this negates Klerck's (1991:46) argument that temporary employees are used to perform those routine, mundane jobs that permanent workers do not enjoy, his argument holds true from managements' perspective, which will be discussed at a later stage.

With regards to the subjects' perceptions of the pay structures, one subject stated that they receive more than permanent employees, as there are no deductions from their wages, such as pension. Two of the subjects indicated that they were paid on par with permanent workers, and the remaining four subjects stated that they were paid R30 or R40 per week less than permanent workers.

The afore-mentioned statements serve to indicate a sense of confusion or misconception on the part of the subjects regarding their pay. As can be shown, only four of the subjects were aware that they were actually paid less than permanent workers while performing the same type of work. As one subject stated:

"It is not fair or right. We do exactly the same work as the permanent staff, but we get paid less".

Another subject re-affirmed this by saying :

“It makes me feel bad that I get paid less because we do the same work as them (permanent workers)”.

This problem is also exacerbated by the fact that this worker has had twenty years experience as a weaver in various textile organisations, but was forced to become a temporary worker due to retrenchment. The subject added that it made her feel “worthless” because, due to her extensive knowledge and experience, she should actually receive more than a permanent worker who had only been hired seven months previously.

These statements are in line with Volodia (1991:50), who states that numerical flexibility creates a rift between the better paid, permanent workers on the one hand, and temporary workers who earn lower wages on the other hand.

4.2.3 TRAINING

In relation to the topic of the importance of training, subjects were asked as to whether they had received any training during their time as a temporary employee. In addition, an attempt was made to establish whether this training was only specifically job-related, or if any additional training was provided to acquire skills in another area/department.

Of the seven subjects interviewed, five had received two weeks in-house training only on their particular machine, whilst two subjects had received in-house training, which lasted five days. The latter subjects stated that although training lasted for two weeks, they acquired the necessary skills quickly and thus only needed a short training session. Some of the responses made were:

- “All of my training was done here on the machine. It is very simple to operate and it only took me three days to learn”.
- “The training officer shows you how to do it, and then you try it for yourself. It is easy, but if you have any problems, you just ask one of the other workers to help you”.

Six subjects interviewed stated that, while they thought the in-house training provided was very good, they indicated to the researcher that they wished they could be taught more about how their department fits into the organisation as a whole. While they could explain how their particular machine operated “inside-out”, they revealed that their job would be more meaningful if they understood the entire process. This can aptly be explained by the comment made by one subject, who had returned to the organisation as a temporary worker for the second time. She explained that she had worked and had been trained in two different departments, namely weaving and final purch. She was glad that she had experience in both, as she could “see how things fitted together”.

Thus, from the answers provided, it is clear that temporary workers receive no additional training, apart from job-specific, in-house training. However, six of the seven subjects interviewed expressed the view that additional skills training, in a sense of learning about other departments and their functions, would be of great benefit, not only for personal gratification, but also for overall organisational performance.

Many theorists, including Rees (1997:31,33) and Arulampalam and Booth (1998:523), state that temporary workers are used for the sole purpose of reducing overhead costs, and since management does not expect these employees to remain for a long period, they see no viable advantages to spend their time and money training them when they yield no foreseeable future return on their investment.

4.2.4 TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES AND THE TRADE UNION

With regards to the above, the subjects were asked as to whether they felt that the trade union provided any sort of benefits to them. In addition, the researcher attempted to discover whether the trade union had any impact on their decision to embark on a legal strike.

Of the seven subjects interviewed, one claimed that she was not aware that the trade union provided any benefits to temporary employees, and that she still “needed to find out about that”. It should be noted that, at the time of the interview, the subject was in her third and final month of the contract.

Another subject indicated that the trade union defended all employees in the company, be they permanent or temporary. The remaining five subjects stated that the trade union provided no benefits to them whatsoever. Some of the responses made were:

- “The trade union has nothing to do with us”.
- “The trade union does nothing for us, but I wish they did. After all, we are all in the same boat and the fact that I am here for three months and someone else is here for three years has nothing to do with it. We should all have the same rights”.

One subject further elaborated on this pertinent issue. The subject is a finishing operator, whose job it is to check the material for any defects. The material is placed on a powerful rolling machine and circulated. The subject went on to show and explain that if she was not careful, her fingers could be injured in the machine, and in the worst possible case, they could actually be broken. The subject stated that if this should happen, she would receive no compensation from the company, and that the trade union would not defend her case, as she stated:

“I am not one of them”.

The above comments go to show that, as the theory suggests, some union officials and shop stewards do not take the grievances of temporary workers seriously. Almost all (except for one) of the subjects interviewed believed that they could not turn to the trade union for advice or to sort out problems that inevitably arise.

Subjects were also asked as to whether they would join their permanent counterparts should they embark on a legal strike. Rees (1997:34) suggests that, although under the new Labour Relations Act, temporary employees are also allowed to embark on a legal strike, they rarely do so. He cites the reason for this as being the fact that they have no organisation to turn to for advice about the correct procedures, and are thus likely to be dismissed due to the fact that they did not follow them.

All of the subjects unanimously agreed that should a legal strike occur, they would not be a part of it. Some of the statements made are outlined below:

- “No, my aim is to get a permanent job here. Even if I did go on a legal strike, my manager would not believe that I am motivated to work and to want to keep my job. He will just think that I am a trouble maker and that will ruin my chances of getting a permanent job here. It would just be stupid of me to go on a strike”.
- “Every contract worker decides whether they want to join the strike or not, but management does not care about your problems. If I go on a strike, they will just end my contract. I cannot afford to be without a job. I am a single mother with three children. A job is a job – I will not risk it”.

One subject, in complete contrast to the others, stated that strikes just lead to fights. He added that regardless of whether a person was a temporary or permanent employee, if they have a problem/grievance, then the related parties should sit down and communicate with each other. He furthermore stated that strikes led to managers having a more pessimistic attitude towards the workers, which could simply result in firing or retrenchments.

Thus, although Rees suggests that temporary workers are unaware of the procedures to be followed, the findings suggest that since all temporary workers interviewed had previously been permanent, they were, in fact, aware of the correct procedures. The reason cited for not embarking on a legal strike with their permanent counterparts was due to the fear of job losses. All subjects stated that, should they embark on a legal strike, cancellation of the contract of employment was inevitable, and thus the potential ramifications of their actions were not considered to be desirable. The most important factor was being able to secure their jobs.

The above issue, namely strikes, relates to two other very pertinent factors, namely what the subjects thought their chances were of receiving permanent employment once their contract had expired, and the reactions of permanent employees towards temporary employees.

In relation to the former issue, all subjects indicated that they wished they could get permanent employment. Four of the subjects stated that it all depended on whether there was any work for them. They realised that they were only called in when demand arose, in other words, when the company was in an upswing and had received a lot of orders.

As two of the subjects stated:

- “As I am on contract, I must work even harder to get permanent work. You need to sell yourself as a good worker so that they will notice you”.
- “I must do a good job, for example, the quality must be right. If they see this, then they will see that I am a good worker and I will then get a permanent job”.

Another subject commented that he had been on contract long enough. He felt that he could perform his duties very well, and that he should be hired as a permanent employee.

The above statements, which relate numerical flexibility to an increase in demand, are in line with Klerck’s argument (1991:45). He states that the primary advantage of temporary employees is that companies can respond to unpredictable fluctuations in market demand without having to meet the costs of a large, permanent workforce. Volodia (1991:48) goes on to say that due to the rapidly changing trading patterns characteristic of the South African and global markets, managers attempt to trim the workforce to the bare minimum in order to cope more effectively during slack periods.

Although Volodia’s (1991:50) research indicates that many permanent workers first worked at the company concerned as temporary employees, the results indicate the opposite to be true. It was found that most temporary workers were permanent, and then left the company for various reasons, such as retrenchments. They then returned to the company in question, and were hired as temporaries. Rees (1997:30) and Horwitz and Franklin (1996:13) state that the central objective for employing temporary employees is ultimately to downsize the workforce and reduce costs, rather than as a means of offering permanent employment.

With regards to the attitudes of permanent workers towards their temporary counterparts, four of the subjects indicated that they experienced no hostility or negative attitudes from the permanent workers. Some of the responses made are indicated below:

- “We all work together as a team”.
- “They (permanent workers) are glad to see that I am back, as they know that I am coming to help them”.

However, three of the subjects interviewed stated that they experienced a certain degree of animosity towards them, mainly due to the fact that, as Klerck (1991:47) has stated, permanent employees see them as a threat to their jobs. Some of the comments made were:

- “They feel threatened that we are cleverer than they are and that we might take their jobs”.
- “Some of them are selfish because they are afraid that we will take their jobs away from them”.

As can be indicated from the above comments, no direct conclusions can be drawn. The results however, do lean more towards opposing the theory of negativity in attitudes between permanent and temporary workers. Four of the seven subjects stated that permanent employees actually welcome their temporary counterparts back, as the workload tends to become too much for them during peak times and thus they welcome the relief and reduced stress.

4.3 MANAGEMENT/SUPERVISORS

4.3.1 THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MARKET

The researcher attempted to investigate the reasons behind and the need for the organisational restructuring which is taking place at many organisations today. In light of this notion, management were asked about the changes occurring in the labour market, as well as the strategies that they are adopting to become more flexible.

The subjects' answers centred mainly around the issue of seasonal fluctuations, particularly within the organisation concerned. Ladieswear, in particular, is produced mainly for the Autumn/Winter market, and it is thus during this period where orders, and consequently production, increases dramatically. Five of the seven subjects interviewed cited the inflexibility of the labour law as the main reason for hiring workers on a temporary basis. This can be explained by the fact that temporary employees are hired only for specific periods of time, whereafter they no longer have any obligation to keep that employee, unless production requirements dictate.

As one subject explains:

“Our situation is such that orders can run out after a period of three months. Due to the inflexibility of the Labour Act, we cannot simply retrench the permanent staff. We have to keep them during these slack periods and pay them, even though they do not really have work to do. With temporary workers, we can just tell them to go”.

From the various responses acquired, subjects felt that the contract system had to come into place to overcome seasonal fluctuations of demand and, as a whole, to reduce the costs of manpower in order to be more globally competitive. One of the subjects cited that, in his belief, the only way to compete effectively would be to directly decrease their costs. In his own words:

“Temporary workers are our most effective weapon to boost profits by decreasing our overheads – it is as simple as that”.

The above arguments are, in no doubt, in line with Thompson and McHugh (1990:199), as well as various other theorists such as Klerck (1991:45), who state that numerical flexibility is used to vary attendance to meet fluctuations and workload, as well as helping to gain control over time-scheduling.

4.3.2 ADVANTAGES OF TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES

From the answers provided, it is clear that the benefits that accrue from making use of temporary workers far outweigh any disadvantages. All seven subjects agreed on the point that the most prominent benefit of temporary employees is the resultant decrease in costs to the organisation. One subject stated that due to the fact that the contract is for a very specific period of time, usually being one to three months, there is no compensation paid at the end of the contract. In his own words:

“Without a doubt, at the end of the day, they (temporary workers) provide us with the cheapest source of labour”.

An equally important argument, and one which has been discussed above, was put forward by four of the subjects. They stated that seasonal changes in the market necessitates rapid production changes, and thus the use of temporary workers affords the organisation the chance to meet the demands of the law of economics – this being to ensure that the supply of workers meets the demands of the marketplace.

Two of the subjects explained that the situation within the South African market has afforded a golden opportunity for organisations to capitalise on. Due to the extremely high levels of unemployment, there are vast numbers of people who will seek any form of employment, be it permanent or temporary, as is aptly expressed by one of the subjects, whose comment I quote:

“The reality is that there are so many people out there looking for work, they will grab any chance they can get with both hands. Since they are desperate, they readily accept our terms”.

Another subject went on to say that the marketplace dictates the rules in that, if the supply of labour far outweighs the demand, then the price of labour decreases. He furthermore added that apart from the internal pressures of having to cope with global competition, external factors, which are dictated by the environment, have also played a major role. Organisations are now freely able to make use of temporary workers, and are able to do so at a low cost.

From the various responses given, there were two central reasons for a reduction in costs which the temporary employee affords the organisation. The first, and probably the most predominant reason given, is that the organisation is under no obligation to provide any benefits to temporary employees. Additional costs such as provident funds, medical aids and pension can, and are avoided. One subject stated that unemployment is received and tax is deducted. He furthermore added that, according to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, a provident fund is only provided after a certain amount of time. Since temporary employees do not fall into this time frame, as their contracts are for a shorter period of time, they are not, by law, entitled to it. This argument is in line with Klerck (1991:46), who states that numerical flexibility enables management to evade non-wage demands, for example pension and provident funds.

Another subject noted that temporary employees provided an “escape” from the rigidities of the labour law. He explained this by stating that should a permanent employee not perform their duty to the satisfaction of the manager, then it would require long, tedious procedures in order to dismiss them. In addition, if the employee became disgruntled, a labour dispute could arise, which would lead to a “waste of time, money and effort”. One subject also stated that the organisation attempted to avoid labour disputes by adding a clause to the contract that permitted the organisation, at any time during the contract period, to give the employee one week’s notice of termination. He stated that this led to a decrease in commitment, on the part of the organisation, to provide full employment during the stated contract period. In his own words:

“That clause is there because we are not even sure if we will have enough work to keep the temporary employee busy during the entire contract period. It protects us from being fully committed to something that is so uncertain”.

The above statements concur with the theories of Thompson and McHugh (1990:199) and Klerck (1991:46), who state that numerical flexibility is a way for the organisation to externalise uncertainty, costs and risks. In addition, the hiring and firing of employees is simply a matter of extending or cancelling a service contract, which avoids industrial action.

A further advantage of a temporary worker, is that the company does not have to spend time and effort training these workers over and beyond the initial basic training which is given to them at the onset of their contract. As one subject stated:

“They (temporary employees) are trained in-house for the specific task that they are contracted to do. No other training is given to these employees”.

However, another subject stated that, although the initial training provided is geared towards a specific operation, he added that thereafter, only temporary workers who are considered for the future would be earmarked for additional training. This training takes place either at another workstation, or externally. In most of the cases, temporary workers start in positions that require minimum training and therefore minimum costs. He added that if future needs do arise, or if these employees perform extremely well, then they will be trained on more complicated machinery. However, he stated that this happened “in about five percent (5%) of the cases”.

One subject stated his opinion very clearly:

“Training is an investment. Temporary workers are not”.

Clearly, the above sentiments are in line with Horwitz, Brosnan and Walsh (1998:27), who state that numerical flexibility allows the employers to avoid extensive training costs.

Valverde, et al (1998:598) argue that temporary workers are not fully committed to their jobs, stating that due to the fact that the company makes a limited commitment to them, they become disinterested and create substantial competitiveness problems. However, Volodia (1991:49) states just the converse. He argues that since temporary workers are only employed for a short period of time, they are more eager than their permanent counterparts to be productive in order to secure further part-time or even permanent employment.

The results of the research do, in fact, support Volodia’s argument. Some of the comments which were made by the subjects were as follows:

- “Since they try to perform to the best of their ability in order to be considered for permanent jobs, their work performance tends to be above average”.
- “Temporary workers have expectations that if the factory will need them, they might get the status of permanent employment. They are therefore very motivated and try to perform their best. Their attendance is usually also far better”.
- “My experiences with temporary workers have been very positive thus far. They pick up the pace of work because they are so keen to get a permanent job”.
- “Temporary workers in this department have caused a thirty percent (30%) improvement in production. I can show you the graphs to prove it!”

A further interesting point was made by one of the subjects interviewed. He stated that, within his particular department, temporary workers have decreased absenteeism, which has led to an improvement in productivity. He explains this by stating that permanent workers can see that, should they be absent, management could cope without them.

He further adds that once workers realise that they are replaceable, then they are more hesitant and “think twice about staying at home when they have a small cold”. Thus, these workers have come to the realisation that should they not look after their job and be responsible, someone else will fill their position.

The subject also stated that the motivational and hence productivity levels of both permanent and temporary workers are on the rise when temporary workers are employed. Firstly, temporary workers wish to gain permanent employment and thus increase their level of commitment. On the other hand, due to the presence of these workers, permanent workers “do not want to put their foot down wrong”. They are therefore motivated to work harder for fear of management remarking that they are not as capable of doing their job as their temporary counterparts.

4.3.3 DISADVANTAGES OF TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES

The researcher found that the disadvantages for the use of temporary workers are few and far between. Of the seven subjects interviewed, four stated that they felt there were no inherent disadvantages to the use of these workers. One subject stated however, that the initial training costs were high in relation to the fact that resources were spent on workers who would only be briefly employed by the organisation. He further noted that as soon as the temporary worker could deduce, from the circumstances, that there was no possibility of securing permanent employment, then the commitment to their work usually declined. Another subject also cited the training costs as a disadvantage. He commented that:

“The only negative aspect with temporary workers is that you have to spend at least two weeks training someone who is inevitably going to leave you, be it in one or three months. To me, that is a waste of time and money”.

He also added that he had heard “quite a few complaints” from temporary workers who stated that they wished they could undergo more training in order to learn about the operation of other departments, and so understand the manufacturing process better. He remarked that although this would be of benefit to these workers, the organisation could not afford to spend time on this, but that it had to concentrate on the bottom line, that is, to keep the operations running smoothly.

Arulampalam and Booth (1998:521) enlarge on the above statement by commenting that numerical flexibility may be detrimental to long - run economic performance if it is associated with the under-valuation of training. Thus, when a worker's level of skill increases, it serves to boost morale and consequently job satisfaction. It is this increase in job satisfaction which ultimately has a positive correlation with increased organisational performance.

4.3.4 TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES: IMPACT ON PERMANENT STAFF AND THE TRADE UNION

Various theorists, including Klerck (1991:47) advocate that temporary workers are often shunned by permanent workers for various reasons, the most predominant being a threat to their jobs. The researcher investigated this notion by asking the subjects how they have viewed the interactions between temporary and permanent employees, as well as the impact of these workers on the trade union itself.

One subject commented that the trade union, on principle, would like to have as many members as possible. He added that if a contract were for a reasonably long period, then the trade union would try to recruit those workers as members. He stated that, within the organisation concerned, workers have the right to join or not to join the trade union. Thus, if the union realises that the contract is only short - term and has very little possibility of being renewed, then they are not interested in putting an effort to convince them to join the union. However, as in the subject's own words:

“If the contract is for a reasonably long period, and if the company tries to take advantage of the worker by, for example, paying less than the minimum wage, then the union tries to voice their opinion and to fight for these workers”.

Two of the subjects stated that temporary workers provide an enormous advantage from managements' point of view. The reason cited for this is that since temporary workers are not unionised, they tend not to become involved in most of the cases and in the internal tension between management and employees at times of negotiations.

According to one subject:

“This is wonderful for us, because if they do not get involved, then they do not want to challenge or fight us so easily. It is so much easier that way”.

Another subject stated that temporary workers, in his experience, do not feel the need to join or to belong to any trade union. He said that this was due to the fact that these workers felt that it would be a waste of their money to contribute to something that would not provide them with any foreseeable benefits. Since their contract period with the company was of a limited nature, they did not feel it necessary or beneficial to be part of the trade union. He further added that some of the temporary workers had not made any form of contact with the trade union, and that they “did not even know who the trade union is”.

With regards to managements’ perceptions of the attitudes of permanent workers towards temporary workers, answers were many and varied. One subject stated that initially, at the onset of the contract system, permanent employees tended to view temporary employees as a threat to their jobs. However, within the organisation concerned, temporary employees are used due to the fluctuations in seasonal demand. In addition, with the advent of the new labour relations laws, permanent workers are beginning to realise that it is increasingly difficult for the organisation to simply dismiss them. Thus, taking these factors into account, as well as the fact that trade unions are well aware of their members rights, permanent workers do not see their temporary counterparts as a threat.

Another subject commented that “permanent workers know the law very well these days”. What is meant by this statement is that the majority of permanent workers are well aware of the fact that should a company dismiss them for certain reasons, such as retrenchment due to operational requirements, they can not be replaced by a temporary worker. This would ultimately be regarded as an unfair labour practice.

Two subjects noted that, in addition to denying that temporary workers were a threat, they stated that permanent workers welcomed them as a source of relief.

This can be shown by a comment made by one subject which reads as follows:

“Permanent workers do not want the temporary workers to leave. Apart from the fact that they are used to them, they realised just how much their workload was being reduced because they were being helped”.

One subject stated that, to a certain extent, permanent workers do see temporaries as a threat. He explains this by stating that temporary employees decrease their chances of overtime, which rewards the workers with added remuneration. The subject furthermore noted that the majority of permanent workers actually worked slower in order to receive overtime pay.

The statement made above is in complete contrast to Volodia’s argument (1991:49). He advocates that managers are finding it increasingly difficult to get workers to agree to work extended hours, and that this is forcing managers to hire temporary workers. As can be seen from the research findings, the majority of workers will deliberately work slower in order to be able to work overtime.

Another subject stated that, in some cases, permanent workers see temporary workers as a threat. He added that this situation came into place when the organisation was to go on short - time, which meant that orders for manufacturing were particularly low. He stated that permanent workers wanted the temporary workers to be dismissed in order for them to be able to work full-time. He also added that permanent workers felt they were a threat during wage negotiations, as they would agree to lower wages, while permanent workers would fight for an increase.

The above comment concurs with Horwitz and Franklin (1996:15), who state that trade unions respond to numerical flexibility with a great deal of scepticism, as it undermines their core reason for existence, that being to ensure the highest possible wages for their members.

4.4 TRADE UNION’S RESPONSE TO NUMERICAL FLEXIBILITY

With regards to the impact that temporary workers have on the organisation, the researcher asked various representatives from the trade union as to their perceptions on the current situation.

All three subjects stated that they were not in favour of temporary workers. This was mainly due to the fact that they felt that the company was exploiting the situation. One of the responses that was made is stated as follows:

“The contract can come to an end at any time. When management needs them (temporary workers), they use them. When they are finished with them, they just tell them to go, even if the contract period has not actually expired. Also, the wages of temporary workers are less than permanent workers”.

Another subject felt that temporary employees should be treated on par with permanent employees, and that they should receive the same benefits. However, he added that these workers were particularly utilised to managements’ advantage and explained this by saying that the organisation made use of temporary employees on wildcat strikes. The subject stated that although this was very problematic and, in fact, a major disadvantage for permanent workers, he felt that the trade union’s major concern was the fact that management “used and abused” these employees.

The third subject stated that he realised that due to the fluctuations in orders, the organisation had to cope by making use of temporary workers. Although he realised that this was a necessity and that the situation is unavoidable, he disagreed with the way that management implemented and made use of these workers. This is evident from the following statement:

“If a temporary worker is not needed anymore, then they (management) just let them go. This is wrong, and in my eyes, its discrimination. They should also make them permanent after three months”.

The researcher investigated the impact that temporary workers have on the trade union’s annual negotiation with management. Two of the three subjects were in agreement that temporary workers bare no impact on their negotiations. One subject stated that since temporary workers are not entitled to the same rights as their permanent counterparts, no discussions or negotiations are needed. However, he added that the trade union needs to be firmer and to stand their ground with regards to the above-mentioned issue. He proposes that the union should force the organisation to sign a three-month contract, with no additional clause stating that the contract can prematurely expire. He furthermore added that they be entitled to the same working rights, such as benefits.

One subject stated that the temporary workers had a direct impact on negotiations with management, in the sense that the union does not represent the interests of the temporary workers. He stated this by providing an example of what had happened at the particular organisation under study. The subject explained that the organisation had experienced an immense decline in its orders and, due to this fact, they had dispensed themselves of the temporary workers. The trade union thereafter held wage negotiations with management, but were only able to secure a four and a half percent (4,5%) wage increase. The subject stated that they were unable to secure the desired seven percent (7%) wage increase due to the fact that management were aware that they had temporary workers at their disposal, and that these workers were willing to work at a minimum, basic rate. He added that:

“Our ability to negotiate is not as strong as it used to be, because temporary workers can just be used, and they accept very low wages”.

As can be established, the above statement is supported by Klerck's (1991:47) argument that flexible workers undermine wages and salaries that have been duly negotiated with management and permanent workers in the face of collective bargaining agreements. However, a point of interest for the researcher was the concern expressed by the subjects with regards to temporary workers' rights, or lack thereof. All three subjects expressed the view that negotiations, be they wages or benefits, should expressly include the rights of all employees, be they permanent or otherwise.

All subjects expressed the willingness to represent the interests of the temporary workers, but stated that this rarely occurred. The main reason cited for this was that temporary workers did not belong to the trade union. One subject stated that the organisation had an agency shop agreement, which effectively meant that all workers, upon joining the organisation, had a choice as to whether they wished to become members of the union. However, he added that thus far, no temporary worker had expressed his or her willingness to become a member.

Another subject expressed the same sentiments and added that all temporary workers were free to join the union. He stated however, that this was not taking place as a result of the fact that temporary workers were unsure as to how long their employment relationship with the organisation would last.

The subject stated that he “understood how they felt” and believed that their immense job insecurity almost precluded them from joining the union, in the sense they did not believe that it could provide any foreseeable benefits under such uncertain terms.

The third subject felt that although temporary workers did not belong to the union, the union nevertheless represented their interests. He commented that:

“Our function and our aims are to represent and protect the interests of all workers. This we will stand by and fully commit ourselves to”.

He furthermore noted that a wage differential is deducted from all workers, be they union members or not. This wage differential is placed in the bargaining council, from which all employees benefit. When asked why the union defends these workers despite them not being members, the subject stated that they had ulterior motives. He explained that should they defend and protect their interests while they are on a contract, then they would “win them over” should they become permanent, and will thus join and strongly support them.

The above viewpoint is in line with Valverde et al (1997:603), who state that although the central objective of any trade union is to protect and enforce its members’ rights, they may also wish to extend their benefits to the temporary workers as well. This is due to the fact that the union is well aware that strength comes in numbers, and that co-opting flexible workers is an obvious advantage.

Many theorists, including Klerck (1991) and Valverde et al (1997) put forward the notion that trade unions have considerable difficulties organising temporary workers, not least because of the fact that there are breakdowns in the communication process. When this was proposed to the trade union representatives, all three were in agreement, to a greater or lesser extent, with the above proposition. One subject felt that this was a vitally important issue with far reaching consequences. He explained that during general meetings, including those concerning wage negotiations, many temporary workers are unable to attend or alternatively, are not interested in attending. The subject added that this becomes problematic because, in his own words:

“If the person comes back as a permanent worker, they will not know their rights. This makes our job more difficult and time consuming, because we have to explain certain issues that we have repeated a hundred times over”.

Another subject was in full agreement and stated that the breakdown in communication was due to the fact that temporary workers are “simply not interested” in attending meetings or giving their viewpoint.

In examining the trade union’s perceptions of the impact of temporary workers on permanent workers, one subject stated that she had witnessed no apparent conflict/tension between the two groups. However, two of the subjects held opposing viewpoints. They stated that should a permanent worker hold a bad employment record, for example, is a bad quality producer, and his temporary counterpart works well, then management informs the union that they wish to replace the permanent worker. The union opposes this by stating that once a temporary worker secures permanent employment, their level of work actually decreases.

One of the most fundamental and crucial arguments put forward by theorists is the notion that temporary workers cause the strike weapon, the union’s primary power base, to become less effective. In light of the various responses given, this notion is particularly real and a cause of great concern. All subjects stated that temporary workers do not join permanent employees when embarking on a strike. As one subject commented:

“They are afraid of losing their jobs. They have no protection if they strike, and management just end their contract”.

Another subject stated that temporary employees are used as scab labour when permanent employees strike. He commented that this negates the use of the strike as a tool for bringing management to the negotiation table. In response to this, the subject stated that permanent employees become angry, which perpetuates violence and physical attacks on the temporary employees. In the past, within the organisation concerned, violent attacks on temporary employees have resulted in death.

One subject stated that the strike is carried out at the temporary employees own risk. However, he added that some permanent employees physically carry the temporary employees out of the premises. He explained that this was done so that management “can not blame the temporary employees, as they were forced to stop work”.

Another subject commented that the trade union is often faced with a dilemma during a strike. He explained that the purpose of a union is to “keep people in jobs”. However, if temporary workers do not join the strike, then their goal will not be achieved.

The union is thus faced with the decision of protecting the interests of their permanent members on the one hand, and ensuring the job security of temporary workers on the other hand. The outcome, he adds, usually rests on protecting their members’ interests, and they thus force temporary employees to join them. Furthermore, the subject added that unions proactively try to protect themselves in these situations by attempting to ensure that temporary workers are not adequately trained. Thus, during times of strikes, management cannot effectively deploy and use temporary workers to replace the striking workers.

The above arguments concur with Rees (1997), Valverde et al (1997) and Klerck (1991), who advocate that the union’s central argument against the use of temporary workers rests on the premise that it serves to dis-unite the workforce and ultimately weaken the union’s power base in its negotiations with management.

4.5 MULTI-SKILLED EMPLOYEES

4.5.1 EDUCATION

4.5.1.1 EMPLOYEES’ PERSPECTIVES

In relation to the notion of whether educational credentials contribute to the likelihood of achieving flexibility within the workplace, subjects were subsequently asked as to whether the company singles out those employees with better/higher educational attainments to undergo multi-skilling. In addition, subjects were asked as to their perceptions regarding the link between education and multi-skilling.

Of the six subjects interviewed, four stated that educational credentials had little to do with being signalled out to undergo multi-skilling. Of these four subjects, three had standard eight qualifications, and one had a standard six qualification. Some of the responses made were:

- “The company looks to see whether you can do your job and how well you can do it. If they see that you work well and learn quickly, they will train you on more machines. Education has nothing to do with it”.
- “These machines are very easy to operate, whether you have a standard six or matric. The only thing that makes a difference is how much you want to learn and how hard you work”.

However, two of the subjects stated that the level of education plays a role in the sense that they are able to understand and to grasp the functioning of the machines far more rapidly. They also added that whilst a person who had a standard six qualification was able to perform and learn to operate the same machines as one who had a standard eight qualification, the person with the lower qualification required more supervision. The subject added that it is easier to train a more educated person as “they have a stronger mind”. Another comment made by one subject was the following:

“Learning to operate different machines is all about attitude”.

The subject explained the above comment by stating that, regardless of an individual’s education, the ability to be multi-skilled relied upon their willingness to learn, to better themselves, and to take on more responsibility. The subject added that a person with a standard six qualification is usually the faster learner, as “they have more to prove” and therefore work and try harder.

In order to prove her point, one subject provided an illustrative example whereby a particular employee within the organisation concerned was presently abroad in Germany learning how to operate two new machines which the organisation intended on purchasing. The subject pointed out that this employee had only acquired a standard two qualification. However, it was the employee’s positive attitude and willingness to learn which caused the organisation to multi-skill him.

4.5.1.2 **MANAGEMENTS'/SUPERVISORS' PERSPECTIVES**

Of the seven subjects interviewed, four stated that there was no positive correlation between education and the ability to be multi-skilled. The main reason cited for this is that the majority of machines that are used are semi-automatic. This ultimately implies that operators require technical skills such as hand-eye coordination rather than an acute understanding of the processes and procedures involved in operating the machines. One subject summed it up by stating that:

“Learning to operate different types of machines, as long as they are relatively simple, is not dependant on an individual’s level of education. An individual with a standard six qualification and one with a standard eight or matric can learn to operate the machine just as effectively. The difference comes in with regards to the level of understanding – the application is the same”.

The sentiments of the above subject go to show that the level of education plays a pivotal role in **understanding** the operations being performed rather than simply being able to mechanistically apply what has been learnt during the training process.

Another subject stated that the level of education only plays a role on the more sophisticated and complicated machinery, as it involved “more than just pushing buttons and ensuring that the machine does not break down”. He stated that, on the simpler and less technically advanced operations, multi-skilling is a product of other capabilities such as coordination, technical aptitude and attitude. This sentiment was confirmed by another subject, who stated that an individual with a higher educational level, such as a matriculant, had “developed their brain a bit more”. He added that although a less educated person was a good physical worker, they were not ideally suitable for multi-skilling, as it involved more responsibility, as well as being able to understand the various operations in greater depth. He stated that multi-skilling often involved reading and learning manuals, as the machinery operated tended to be more technically advanced. An employee with a low level of education would thus have difficulty with these manuals, and would consequently be less suitable for multi-skilling.

However, contrary to the above statements, another subject commented that multi-skilling is primarily based on how a person applies themselves. When multi-skilling an employee, the company takes experience, willingness and capability into account.

He stated that the younger generation, those with a standard six, seven and eight qualification, have more to give to the company and are very eager to learn. The older generation of workers however, resist the concept of multi-skilling, as they are “generally set in their ways and do not wish to change”.

One subject, who is very involved with training the workers, stated that multi-skilling depended on the operator’s age, as well as their ability to absorb information. He stated that a matriculant “learnt the work very quickly”. The main advantage cited by this subject for using a more educated person is that, for example, an operator with a standard six qualification does not want to read the manual and to learn the work themselves. Instead, “they just want the information given to them”. This therefore places more pressure on the worker, as he has to be “a generalist as well as a specialist”.

The results clearly indicate a wide disparity, not only between management and shop floor workers, but also between management themselves. The majority of shop floor workers felt that willingness and attitude were the deciding factors in the successful implementation of multi-skilling. From the various responses given by management, there is agreement with the above statements, to a certain degree. The arguments put forward by Kgobe (1997:74) and Horwitz and Franklin (1996:14) negate the above viewpoints in the sense that they state that the implementation of multi-skilling requires high levels of skills, numeracy and literacy. This argument would only hold true on the more complicated machinery.

However, what has emerged from quite a few managerial responses and two of the shop floor workers, confirms Ishida, Su and Spilerman’s (1997:867) argument, who state that education increases ones cognitive and non-cognitive skills. What this implies is that although the less educated workers can still be multi-skilled, those that are more educated are at a distinct advantage in the sense that they are able to learn more rapidly, and find it easier to grasp certain functions than their less educated counterparts.

4.5.2 TRAINING

4.5.2.1 EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES

In relation to the topic of the importance of in-house training and tertiary qualifications to the likelihood of achieving job mobility and flexibility, subjects were subsequently asked if the organisation places greater emphasis on in-house training. In addition, an attempt was made to establish whether or not in-house training is seen as preferable to other forms of training obtained from tertiary institutions such as universities and technicons.

None of the multi-skilled subjects interviewed hold any form of tertiary qualification yet, despite the fact that they might be regarded as lacking in this area, all felt that as they had been able to be multi-skilled without tertiary qualifications, such qualifications do not play a pivotal role with regards to functional flexibility.

Four of the subjects felt that the multi-skilling which they had undergone did not require any external training, and that the operations of the various machinery were relatively simple and easy to learn to operate. Two of the responses made were:

- "I have learnt to operate three different types of machines. It took me just under two weeks to learn how to do it properly".
- "I do not need any training from the outside. It is very easy to learn to operate two different machines at the same time".

In connection with the above responses, it should be noted that in-house training is conducted by the department's supervisor/foreman, training officer and by the co-workers themselves.

However, two of the subjects stated that external training was provided to them when they underwent multi-skilling. It should be noted that these subjects worked in the dye-house department, which is relatively more complicated than those such as weaving and spinning. Operators are required to have extensive knowledge and background, not only on the physical operation of the machines, but also in terms of textiles, colour-coding and temperature setting.

Both subjects felt that, despite having a higher educational level, external training is a pre-requisite in this particular department. As one subject notes:

“In-house training can only teach you so much. We need to know a lot of the background stuff, such as the quality and types of textiles so that we can decide what needs to be dyed and how”.

When asked which form of training is preferable, namely in-house or external, three of the subjects unanimously agreed that in-house training was all that was required to physically operate the machinery, as it required more coordination rather than mental capability. However, although they stated that internal training was a pre-requisite for multi-skilling, external training, if given, was seen to be as beneficial in the sense that they are able to understand the process as a whole. Some of the responses made were:

- “I will definitely be better in my job if someone comes from the outside to train me”.
- “The training given here is not very good. They should tell you more. All they do is tell you how to work and clean the machine. I want to know more, for example, why must I keep the machine clean? Then I will be more careful, but they just give us the basics”.
- “I would like more training to improve my skills. Just learning more about the company and how it works makes you feel valuable as a person. You feel that you have learnt new skills which makes you feel better about the value of your job”.
- “Even though I can operate different machines, I would like additional, maybe external training. It is nice to learn more about what you are doing and why”.

From the above responses, it is clear that the majority of multi-skilled workers are trained in-house. They do however, express a desire to be trained externally and thus acquire knowledge pertaining to the entire organisational structure and functioning. This corresponds to Bird’s (1990:11) argument that skills-based training should be used to build peoples confidence, to convince workers that they already have skills, that they learn all the time, and that they can develop further.

Bird’s argument is further highlighted by the comments made by two of the subjects in the dye-house department who had received both in-house and external training. They felt that the advantages of receiving external training were two-fold.

Firstly, it taught them more about the product, for example, the different fabrics and finishes, and thus enabled them to more competently carry out their functions. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it taught them why they needed to perform something in a certain way, rather than merely what they had to do. It is the concept of 'why' which leads to an increased understanding and awareness of the work process as a whole, which, as one subject succinctly phrases it: "causes me to be more aware of why I am doing something, not just what I am doing".

Lastly, subjects were asked if, having received in-house training, they were able to apply any new skills acquired to their daily tasks at work, as well as to areas of work that they were previously unable to deal with. These questions were asked in order to ascertain whether the application of skills to an increasingly broad area of work is a reality or if, in fact, the employee retains an increasingly narrow focus within his/her area of work.

Subjects argued that they were subjected to extensive training and retraining which proves to be invaluable in perfecting skills required of them at work. They also felt that the new skills obtained allowed them to operate various different types of machinery on the production line.

4.5.2.2 MANAGERMENTS'/SUPERVISORS' PERSPECTIVES

With regards to the type of training that multi-skilled workers undergo in the organisation concerned, two of the subjects stated that multi-skilled machine operators are trained in-house by the supervisors and foremen. The subjects noted that, should the supervisor detect a high level of capability in one of the operators, then they are subsequently sent for external training. Some of the comments made are stated as follows:

- "If one of the multi-skilled operators shows a high level of skill and can operate complicated machinery, then they are sent for external training and development courses".
- "If you are earmarked to be a head of department, you undergo training and skilling in all sections of the department".

One subject noted that those workers who operate more technically advanced machinery underwent external and in-house training. The external training is essentially used to uplift and broaden their skills base. As the subject stated:

“They have to know the flow of the work process in order to reach the standard required”.

The subject furthermore stated that the training of multi-skilled operators is ongoing, and that the foreman trains them day-to-day in order to motivate them. Some of the external training which does take place concerns aspects such as safety, which is conducted by the safety representatives.

Another subject commented that, within his department, multi-skilled machine operators initially received in-house training which was conducted by the supervisor. However, he found that the multi-skilled operators were frustrated due to the fact that the more machines they operated, the more they wanted to understand the process as a whole. He therefore decided to call in the training officer to explain the technical background of the operational process, in other words, the composition of chemicals in the machines, how they react and what they do.

An interesting point made by one of the subjects is that although extensive in-house training is provided to multi-skilled machine operators, those that are willing and display a marked interest to learn more, are trained on the technical aspects of the machines. The subject noted however, that this additional training is “only given to those that really want to know more and are genuinely interested”.

Another subject noted that, within his department, multi-skilled operators are trained in-house only in order to operate the specific machinery. He adds that external training is not needed as “once they are trained, they are trained”.

The above comments made concerning the fact that external training improves one’s level of skills, correlates with Wood (1989:32). He states that functional flexibility increases a worker’s awareness of aspects of the production system beyond their immediate and narrowly defined role. Heyes and Stuart (1998:464) also argue that training builds confidence and is a way of better understanding ‘why’ rather than ‘how’ things are done.

4.5.3 PROMOTION AND JOB SECURITY

Multi-skilling has often been associated with a sense of increased job security, as well as raising promotional possibilities. The researcher investigated this notion by asking the subjects whether, in their opinion and from their experiences, multi-skilled workers have more job security and a greater chance of promotion.

With regards to the latter question, namely the link between multi-skilling and promotion, five of the six subjects interviewed felt that operating three to four different types of machines and acquiring new skills in each lead to a greater chance of promotion. The main reason cited for this was the fact that the organisation could make use of them in different departments when an unexpected situation arose, such as when one of the workers were absent. Some of the responses are indicated below:

- “Because I have more skills, my supervisor can see that I am a better worker and that I know a lot more. If someone is sick and I can do their work, then I will”.
- “They (the supervisor) know that I do not need such a lot of training if they promote me because I have more skills by operating four different machines. This is good because they do not like to spend a lot of time training”.
- “By being multi-skilled, I have learnt to think more. This is good when they consider you for promotion. They can also use me when someone is absent”.

One subject stated however, that regardless of the fact that she was multi-skilled, she felt that she had become stagnant within her department. She also stated that promotional possibility relied purely on good work performance, that is, the quality of work and how often the person is absent.

Once again, five of the subjects interviewed felt that multi-skilling led to increased job security in the sense that they could easily move between one department to another within the organisation. One subject felt that because she had acquired additional skills, it placed her “one step ahead” of those workers that had not. Another subject felt that, because she was taught so much more, she had gained a lot more knowledge than her work colleagues. She went further on to explain that being multi-skilled had “saved my (her) job” four years previously when the company had retrenched a numerable amount of employees.

Managements' and supervisors' sentiments with regards to the above topic serve to mirror those of their employees. Six of the seven managers/supervisors interviewed felt that a multi-skilled employee had greater job security. One subject stated that multi-skilled workers are "naturally more useful". It is this 'usefulness', in other words, the ability to re-deploy employees when necessary, that leads to an increase in job security. Another subject felt that multi-skilling was used as a selling point to the trade union. The subject explained this by stating that management was able to show the trade union representatives that increasing the skills base of its workforce would produce more knowledgeable employees which would ultimately serve the purpose of improved job security.

Another subject stated that the organisation concerned had a history of restructuring and hence retrenchments. He added that when management review the retrenchment list, those that are multi-skilled have a far greater advantage over those that are not, simply because they are more useful. He added however, that although this was an important deciding factor, the individual's capability and work performance were also taken under due consideration.

One subject felt that multi-skilled workers have a greater chance of promotion. This subject stated that:

"The fact that they have become multi-skilled goes to show that they are more capable. Those that are more capable naturally have a greater chance of promotion".

Another subject felt that multi-skilled workers display more initiative, know more about the job, and have leadership qualities, all of which stand workers in good chance of being promoted. Two subjects however, felt that there was no inherent link between promotion and multi-skilling. One subject felt that an individual's level of skills did not necessarily imply that they could manage a better position. A point of interest to note was that the subject added that the organisation would keep a multi-skilled person in a particular position in order to make a profit, since they were more efficient. The second subject stated that promoted people "stand out" and that multi-skilled individuals did not always fit this description.

As can be deduced from the various responses given, it seems that the majority of management and labour are in agreement as to the notion that multi-skilled workers have not only increased job security, but are more eligible for promotion should such an opportunity arise.

Thompson (1989:220) serves to confirm this by advocating that functional flexibility results in more secure employment prospects, as these workers are willing to move between jobs and to train for new ones. Mather (1996:21) also proposes that multi-skilled workers are provided with an opportunity to realise their full potential by acquiring new skills and thereby extending earning capacity.

4.5.4 REMUNERATION

Mather (1996:27) states that functional flexibility allows employees to extend their earning capacity/potential. The researcher examined this notion by asking both multi-skilled workers and management as to whether functional flexibility does, in reality, lead to a direct increase in remuneration or whether, as Mather states, it leads to a potential future increase in earning capacity.

All multi-skilled employees interviewed claimed that although they had undergone extensive training to operate multiple machinery, this had not been accompanied by any direct increase in remuneration. They furthermore expressed not only great dissatisfaction as a result of this, but also a high level of disappointment. These employees felt that, as one subject phrases it: "Management is taking advantage of us". Some of the other responses made are noted below:

- "We are grateful for the extra training, but management should reward us for putting more effort. It should work both ways".
- "It is not fair. They (management) make us do more work, but will not give us more money".
- "I operate four different machines. Although this is more interesting, I would be much happier if I got more money".

Management confirmed the above and explained the situation by stating that the organisation makes use of a particular grading system. Thus, the organisation grades each employee on the specific machines that they run. The employee is therefore paid according to the grade they are in (which predominately relates to the level of responsibility), rather than to the amount of machines operated.

One subject noted that although a multi-skilled employee does not receive any financial rewards, the company does recognise a multi-skilled worker in the sense that they are often placed in line for a promotion, such as a supervisory position. He further added that the organisation had compiled a bonus system, where employees are financially compensated for good work performance. Due to the fact that multi-skilled employees generally have more responsibility and are capable of working well, they are often in line for, and consequently, receive bonuses.

Another subject noted that, in his viewpoint, multi-skilled employees “should have a special earning bracket”. He stated this because, being very much involved in the training process, he felt that the additional skills acquired, as well as the resultant increase in responsibility, justified financial compensation.

Thus, in light of the above, Mather’s argument holds true to the extent that functional flexibility leads to an increase in earning **potential**. Although employees are not directly compensated within the organisation concerned, they are often signalled out for promotion, which consequently leads to an increase in remuneration.

4.5.5 JOB SATISFACTION

The concept of multi-skilling, as many theorists have pointed out, has undoubtedly led to a greater variety in the work processes. The afore-mentioned is often associated with an increase in job satisfaction and consequently, work performance. In light of this notion, subjects were subsequently asked as to the effects of multi-skilling on the level of job satisfaction. Summarized below are some of the statements made:

- “I like my job now – it is more satisfying”.
- “I like to be kept busy all the time, and operating more than one machine keeps me busy. At least I can not call my work boring”.
- “I am always doing something different and learning new things. I prefer variety”.

- “When you operate one machine, you have nothing to look forward to. I also feel more confident because I can do more”.

The above statements made go to show that multi-skilled workers agree that, by having a wide variety of skills, their sense of confidence increases, which, in turn, creates a positive and favourable attitude towards their work. Furthermore, they noted a renewed sense of interest and enthusiasm which, they stated, impacted directly on their work performance. Routine work, repetitiveness and dull work were all cited by the subjects as the disadvantages of operating only one machine.

However, one subject disagreed with the above comments. She felt that:

“One machine is enough. You do not get so many problems. When you operate a lot of machines, there are more chances of things going wrong, and then you are blamed for it. I do not want that”.

The majority of subjects also felt that supervisors saw them as more trustworthy, and that regular checkups were simply a matter of routine and concern as to whether they experienced any difficulties/problems.

Statements made by management reinforce those of the workers. A statement made by one subject referred to the fact that multi-skilled workers were able to identify and solve problems on their own, and that they developed “lateral thinking”. This was an obvious source of advantage, not merely from their viewpoint, but due to the employee building a sense of confidence and faith, both in him/herself, and in their work. Listed below are two of the comments made by management:

- “These (multi-skilled) workers are more responsible and more reliable. They tend to have more pride in their work and are more committed”.
- “We are showing them that we have faith in them. I believe they respect this and feel a sense of pride. It makes them feel good knowing that they are not doing the same work as everyone else”.

4.5.6 GENERAL COMMENTS

Managers and workers alike were asked as to whether they believed that multi-skilling led to a reduction in the number of people employed. The researcher asked this question in order to examine the impact of functional flexibility on the external labour market.

One manager interviewed claimed that the predominant use of multi-skilling was to reduce absenteeism and thus idle time, as well as to improve productivity by allowing workers to be more versatile. The subject explained this by stating that the number of employees are based on accepted standards. This implies that if a person is doing the job they are supposed to do, then they are already fully utilising their day. However, if the employee has available time, and if another operator is absent, then multi-skilling leads to a reduction in the number of people employed. Another subject stated that, since the operations within the particular organisation were labour intensive, multi-skilled workers simply provided a “breather” when situations “become tight”.

Two of the subjects claimed however, that multi-skilled workers had led to a reduction in the number of people employed in their departments. They added that since retrenchments had taken place, many of the operators were trained to operate several machinery, which reduced the number of people working, and that should order/demand become high, temporary workers would be used as relief.

All six of the multi-skilled employees interviewed claimed that retrenchments had previously occurred due to a lack of orders. However, they stated that when demand went on the rise, management made use of multi-skilled employees, and, when necessary, bought in temporary workers. One subject commented that:

“We used to have sixteen people working in this department. After the last retrenchment, we only have ten. Since most of us are multi-skilled, they have not hired anyone else”.

In view of the above comments, it can be seen that there are both differences and similarities between management and employees’ perceptions regarding the impact of multi-skilling on the workforce population.

The majority of managements viewpoints are in line with Thompson (1989:220,221), who contends that the primary aim of functional flexibility is to reduce idle time, as well as increasing the organisations operating efficiencies. It is this latter concept, namely the improvement in operating efficiencies, which ultimately does affect the number of employees employed, and is in line with the subjects' perceptions. They argue that multi-skilling leads to an improvement in efficiencies by reducing headcount. However, it should be noted that, particularly within one department, multi-skilling did lead to a reduction in the number of people employed.

According to Wilson (1993:85), with the advent of multi-skilling, the status of the craft or single-skilled worker is gradually diminishing. From the various responses provided by different levels of management and supervisors, the above proposition most certainly holds to be true. Listed below are a few of the comments that were made:

- “There is no doubt that multi-skilling is the way of the future and plans are underway to multi-skill as many people as possible”.
- “In order to be competitive these days, and to ensure that your costs are at the minimum, people need to be multi-skilled and understand a bit of everything”.
- “I am not saying that being a professional in one particular area is a bad thing. However, in today’s age, you cannot be so closed-minded. You need to broaden your horizons and learn about things beyond your immediate environment”.
- “Although we will always need single-skilled people, there is more and more talk about multi-skilling. Every company works on a tight budget, and there is no extra money to hire someone to do specific jobs. We need to fully use the people that we already have”.

As can be deduced from the various responses given, organisations are gradually realising the necessity of the proper utilisation of their workforce, and are in agreement as to the fact that a single-skilled person, although not necessarily becoming a thing of the past, is most certainly declining in level of importance.

In addition to the above, the researcher also investigated permanent employees' perceptions regarding the employment of temporary workers, and attempted to ascertain whether they do, in reality, perceive them to be a threat to their job security. Theorists such as Klerck (1991:47) and Kenny (1998:27) contend that permanent workers often shun their temporary counterparts due to the fact that they view them as a threat to their jobs.

The research findings however, do not concur with the above theorists' propositions. Permanent employees predominately view temporary employees as a welcome source who greatly help to diminish their levels of stress experienced during times of excessive orders. Some of the responses made by the permanent employees are indicated below:

- "I only see them as a threat if I can not do my work, but I can so it is not a problem".
- "We actually help them and we know more than them, so they are not a threat".
- "They are just there to help us".
- "Temporary workers are not a threat. They just come and go".
- "There is sometimes too much work here and they help us out. There is good team spirit".

4.5.7 TRADE UNION'S RESPONSE TO FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

The importance and uses of functional flexibility, as well as the consequences thereof, has been an issue which is widely discussed and debated among the trade union and its members.

From the various responses given, the trade union favours multi-skilling from the point of view of the general upliftment of the skills base of the workforce, and the consequent training which is provided to these workers. They believe that it is highly beneficial for the employees, in that the organisation is reducing boredom and fatigue generated by monotonous, routine work.

As one subject states:

“In the past, people used to come to work and do the same thing everyday. They got bored. Now, they are learning new skills, doing different things and consequently learning more about the company in general. This is an advantage for the worker and the company”.

Another subject felt that, due to multi-skilling, workers took more pride in their work. He stated that this was because they felt that management appreciated them more, and signalled them out for good work performance. The added responsibility of looking after several machinery did not deter them, but, in fact, caused them to put more effort into their work so as “not to let management down”. In addition, all three subjects felt that multi-skilling was a necessity in this present day and age, and that increasing competitive pressures required organisations to restructure and to make more productive use of its workforce. They felt that the organisation was heading in the right direction and that, without a multi-skilled workforce, profits would deteriorate, which would ultimately result in job losses.

All three subjects interviewed felt that a multi-skilled worker had more job security. This was due to the fact that, firstly, possessing a variety of skills implied that these workers had an advantage over those that could simply operate one machine. As one subject states:

“Today, in order to keep your job, you need to be better than someone else. Being multi-skilled means that you are better because you have trained more and learnt more”.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, multi-skilled workers are versatile and management recognises this by relying upon their use, often during unforeseen circumstances such as sudden resignations or absenteeism.

With regards as to what kind of training (internal or external) is provided, subjects were subsequently asked as to the type of training that multi-skilled workers undergo. From the responses given, it is clear that these workers receive internal training only, which is usually conducted by the supervisor/foreman and, on the more technically advanced machinery, by the training officer.

One subject stated that she believed that the company should conduct a performance appraisal on each and every employee in each department, and to single out those who obtained a favourable appraisal to undergo additional training to be multi-skilled. She also added that it was vitally important for the company to train the afore-mentioned employees on aspects such as communication, supervision and general management skills.

Two of the subjects stated that external training only took place when the company earmarked the employee to become a foreman or assistant manager. However, they expressed their dissatisfaction with this and added that external training should be given to multi-skilled employees. The reason cited for this, is that since these employees are taking on additional responsibility, they should be made aware of other general supervisory or managerial skills.

A point of contention however, does arise with regards to training, and is related to one of the questions that was proposed, namely, the link between multi-skilling and wages. The subjects felt that although the training and the additional skills acquired were an obvious source of advantage, it was not recognised by the organisation itself in the sense that it was not accompanied by an increase in remuneration. One subject states:

“You only get paid what is negotiated – nothing more”.

The subject proceeds further to say that the trade union disagrees with this, and explains that, for example, should a person be absent, then due to the availability of the multi-skilled employee, production carries on as normal. The subject added that, in some circumstances, the multi-skilled person is actually forced to help. Due to this factor, the trade union believes that multi-skilling should be accompanied by an increase in pay.

Another subject mentioned that only if a multi-skilled person is promoted to a supervisory position, then they receive an increase in pay. However, he stated that:

“A multi-skilled person should get paid more, as that person is willing to move around from one department to the next, and, in some cases, they have to do the dirty work because the company will not hire someone else”.

Another subject reaffirmed the above by stating that:

“The company does not recognise the person as a multi-skilled worker. They do not, for example, give you a certificate after they have trained you. Where is the proof?”

An interesting comment made by one subject is that the level of education, although not directly influencing the ability to be multi-skilled, plays a role in one’s sense of understanding of the required work, which often causes them to be more productive and efficient.

Lastly, the subjects were asked as to whether the training that multi-skilled workers underwent was a product of collective bargaining. All three subjects stated that management did not consult them with regards to the implementation of a training programme. One subject states:

“It is more like a law. The company selects the workers to be multi-skilled and then they tell the supervisor to train them”.

Another subject felt that it was to the company’s advantage should they consult the union with regards to training. He stated that the union “is the closest to the workers” and therefore they know who should be trained and for what.

The comments made by the union tend to correlate with Mather (1996:28) when he advocates that trade unions define functional flexibility as a pay shortage, and states that organisations should recognise and reward the application of newly acquired skills. It also corresponds with Heyes and Stuart’s (1998:459) theory which claims that multi-skilled employees gain additional information, insight and knowledge, thus leading to greater job enrichment.

4.6 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings, which emerged from this study, highlight the fact that, with regards to both numerical and functional flexibility, management and employees’ perceptions differ greatly with respect to various issues such as rate of pay, training and education. It was found that managements’ prerogative to decrease costs often comes at the great expense of worker dissatisfaction.

With regards to the notion of numerical flexibility, all temporary workers interviewed stated that they were not on contract by choice, but due to mitigating circumstances such as retrenchments. It was felt that management used this to their advantage by rewarding them less on financial terms, as well as promoting job insecurity by terminating the contract on short notice.

In the area of functional flexibility, despite the disadvantages mentioned by the trade union, it can be concluded that, whilst management is able to obtain a labour force suited to its changing production requirements, multi-skilled workers experienced a marked increase in job satisfaction. It should be noted that although they were not necessarily financially compensated for their increased workload, the positive experiences of job security and promotional possibilities cannot be overlooked.

As is also evident from the results of the various discussions and interviews held with representatives from all parties involved, the majority of findings in this study correlate closely with literature consulted, as discussed in the literature review chapter.

It is thus evident that there are great sources of dissatisfaction experienced by the majority of temporary and multi-skilled workers consulted. These dissatisfactions need to be addressed. Recommendations will be highlighted in Chapter Five of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the research are two-fold. Firstly, with regards to numerical flexibility, sources of dissatisfaction have arisen, in part, due to pay structures and cancellation of the employment contract at managements' discretion. From the trade union's perspective, the effect of a strike does not often produce the desired outcome, as temporary workers are used to continue with the production line. Thus, numerical flexibility seems to negate the union's central objective, that being to negotiate favourable terms of employment for its workforce.

With regards to functional flexibility, sources of dissatisfaction have arisen mainly due to disagreements over additional remuneration or, as the research results have indicated, from the lack thereof. Thus, based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made for management, employees and the trade union.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON NUMERICAL FLEXIBILITY

- The use of permanent rather than temporary employees when production requirements necessitate the use of over-time. This will serve as a source of motivation for permanent employees.
- Non-cancellation of a contract until the specified time period has elapsed. A shorter contract period could perhaps be used, for example, one or two months for this purpose.
- An equal level of remuneration paid to both permanent and temporary employees.
- An incentive system for temporary workers based on, for example, the amount of output produced or any other scheme which management deem viable.
- The provision of basic benefits, such as a provident fund.

- Provide additional skills training to temporary employees for general employee upliftment.
- The need to negotiate terms and conditions of employment which are more favourable to temporary employees.
- Inform temporary employees of their right to join and to belong to a trade union, as the results indicate that many temporary employees are not aware of their rights to do so.
- The trade union should take the grievances of temporary employees more seriously, perhaps through fortnightly discussions in order to keep abreast of the situation.
- Managers/supervisors should view temporary workers as adaptable and keep a careful watch over those that excel and perhaps offer permanent employment. This would ultimately have the effect of improved motivation and commitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

- Managers should be more aware of the importance of working with their workforce in a participative mode, exploiting the talents and abilities of all in the organisation, rather than a selected few.
- Defining work objectives more clearly.
- Providing opportunities, wherever possible, for multi-skilled workers to participate in making decisions that affect their own job performance.
- Developing, and improving employee training, especially with regards to external training, so that employees are able to gain a wider perspective and knowledge base.
- Provide opportunities for employee development, such as an involvement in the Adult Basic Educational Programme, in order to raise literacy rates.

- Training modules should be developed so that employees can improve themselves. A suggestion would be to post on the company's notice board, a list of the employees who have completed each module. This should be done so that supervisors are also made aware of which employees are trained to do which job. This will help foster a greater measure of delegation, and a greater degree of involvement in the team effort.
- Providing multi-skilled workers additional remuneration as a reward for their increased effort and willingness to move between jobs. If not, then the work should be done in such a way so that it provides regular work for the same number of employees.
- Employers should realise the importance of actively educating employees about the needs for, and the objectives of multi-skilling, in that they need to understand the business and customer needs.
- A skills audit, together with an effective and complete job evaluation system should be conducted in order to implement an effective multi-skilling design.
- Communication between all parties is vitally important to ensure that there are no misconceptions about the programme, as well as to address any grievances.
- Designing a performance-based reward system for multi-skilled workers.

From the recommendations made, the researcher feels that a programme designed for general employee upliftment involving basic education, as well as knowledge and an all-encompassing skills acquisition programme should be designed and implemented. A central, and perhaps ever increasing source of concern is a lack of basic educational credentials which, if properly addressed, would lead to higher levels of efficiency and consequently, productivity.

It is widely acknowledged that the educational standards of the worker population of South Africa are far below the ideal. The main problem caused by poor education is not always a practical problem in a technical sense, as the research results have indicated, in that technical skills can be taught in many operations in a practical, on-the-job way. It is the problem of literacy that is regarded as more serious. A foundation of literacy is needed to establish good communications.

With regards to the notion of all forms of flexibility, be they numerical or functional, the researcher feels that communication across all levels and hierarchies is vitally important to ensure that misconceptions and dissatisfactions do not escalate to the point where productivity has to suffer. Management should rapidly address fears of job losses, which are particularly evident among temporary employees, in order to produce a more motivated and committed workforce.

The researcher is aware that some of the recommendations identified in the study call for fundamental, if not drastic changes, particularly with regards to remuneration and the employment contract. However, it is the belief of the researcher that an attempt to maintain the status quo in the name of profits will undoubtedly produce great stressors and consequently high and rising sources of dissatisfaction among the workforce which will lead, paradoxically, to a fall in productivity.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As the study findings suggest, many sources of dissatisfaction have arisen among both functional and numerically flexible employees. The results have indicated that the unemployment rate in South Africa has consequently allowed a vast number of workers to become passive and submissive, and the notion of commitment and motivation to one's work is seemingly related to factors such as job insecurity, rather than to job satisfaction.

The various experiences of both multi-skilled as well as temporary employees are perhaps complex issues to study, as there are many factors involved, such as the level of education, and much diversity among the individuals themselves. The experiences of both management and employees alike, particularly within a unique context such as South Africa, requires further study and evaluation.

Researchers are thus encouraged to explore this topic further, as well as to examine key areas within this field, such as examining both the rewards and costs, financial or otherwise, of functional and numerical flexibility. In addition, the researcher feels that it is of the utmost importance to gain a more global perspective on this issue, and to examine studies conducted abroad, which have far more experience in terms of implementing flexible employment practices.

Organisations should furthermore identify and maximise opportunities for all employees to be involved in policy development and decision-making. Due to the fact that both processes are initiated and therefore under direct managerial control, it is suggested that there needs to be a careful and constructive examination of the requirements to ensure successful implementation of flexible working practices.

It should also be noted that whilst this study was conducted on a small scale, available literature and past studies conducted suggest that many sources of dissatisfaction still persist and need to be urgently addressed.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences, both of management and their employees, of functional and numerical flexibility within South African organisations.

It should be noted that although this study is limited to two textile organisations in Cape Town, the various findings indicate that both forms of flexibility predominately serve managements' bottom-line agenda, that being to increase profits and to minimise costs. The utilisation of flexible labour, particularly in the numerical category, is due to the prevailing circumstances within the external labour market, that being the high level of unemployment as well as a market necessitating fundamental changes in organisational restructuring.

It was found that, on the numerical side, management ultimately gain the upper hand in being able to utilise labour entirely at their own discretion. The results serve to indicate that while employees are provided with employment and income, it is one characterised by immense job instability, insecurity and uncertainty. The contract period can prematurely end, and while these employees perform the same duties and functions as their permanent counterparts, they are paid a relatively lower wage. In addition, training provided to these workers is job-specific, and no additional effort is made to further motivate these employees through general skills upliftment.

The researcher also found there to be a lack of communication and genuine commitment from the trade union's side, in that no sincere effort is made to co-opt these workers to join the union and thus to gain from the benefits that membership affords them. The results seem to almost negate the union's objective of establishing solidarity by acting as a united front. Thus, such a utilisation of labour entails an employment practice whereby individuals are simply used and disposed of in as cheap a manner as possible. It was also found that, as has previously been stated, commitment and motivation are a product of job insecurity rather than one of genuine job satisfaction. In the researcher's opinion, sacrificing commitment in the name of profits might serve to achieve short-term objectives, but is a recipe for failure if the organisation wishes to sustain long-term growth with minimal employee turnover.

The implementation of a multi-skilling programme however, is one characterised by a mutual relationship from which both parties seem to benefit. It was found that the level of education, although not bearing a direct impact on the ability to be multi-skilled, played a vital role in a sense of understanding of one's work. While management are able to re-deploy workers when production requirements dictate, these workers have received compensating advantages. They experienced a marked increase in job satisfaction, which ultimately translates into improved commitment, motivation and hence productivity.

Although high levels of illiteracy prevail among the workforce, it was found that this did not create impediments to the multi-skilling programme. It should be noted however, that all multi-skilled workers were machine operators who required hands-on, practical in-house training. Those that needed to operate more complicated machinery were however, slightly more educated. Management proposed that this was a source of advantage in that it served to raise their cognitive and non-cognitive skill levels. It should also be noted however, that workers with the same educational attainment might differ in their ability to learn and implement new technologies. This is due to the fact that various educational institutions provide different forms of learning, and thus different skills are developed.

Functional flexibility also affords a worker greater job security and is positively correlated with promotion in the sense that multi-skilled workers progress with more ease between and within various departments should a vacancy arise, as they are not confined to one area of expertise.

Results however, have denoted that a point of contention arises with regards to incentives, financial or otherwise, provided to multi-skilled workers. Management advocate that multi-skilled workers have a greater potential for increased compensation due to increased promotional possibilities. Employees, on the other hand, believe that they should immediately and readily be compensated when performing more and varied tasks.

This research study confirms the view that due to changing national and international labour practices, circumstances and market conditions, functional and numerical flexibility are a necessity and a reality which are needed for organisations to gain and to maintain a competitive advantage. Although the South African textile industry has faced general crisis of competitiveness, the organisation under review has managed to secure its survival by concentrating on niche markets. This has been facilitated by an ongoing re-skilling process, as well as making efficient use of, and exploiting the South African labour market. In light of this, employee motivation and commitment may not necessarily reflect satisfaction with new work regimes, but simply the absence of alternatives.

Managers therefore need to identify inefficiencies in their organisations and in their general work practices. They need to realise that workers are striving for a greater share of the wealth that is created by industries and to accept the need to negotiate terms and conditions of employment which are more favourable from the employee's perspective.

Thus, the problems highlighted in this study reveal the challenges, rather than the barriers to effective workplace reform which all organisations in South Africa currently face. These challenges need to be addressed and overcome in order for organisations to obtain a genuinely committed, motivated and highly skilled workforce and that its most important, yet often undermined human asset, attains its greatest potential.

Lastly, it is hoped that this research, rather than providing conclusive answers, will stimulate greater thinking and further studies in this fascinating, turbulent and diverse field.

APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MANAGEMENT/SUPERVISORS

1. Please state your position within the company.
2. What needs and changes have occurred within South Africa that has caused more temporary and multi-skilled workers to be hired?
3. What strategies has the organisation adopted to become more flexible regarding its labour force?
4. What benefits do temporary workers provide to the organisation?
5. How would you compare the wage of a temporary worker with that of a permanent worker?
6. What benefits do you provide to temporary workers?
7. What are the levels of motivation and commitment of temporary workers as compared to that of permanent workers?
8. What, in your opinion, are the impact of temporary workers on the trade union in this company?
9. What, in your opinion, are the advantages and disadvantages of the use of temporary workers?
10. What usually happens once a temporary worker's contract expires?

11. What type of training is given to temporary workers? How would you compare the training given to temporary workers as compared to that of permanent workers?
12. Do you feel that temporary workers can be useful in the future of the organisation, or do you see them as disposable?
13. What types of jobs do temporary workers do, for example, is it routine/repetitive work?
14. Do you think that permanent workers view temporary workers as a threat to their jobs?
15. Is education one of your main criteria for choosing employees to undergo multi-skilling?
16. What type of training do your multi-skilled workers undergo?
17. Does the company place more emphasis on multi-skilling the machine operators or higher level employees, for example, supervisors?
18. In your opinion, are employees with higher educational qualifications more suitable for multi-skilling? Is it easier to multi-skill an educated employee?
19. In your opinion, is in-house training seen as preferable to other forms of training, for example, universities and technicons?
20. Do you believe that multi-skilled workers lead to a reduction in the number of people employed?
21. Are multi-skilled workers in your organisation paid more than those that are not multi-skilled?
22. In your opinion, do multi-skilled workers have more job security? Why or why not?
23. Do multi-skilled workers have a greater chance of being promoted? Please give reasons.

24. Do you believe that multi-skilled workers are more satisfied in their jobs?
25. In your opinion, is the concept of a single-skilled person becoming something of the past?
26. As a supervisor/manager, do you need to control multi-skilled workers more strictly because they have more to do than the average worker?
27. In what ways have multi-skilled and temporary workers contributed towards increasing organisational performance?

APPENDIX TWO

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MULTI-SKILLED EMPLOYEES

1. Please state your position within the company.
2. Do you believe that the company gives priority to those with more education to be trained on more than one type of machine?
3. In your opinion, do you need in-house or external training to be multi-skilled?
4. What type of training have you received when learning to operate several different types of machinery?
5. Did the skills that you acquired during training allow you to apply them in other areas of your work?
6. Do you see any link between education and the ability to be multi-skilled, in other words, do you think that having a higher education makes it easier to learn to be multi-skilled?
7. Do you believe that being multi-skilled leads to a reduction in the number of people employed?
8. Do you get paid more because you are multi-skilled?
9. Do you believe that your job is more secure because you are multi-skilled?
10. Do you believe that you have a greater chance of being promoted due to the fact that you are multi-skilled?
11. Has multi-skilling led to increased job satisfaction?

12. Do you feel that temporary workers are a threat to your job?
13. By being multi-skilled, do you believe that the supervisor gives you more freedom in your job and monitors you less than others because they believe that you can do your job better?

APPENDIX THREE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES

1. Please state your position in this company.
2. Why did you become a temporary worker, in other words, was it by choice that you are on contract?
3. Does being a temporary worker suit you, for example, does it give you more freedom to move and experiment with different jobs, or would you prefer to become a permanent worker?
4. Do you receive any benefits, for example, pension or medical aid? How do you feel about that?
5. In your opinion, how does the pay of temporary workers compare with that of permanent workers? Do you believe that you are paid more or less than a permanent employee?
6. In your opinion, how do permanent employees feel about you being here? Why do you say this?
7. Do you find your work stimulating/rewarding?
8. During your time as a temporary worker, have you received any training? If so, then what type of training have you received? What type of training would you like to receive?
9. What do you think your chances are of getting permanent employment in this company once your contract is over?
10. Does the trade union provide any benefits to you? How do you feel about that?

11. If permanent workers went on a legal strike, would you join them? Why?

APPENDIX FOUR

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE TRADE UNION

REPRESENTATIVES

1. What is your general view on temporary workers?
2. What impact do temporary workers have on your annual negotiations with management?
3. To what extent do you represent the interests of the temporary workers?
4. How do you see temporary workers affecting the security of permanent workers jobs?
5. Are you finding it more difficult to communicate with temporary workers?
6. Do you believe/find that during a legal strike, temporary workers will support you? Does management use temporary workers to replace you when you strike?
7. Do you think that multi-skilled workers have more job security?
8. Do multi-skilled workers get paid more than those that are not?
9. What type of training is given to multi-skilled workers?
10. Was this training a product of collective bargaining? In other words, were you consulted about its implementation with management?
11. What, in your opinion, are the advantages and disadvantages of being multi-skilled?

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