

# THE MEANING OF WORKING IN BLACK AND WHITE MANAGERIAL SAMPLES WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT

M L WATKINS

Department of Industrial Psychology  
University of South Africa

## OPSOMMING

Die verdeling en skepping van welvaart is waarskynlik die belangrikste uitdagings wat die Suid-Afrikaanse regering die hoof moet bied. Op ondernemingsvlak sal daar dus van elke werknemer verwag word om verantwoordelikheid vir 'n betekenisvolle bydrae tot organisasie-sukses te aanvaar. Die vorming van multi-kulturele groepe skep relevansie vir die bestudering van die betekenis van werk, en spesifiek die sin vir geregtigheid,<sup>1</sup> as 'n manifestasie van 'n behoefte aan billikheid. In hierdie studie is daar gevind dat swart bestuurders 'n sterker sin vir geregtigheid as hulle wit kollegas ervaar. Dit word aan deprivasie in die verlede toegeskryf. Ofskoon regstellende aksie as 'n kompenserende maatreeël geïmplementeer sou kon word, skep die leemtes hieraan verbonde 'n behoefte aan oorweging van alternatiewe moontlikhede. Daar word derhalwe aanbeveel dat bestuurstelsels herontwerp word om gelykheid in die werkplek te bevorder.

## ABSTRACT

Wealth distribution and wealth creation are probably the most important challenges to be faced by South African government. At the organisational level, it will be required of each employee to accept responsibility for contributing to organisational success. The formation of multi-cultural work teams gives relevance to the study of meaning of work and specifically, to the sense of entitlement as a manifestation of a need for equity. In this study it was found that black managers experience a stronger sense of entitlement than their white colleagues, which is ascribed to deprivation in the past. Although affirmative action could be implemented as a compensatory measure, the caveats involved make it imperative to consider other alternatives. Hence, it is proposed that management systems should be redesigned to promote egalitarianism in the workplace.

Wealth distribution and wealth generation are the most challenging problems facing the South African government at the moment. Government has already proposed wealth distribution programmes to favour the disadvantaged, to be funded by the advantaged, in an attempt to promote social equity. On the other hand, economists strive towards allowing capital to flow freely into the most productive investments. This creates a trade-off between equality and efficiency in which gain in one area may lead to incremental loss in the other (cf. Mitchell, Tetlock, Mellers & Ordóñez, 1993). Political change, followed by the demand to implement affirmative action as a compensatory measure for previous deprivation in South Africa, will probably create the challenge of maintaining balance between equity and efficiency in industry. One of the most important ways of attaining this, is by preparing employees to accept responsibility for their contributions to organisational effectiveness. The creation of multi-cultural work teams, however, raises many questions regarding similarities and differences between the psychological meaning which different groups associate with working as a life-role.

The functional significance of work, as a valuable income-generating activity, is of obvious importance for the improvement of quality of life. The psychological meaning of work, however, refers to the definitions, significance, beliefs and values which individuals and significant groups attach to the idea of working. In this approach to the study of work, it is of particular interest to pay attention to, for example, the centrality of working relative to other life-roles among different groups, the extent to which individuals feel entitled to employment, as opposed to feeling obliged to perform certain tasks, the outcomes people seek from working, and the extent to which groups differ with respect to their definitions of work roles. In this field of study, the concept "meaning of working" is used to emphasize work as a psychological, ongoing human activity, rather than a functional role.

Economic success in Japan and Germany, and the socio-psychological problems in many Third World countries, inspired Professor George W. England to play a leading role in forming an international research team to study the psychological meaning of working in various societies. The original project was aimed at a study of meanings people attach to work as one of their most important life roles. The team assessed these meanings in eight industrialised countries (Belgium, Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, USA, and Yugoslavia) among approximately 14,700 employees of their respective work forces. The research represented a collaborative team effort by 14 team members and even more supporting institutions. The most important questions they sought to answer, were: How important and significant is working in people's lives? What are the general outcomes people seek from working? and What level of "rights" and "duties" beliefs about working exist in various societies? (G.W. England, personal communication, 1993). This gave rise to numerous studies on (a) the meanings which individuals and significant groups associate with working (b) how meaning of working manifests itself in different societies (c) the possible consequences of those meanings for individuals, organisations and societies; and (d) the similarities and differences between the development and manifestation of meaning of working phenomena in different countries (MOW International Research Team, 1987).

The team started off by developing a heuristic model, based on the integration of previous research on the topic. They reached the conclusion that conditional variables (e.g. personal and family-related aspects, job and career history, and socio-economic environment) tend to stimulate the formation of:

- Work centrality, which reflects the importance of having and performing work, relative to other life roles regarding leisure, community, religion and family;
- Valued work outcomes, which include expressive goals such as interesting work, variety and autonomy, economic goals (eg. pay, security and promotion) and comfort goals such as convenient working hours and physical conditions;

Requests for reprints should be addressed to M.L. Watkins, Department of Industrial Psychology, University of South Africa, P.O. Box 392, Pretoria 0001.  
<sup>1</sup>"geregtigheid" verskil van "geregtigheid" wat verwoys na die sin om regverdigheid te laat geskied.

- Work-role identification, which can be sub-divided into a self-serving role set consisting of *inter alia* occupational and interpersonal roles, and an organisation-serving role set which includes task and company roles; and
- of specific interest for this study, societal norms about working which includes (a) *entitlement* as a manifestation of what one should expect from working with regard to being trained, employed, performing meaningful work etc., and (b) *obligation*, which refers to what should be expected from one in working by, for example contributing to society, being creative and valuing the type of work that is done (cf. MOW International Research Team, 1987).

By 1987, forty research papers had been published from the MOW research, followed by the enhancement of further research by conducting replication studies among some of the nations previously referred to, and by extending the research to other nations (G.W. England, personal communication, 1993). Professor England visited South Africa in 1993 to facilitate a national study on meaning of working patterns in the country.

Quintenilla and England (1994) recently focussed on the underlying expectations which regulate the interaction between employees and organisations. Based on Rousseau's classical work in the field of sociology, the authors describe societal norms in the context of a social contract from which the rights and obligations of the participants emerge. This forms perceptions of "what is fair and what isn't". Norms are, therefore, informative of expected behaviour as well as evaluative in terms of the behavioural reactions to be expected. Social norms about working are classified into content domains which focus on the nature of the behaviour required (obligations) and the underlying feelings related to behavioural requirements (entitlement). This includes (a) the duty to work versus the right to be employed, (b) employees' entitlement to meaningful work versus an obligation to, themselves, provide meaning or sense to work content (c) entitlement to expect management to initiate work improvements (top-down) versus the obligation to initiate improvements (bottom-up) (d) the right to be retrained and re-employed when skills and abilities become outdated versus the duty to provide for future needs, and (e) the right to expect the educational system to prepare people for meaningful jobs versus the duty to perform work, irrespective of the simplicity involved in the nature thereof.

Bearing in mind that feelings of entitlement are closely related to a need for fairness to prevail (see Lansberg, 1989), it is imperative also to pay attention to the psychology of justice. From a cognitive psychology viewpoint, Adams's (1965) equity theory explains fairness or distributive justice in terms of perceived, comparable or incomparable input-output ratios, based on interpersonal comparisons. The notion that individuals should be rewarded proportionally according to their contributions or inputs, is the only relevant standards for justice. Although a great deal of research has been done on equity theory, researchers only recently realised that: (a) intra-personal comparisons play an important role in an individual's evaluation of fairness of rewards received, based on past history of rewards received for outputs; and (b) persons tend to compare themselves with reference groups, which can be divided into in-groups (similar) and out-groups (dissimilar). Based on these comparisons, individuals develop internal, subjective standards or criteria to evaluate their own input-output ratios from which feelings of entitlement emerge (see Major, McFarlin & Gagnon, 1984; Seta & Seta, 1982).

According to Lansberg (1989), a three-step cognitive process explains how individuals develop perceptions of what they are entitled to receive from an organisation. The first step entails perceptual segmentation of the work environment into social categories or groups. Each individual functions in an organisational structure which differentiates between various work teams for example, personnel officers, sales people, managers, and operators. Collectively, these groups contri-

bute to the attainment of common goals. Secondly, individuals identify with a specific category by becoming a member of a group, followed by a third process of social comparison in which they compare themselves with: (a) members of their own group or referent similars; and (b) members of other groups or referent dissimilars. Seta and Seta (1982) added a further dimension to this by suggesting that intra-personal standards are also compared with actual rewards. These standards are based on previous experience of congruence between a sense of entitlement and distributional outcomes. Callahan-Levy and Messé (1979) conducted an experiment in which male and female subjects (who have traditionally received less rewards than males) were requested to perform a specific task for a specified period of time, and privately to pay themselves what they considered to be fair remuneration. They found that female subjects tended to pay themselves less money than the males, although no significant differences between the groups' assessment of their own performances were recorded.

Social comparison with referent "similar" entails a broad evaluation of similarity between the input-output ratios within the same group. Social contrasting, by way of comparison with referent "dissimilar" (groups in other departments), however, involves various criteria which may or may not legitimise inequality. For example, if an operator should contrast his or her rewards with a group of engineers, factors such as experience, qualifications and work complexity may well legitimise differential rewards. Should the operator never have had the experience of receiving higher rewards than engineers in the past, (s)he may very well not feel entitled to the same rewards than engineers.

Social comparison and social contrasting link two important aspects of the Greek and Roman approaches to justice, viz: "the equal treatment of equals" and "to give each his or her due" (cf. Popper, 1966). It is generally known that, although black employees were probably treated (rewarded) as equals among their own black reference groups in the past, discrepancies between rewards of black and white employees performing the same work prevailed.

Considering the experiment with the males and their female counterparts who, based on previous experience, felt less entitled to the same rewards as men, it becomes evident why labour unrest was virtually unknown in South African industry about 20 to 30 years ago. Marx (1967, p. 49) quoted a freed slave who once said: "Beat and cuff your slave, keep him hungry and spiritless, and he will follow his master like a dog, but feed and clothe him well, work him moderately, surround him with physical comfort, and dreams of freedom intrude". Laboratory experiments have shown that people tend to become so distressed with inequitable distribution of rewards, and that they are often prepared to sacrifice optimal monetary gain to restore equality (Schmitt & Marwell, 1972).

Bearing in mind that very few articles on this addition to equity theory have been published, it is evident that research on the role intra-personal and inter-group comparisons in equity, is still in an early phase and that it needs to be fully explored.

In view of South Africa's history of discrimination, it remains uncertain whether government will legalise affirmative action as a compensatory measure for previous deprivation. Affirmative action is a policy which was originally designed to reduce racial injustice in the United States of America. In most countries where the policy has been implemented, organisations are required by law to employ, develop, remunerate and retain members of protected classes by means of quotas, often leading to tokenism. Because of the many caveats involved in legalising the policy, an array of possible rationales for addressing the problem in South Africa has been suggested by academics and management consultants. These ranged from brute-force attempts at empowerment to the creation of so-

called "equal opportunities" beyond any benefit to whom the policy should be aimed at. Affirmative action is, irrespective of how it is shaped, aimed at the advancement of particular groups. This is likely to create unfairness, reversed discrimination and preferential treatment, instead of equal entitlement to distributive rewards. Although black managers should experience a stronger sense of entitlement than their white colleagues, affirmative action as a compensatory measure for deprivation, fails to achieve the aims of restoring equity in the workplace. This study, therefore, focuses an alternative option created by recent studies on equity and organisation theory aimed at creating egalitarianism in the workplace. (See Crosby and Clayton, 1990).

**METHOD**

**Research instrument**

The Societal norms sub-scale of the Meaning of Working-questionnaire (MOW International Team, 1987), was used to measure the content domains of entitlement and obligation. The instrument consists of 10 statements with four-point scales (ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"), five of which are intended to measure obligation, and the rest to measure entitlement.

**Subjects**

As part of a larger research project on the performance values of white and black managers, the questionnaire was posted to 1 500 employees in three large South African organisations which are known for their progress in attempts at developing black managers, affirmative action, and integration of black managers into their respective organisational structures. Of the 542 questionnaires that were returned, 351 were completed by white and 136 by black managers. Besides the 32 invalid questionnaires, the rest were received from Indian and Coloured managers and they were not included in the study. With regard to qualifications, 56,8% of the sample of white managers and 49,9% of the black managers had obtained post-matric qualifications, and the remainder had matriculation certificates. A random sample of 136 white managers was drawn from the larger sample to be compared with the 136 black managers.

**Procedure**

The Linear Structural Analysis (LISREL viii) program

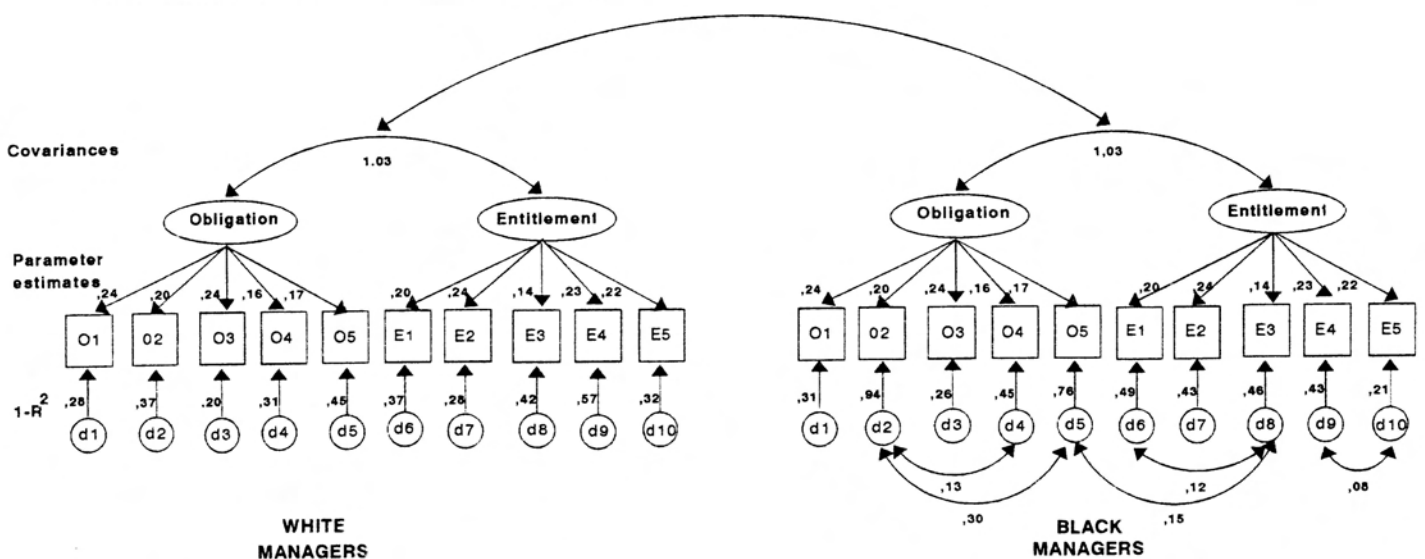
(Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993) was used to analyse the theoretical model (entitlement and obligation) with its underlying content domains among the samples of white and black managers. The program offers a useful methodological approach for analysing data with measurement errors which, especially in cross-cultural studies, need to be controlled.

The psychometric properties of the Societal norms-measure were investigated by comparing the covariances of the latent variables (entitlement and obligation), the factor loadings or parameter estimates of the latent variables on the manifest variables (questionnaire-items), and the error variances (measurement errors) in each sample. The hypothesis was stated that the covariances between the latent variables and their factor loadings on the manifest variables (parameter estimates) are equal, but that the error variances differ due to extraneous factors such as cultural diversity, tenure, age and so on. LISREL-output produces various goodness-of-fit statistics and modification indices which suggest ways to improve the overall fit between the data of the samples. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were also determined for each sample.

The means of the latent variables were then estimated for both samples. Latent variables have no intrinsic scales or units of measurement, therefore, it is assumed that the manifest variables are measured in deviations from their means which are set to zero in one group. The means of the latent variables in the second group are then estimated and indicated as the extent to which they differ from zero. In view of the literature review, the hypothesis that black respondents should yield higher scores on the entitlement measures than their white colleagues in the workplace, was stated.

**RESULTS**

The initial test for equality of factor structures revealed poor fit between the data of the samples, which probably can be ascribed to the presence of large measurement errors in the data of the black managers. The modification indices were, therefore, followed by correlating some of the error variances (see figure 1) in the data of the sample of black managers to attain a close fit with the data of the white managers. The results yielded meaningful ( $p < 0,01$ ) parameter estimates for all manifest variables in both samples.



$P < 0,01$ ; all parameter estimates

**Figure 1: Structural analysis of entitlement and obligation in white and black managerial samples**

The goodness-of-fit statistics (Table 1) indicate close fit between the data of the samples. Therefore, the hypothesis that the covariances between the latent variables and their factor load-

ings on the manifest variables (parameter estimates) are equal, but that the error variances differ due to extraneous factors, is not rejected.

**TABLE 1**  
**GOODNESS-OF-FIT STATISTICS**

	Fit indices	0,90 confidence intervals
Population discrepancy function value (FO)	0,084	0,0043; 0,19
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0,034	0,0076; 0,052
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	0,94	

Bearing in mind that the Societal norms-scale is essentially a sub-scale of the Meaning of Working-questionnaire which is aimed at analysing group data, acceptable Alpha Cronbach coefficients of 0,60 among white managers, and 0,58 among black managers, were measured.

The means of the latent variables were estimated for each sample which, as expected, showed no meaningful difference between samples on the obligation sub-scale (mean vector = 0,05;  $t = 1,60$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ). The mean of the entitlement sub-scale for black respondents were, however, found to be meaningfully larger than zero (mean vector = 0,28;  $t = 5,22$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ). The hypothesis that black respondents yield higher scores on the entitlement measures than their white colleagues in the workplace can, therefore, not be rejected.

## DISCUSSION

In South Africa, the very fact that affirmative action requires that race and gender be considered as employment and enhancement criteria, not only implies contravention of the constitution and, specifically, the Bill of Rights, but is bound to stimulate rather than reduce prejudice towards the intended beneficiaries. This could lead to further discrimination, based on stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies about the target person's ability to perform. This scenario must give rise to devastating intra- and interpersonal effects. Equal opportunity, on the other hand, will only suffice in a perfect society where initial conditions are equalised, but this remains to be seen (see Crosby & Clayton, 1990).

In view of a demonstrable history of discrimination, a dire need for corrective action by means of empowerment, upliftment and equality exists in South Africa. Recent developments relating to equity theory hold promising implications for the creation of equity in the workplace, which steers away from policy-based affirmative action. Lansberg (1989) for example, identified organisation structure, composition, and size, as some of the most important factors which tend to influence the process of social categorisation, from which egalitarian or non-egalitarian perceptions of entitlement tend to emerge.

*Organisation structure* reflects the differentiation of tasks, which influences the inclusiveness of group categories. An array of organisational typologies are presented in the literature in which organisations are broadly classified as (a) closed, bureaucratic systems with a clear chain of command, centralized authority and exclusivity, or (b) open, organic systems which require a great deal of cooperation and inclusiveness. Srivasta and Cooperrider (1986) for example, found a close relation between an organic structure and an inclusive, egalitarian culture. This was supported by Yuchtman (1972), who found an inverse relation between bureaucracy and an egalitarian ethos. This notion is closely related to the South African government's aims of national unity in which it is taken into account that a melting pot of South African ethnic groups are entitled to participative, "transparent", decision making processes. This clearly steers away from a traditional, archaic, closed systems approach based on the principles of classical organisation theory with its theoretical underpinnings in traditional capitalistic ethic of profit maximisation. It should be borne in mind that a social ethic, aimed

at group participation and socio-cultural influences on individual welfare, has grown in no small measure in the United States of America (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1981). This raises the question whether transition in South Africa is really leading to devastating "inefficiency" or whether high levels of industrial efficiency are, merely to some extent, being forfeited to restore balance between efficiency and equity in society.

*Composition* refers to differentiation between groups by way of demographic factors for example, race, age and gender. Employees tend to view themselves as entitled to the same rights and privileges as members of the reference group with similar demographical characteristics (cf. Goodman, 1976). It, therefore, seems logical to promote homogeneity to enhance inclusiveness and egalitarian entitlement. On the other hand, Kanter's (in Lansberg, 1989) work suggests that this may lead to a situation in which powerful, dominant groups strive to legitimise criteria which entitle them to a larger share of rewards than less powerful groups. Although multicultural groups hold potential for non-egalitarianism and inter- and intra-personal conflict, an overlap between biographical characteristics, for example, white male employees working with black female colleagues, sharpens similarities between members of in-groups.

*Organisational size* is inversely related to egalitarian perceptions in that the larger organisations become, the more in- and outgroups are created. An increase in differentiation creates more social categories, unequal perceptions of entitlement, non-egalitarian distribution of rewards, and the potential for conflict. However, large organisations in South Africa seem to be moving towards a "benign" cycle of creating simple technology to meet basic individual needs, for example, the establishment of community banks and small business corporations which are able to succeed on basic managerial practices, adult education in industry and even basic training at tertiary level, to prepare people for higher education.

Srivasta and Cooperrider (1986) elaborated on the above aspects by proposing an egalitarian organisation theory. Based on the notion of inclusion, the model provides for each organisation member actively to participate and accept responsibility for management decisions. Organisational decisions, plans and policies, therefore, become morally binding on all members in a climate of mutual involvement, co-determination, and the absence of a social hierarchy of unilateral authority. Interaction between organisation members are increased, and optimism towards an uncertain future is created. They identified the following catalytic features of an egalitarian organisation:

- Power is not person- or position-centered, but a situational and interactive phenomenon which is shared in a system of participative management.
- The formal hierarchy of authority, in which employees surrender their own judgements, disappears. The chain of command is replaced by a "chain-of-consent".
- Shared governance creates continuous interaction between employees which manifests itself in a consensus system with many political forums, in the form of inter- and intra-departmental committees with rotating leadership and membership roles.
- An egalitarian organisation implies face on meeting of differences, rather than trying to level those differences. Members are treated as equals and valuable human resources who can potentially empower or disempower the group.
- An egalitarian system is not without rules, but those rules are governed by common consent which are binding on all organisation members.

The egalitarian organisation is, therefore, a permeable, open system of interactions which manifests itself in increased commitment to the attainment of organisational goals and excellence. Bearing in mind the caveats concerning the ability of in affirmative action to create equality in the workplace, an organisation structure which allows for participation and consent is more likely to result in equal entitlement to distributive rewards. The findings of this study offer interesting, but challenging implications for management development in South Africa. Something akin to a paradigm shift from performing mechanistic management functions to a dynamic, facilitative approach to the management of multi-cultural group behaviour, will be required to create egalitarianism in the workplace.

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