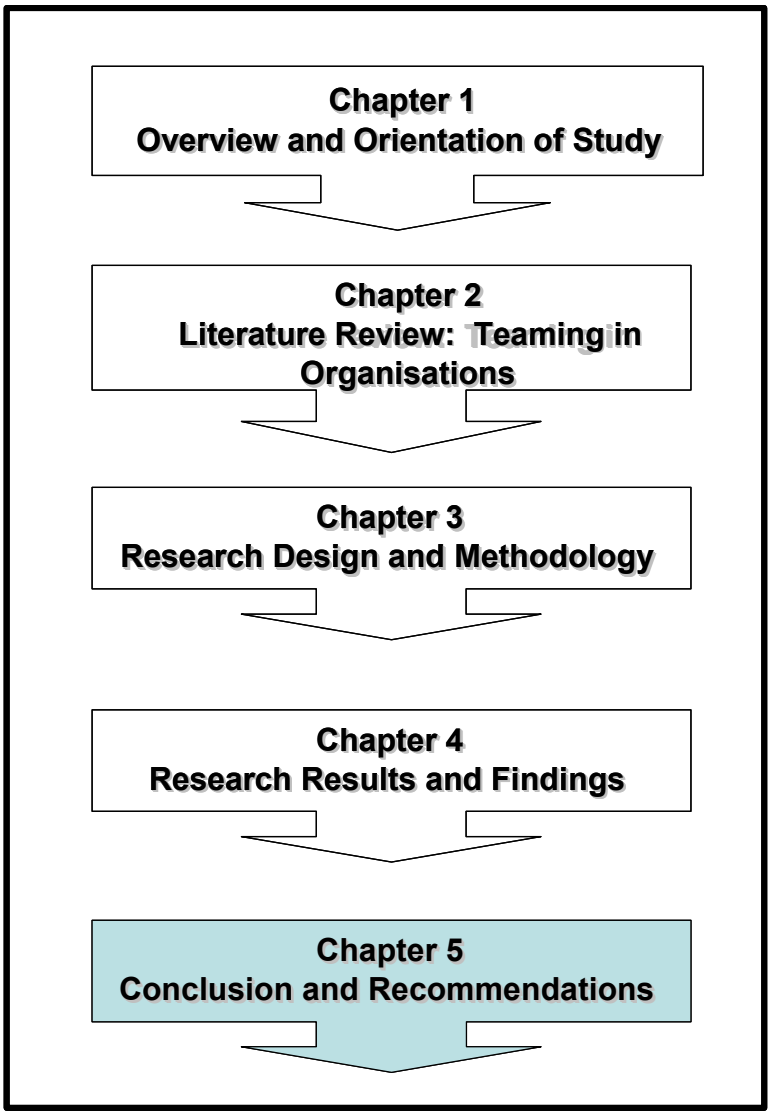
CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



5.1 INTRODUCTION

A Douglas Adams character jokingly commented: "I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I intended to be." In this final chapter, I look back at the research journey, highlight some important ideas and thoughts, make some recommendations and attempt to provide a logical closure to the research process.

> *♥At this point, I need to reflect on the fact that some of my references might be seen as rather "commercial". I once again want to state that the purpose of this study was to understand expectations of teamwork in contemporary organisations, thus leaving me no choice than to refer to sound academic but also more contemporary views of both teams and teamwork.*

In **Chapter 1**, I formulated the main research question, namely: "What are the expectations of teamwork on multiple levels in selected 21st century organisations?" I also shared my intention to investigate the following sub-questions:

- How do South African employees experience teams and teamwork?
- What do teams regard as critical success factors in the team development processes?

I indicated the rationale for and value of the study. I also explained that a qualitative, interpretivist approach was best suited to answer my research question.

Konyana-Bam and Imenda (2000:2) remarked:

> The world of research, especially in the developing world, continues to be dominated by research traditions and paradigms that emphasize quantitative methods. While recognizing the need for and importance of such methods, researchers in many parts of the world are practicing and developing other approaches qualitative, ethnographic and anthropological in nature. Such research is based on quite different

♥ From the researcher's diary.

traditions, paradigms and definitions of knowledge and is quite different in its characteristics, small in scale, but set within a broad contextual framework, intimate and intensive in method, and richly descriptive in outcome.

The above principles were taken into account in this study.

I also positioned my study within the context of Organisational Behaviour as a field of study. I laid down specific ethical guidelines and noted my personal regard for confidentiality, informed consent, emotional safety, privacy, and academic objectivity.

Chapter 2 was devoted to a review of relevant literature in the field of teams and teamwork. I reviewed definitions of teams, looked at team roles, team development, and team building, but clearly indicated that – since teams have been studied for so long – it was impossible to cover all academic points of view.

In **Chapter 3,** my selection of a qualitative approach was justified, and the role I as the researcher played in this process was clarified. The sampling method and how it evolved from typical case sampling to snowball or chain sampling was discussed. The data collection methods were then introduced: personal, in-depth interviews on the one hand, and focus group interviews on the other. The recording of the interviews, the management of the data and the coding process were discussed in detail.

In **Chapter 4,** I analysed the four main themes that emerged from the personal and focus group interviews and deduced some answers to my research questions. As already indicated, the themes were constructed by means of an inductive analysis. I used Weft QDA and Participlan to manage the themes and interpreted them against an organisational behaviour background.

In this final chapter, I can now explore the relationship between the various themes and indicate its significance in terms of teamwork in contemporary organisations. I examine what I call “team paradoxes”. The implications of

qualitative studies in the field of Organisational Behaviour are discussed and the strengths and limitations of this study are identified. Some new lines of inquiry are suggested and research questions, which could add value in the ongoing research process, are proposed.

5.2 THE FOUR EVOLVING THEMES

I concluded Chapter 4 by summarising the four evolving themes, thus answering my main research question: "**What are the expectations of employees of teamwork on multiple levels in selected 21st century South African organisations?"**

I found that these themes could also be expressed as critical team success factors, and Table 4.5 then forms my answer to the sub-research question "**What do teams regard as critical success factors in terms of teamwork in the team development processes?"**

Theme 1 related to *individuals and their expectations of teamwork*. The theme represents a broad sense of being part of an organisation and enjoying it. A great huge need for enjoyment and fun was expressed in most cases**.** Individuals in modern organisations also experience a strong need to belong and to be both accepted and respected in their teams. They experience instances of "detachment", where they feel alone and isolated, and problems like work overload, burnout and stress magnify these feelings. They need and ask for more power, and openly express their willingness to be held accountable. I detected strong emotional undertones of frustration and irritation regarding an organisation that says one thing (vision), but does the opposite.

My inquiry revealed that 21st century organisations demand a lot from their employees. This was evident in the responses reflecting exhaustion, work overload and high stress levels. There is a growing need for people to enjoy work more and have more fun in the workplace. Although many demands are made on both individuals and teams in organisations, they often feel that they are not offered enough support to help them meet these demands. Amongst

the interviewees, there was almost a cry for more understanding, support, trust and empowerment.

Theme 2 dealt with *teams and their expectations of working together*. The need for understanding and acceptance was once again expressed, especially against the background of the 21st century organisation with its diversity and global focus. Teams expressed a feeling of often "feeling lost", thus focusing on the value of goal setting and of having a clear idea of their roles and responsibilities. Team leadership was indicated as a crucial tool for creating a culture for teamwork. Teams defined leadership in broad terms and noted that the leader of a team determined the atmosphere in that team. Their concern was that their respective organisations offered no leadership framework and that teams were as strong as their respective leaders. An obvious paradox came to the fore: organisations say they support teams, but no team skills are provided. Teams felt that they were expected to "miraculously" turn into high performance teams overnight, without being given any skills.

Theme 3 explored *organisational or leadership expectations in terms of team* work. Team members regarded leadership behaviours as highly influential in terms of team success. Organisations need to reach financial targets and need to make money in order to stay in business, and they use teams as the vehicles to reach their goals. Leaders thus expect teams to be effective, to produce synergy and to deliver quality products on time and within budget. Many leaders are seduced by the "romance of teams" (Allen, 2004:1), meaning that they expect teams to enhance the organisation's performance, even if teams are not necessarily the answer to a given business problem.

Theme 4 deals with *21st century team challenges*. It seems as if the pace of change is becoming almost unmanageable for both individuals and teams. Their reflection on exhaustion, being overwhelmed, and becoming apathetic and deteriorating communication is indicative of this. Employees are becoming more diverse and defined by numerous cultural norms – this makes it very difficult to establish a sound organisational culture. Virtual teaming is becoming the norm, yet teams are given no extra skills to manage these

virtual processes. The struggle to balance work and life is a complex challenge, and interviewees cried out for "new" ways of doing business, since the "old" ways clearly do not work any longer.

This summary of themes indicated the four main themes and numerous sub-themes. However, these themes should not be interpreted separately. They are integrated, intrinsically interwoven and their inter-relatedness offers a nuanced understanding of teamwork from an Organisational Behaviour perspective. This in itself poses many paradoxes on teamwork, which have to be dealt with in the 21st century organisation. These are discussed below, in Section 5.4.

5.3 EXPERIENCING TEAMS AND TEAMWORK

In order to answer my second sub-question, "**How do South African employees experience teams and team work?**", I had to interpret the interview findings by comparing actual experiences with desired experiences.

♥Based on a remark by Interviewee 2, when he was asked to validate the interview information, I was forced to look at the true meaning of the word "expectation" in my main research question, since there proved to be a clear link between expectations of teamwork and the actual experience thereof. Before making my key observations, I thus had to consider the relevance of expectancy theories in teamwork.

Many interviewees in this study expressed their lack of motivation because of inconsistent leadership behaviour and the many "paradoxes" that I have identified. This made me reflect on motivation, and especially on Vroom's well-known **expectancy theory**. This theory has been adapted over the years, but I am interested mainly in the concepts that might influence teamwork.

♥ From the researcher's diary.

The expectancy theory asserts that people are motivated to work if they expect to achieve the things they want from their jobs. Vroom (1964) argues that motivation is a combination of the following:

- **Valence** – the value of the perceived outcome, in other words, "what is in it for me?";
- **Instrumentality** – the belief that if an individual or team completes certain actions then the person or team will achieve a specific outcome; and
- **Expectancy** – the belief that an individual or team is able to complete the actions and have the capability to do so.

Vroom expressed his expectancy theory as the following formula:

Valence x Expectancy x Instrumentality = Motivation

Greenberg and Baron (1993:131) argue that expectancy theory looks at the role of motivation in the overall environment instead of only in terms of the individual. Nelson and Quick (2006:168) contend that "a person's motivation increases along with his or her belief that effort would lead to better performance and that better performance would lead to merit pay increases and other rewards".

My interviewees made it clear that different things motivate different teams and individuals, and those expectations regarding rewards differ. McShane and Glinow (2003:142) add that people naturally direct their effort towards those outcomes that will help them to fulfil their needs – whatever those needs are.

Scholl (2002:2) argues that many variables affect the individual's expectancy perception:

- self-efficacy, in other words, a person's belief in his or her ability to perform a task;
- goal-difficulty, meaning that setting goals that are too high might lower motivation because the team might feel the goals are beyond their ability to achieve; and

- perceived control over performance, in other words, for expectancy to be high, individuals or teams must believe that they can influence an outcome in some way.

Figure 5.1, an expectancy model for motivation by Nelson & Quick, (2006:167), is a good explanation of how expectations can motivate teams and individuals.

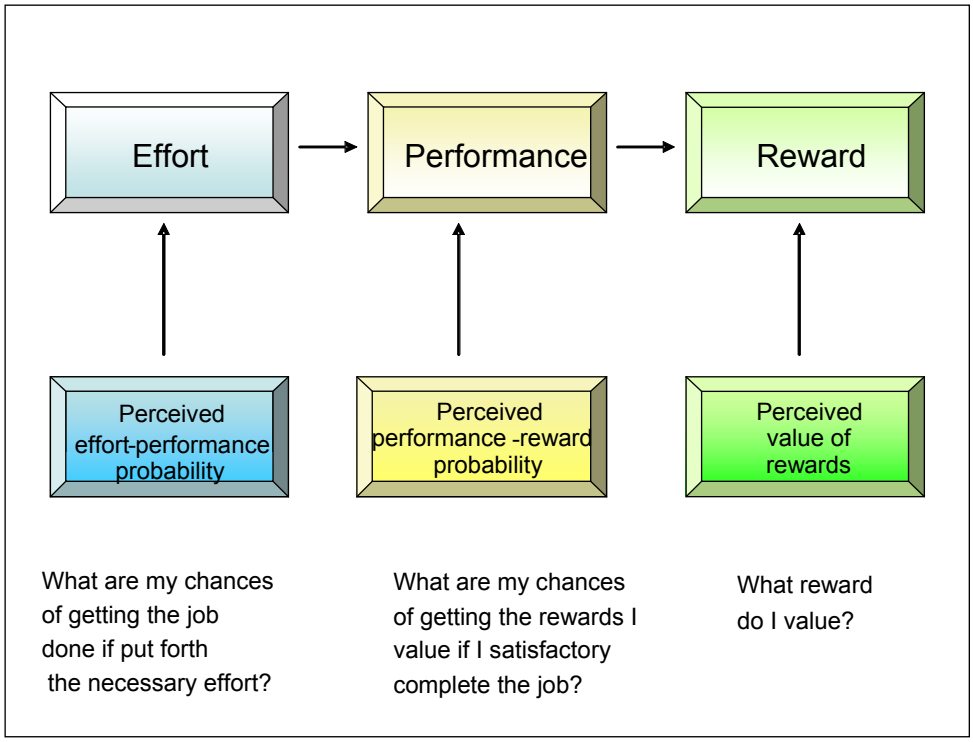


Figure 5.1: An expectancy model for motivation
(Nelson & Quick, 2006:167)

Based on the expectancy theory argument, it became clear that many interviewees regard teamwork as non-value adding because they do not see the real value of working together instead of as individuals. The organisational culture and leadership also do not support teamwork and many organisational "paradoxes" contribute to team difficulties.

The qualitative research process used in this study has proved that teaming in 21st organisations is more complex than it seems at first glance. In answering the sub-question "**How do South African employees experience teams and teamwork?"** I identified a number of what I call "paradoxes" that could add

value to both researchers and practitioners working with and exploring team dynamics. These are now explored briefly. Resolving some of these paradoxes may assist organisations in strengthening their teams.

5.4 KEY OBSERVATIONS: THE 21ST CENTURY TEAM PARADOX

5.4.1 Be a strong individual but also be part of a strong team

Organisations do not realise that a multitude of behavioural and other changes must occur for teams to succeed. Most of us grew up in an environment where individual performance and competition were stressed. Our school grades were determined by our own performance and we obtained employment based on our individual skills and personality. Moving from a "solo" to a "team" paradigm does not happen overnight. Individuals may never have seen the advantages of working in teams, yet they are expected to be part of these teams and produce immediate results. Hence, 21st century organisations need to facilitate this transition if teamwork is ever to succeed.

I interviewed dynamic individuals and found that they often wondered what the team possibly had to offer them. Hyman (1993) points out that, underlying every other responsibility in the team, is the implied responsibility of each individual in that team not to jeopardise the team's goals. That means that there have to be team goals, that these goals need to be respected and that team members need to share these goals. However, if there is not a culture of trust, support and general empowerment, this cannot be done and individuals will continue to act as individuals instead of as part of a team.

5.4.2 Teams need freedom and creativity but also clear guidelines

Interviewees expressed the need for empowerment and to be allowed to generate new ideas. Kazanjian (2007:21) observes, "opportunity is pure oxygen" for teams. Teams need a chance to try something new, to put their combined skills to work and to generate their own successes. At the same time, however, they want clear guidelines and well-defined team roles and responsibilities. This means that a 21st century team leader has to guide

without taking over the team and has to empower teams without giving them too much freedom. Aspects like the nature of the work, the skills levels and the emotional maturity of the team should be the guiding principles.

5.4.3 Teams suffer from an information overload but do not communicate enough

Teams in 21st century organisations often feel overwhelmed by all the information they receive. It adds to the work overload they experience and, instead of empowering them, it threatens them. The need is clearly for communication as opposed to information. Teams want to be acknowledged, understood and communicated to. E-mails are not a preferred way of communication, and especially virtual teams expressed a need for regular contact and short, focused communication sessions. Katzenbach and Smith (2001:31) argue that teams should be given the opportunity to choose to express them by speaking or in writing, "an option that often produces both richer discussions and input and dialogues with fewer interruptions".

5.4.4 We need to work harder and smarter but also need to maintain a work-life balance

Smith (2007:105) jokingly comments that, leaders "need to demonstrate work-life balance (No problem; work is their life!)" This quote might be meant tongue in the cheek, but I found that many leaders tend to believe and live Smith's quotation. Thus, 21st century organisations expect teams to be highly successful and, in many cases, to take on greater workloads than before. Quite often vacant positions are not filled immediately since the expectation is that the team is strong enough to take on the challenge. Targets are often increased without consulting team members, which adds to the expectation that teams should just work harder and smarter in order to reach those goals.

Amid this job stress, teams are expected to live a balanced life, be healthy, have energy at all times and be living examples of overall "wellness". Christie (2004:25) suggests that risks and problems in the workplace can be successfully addressed through employee assistance programmes and well as multi-professional support teams. He views this as the organisation's way of maintaining human resources by addressing both the physical and mental

needs of teams. However, a programme in isolation cannot make a difference. All the leadership practices in the organisations should reflect the focus on human capital and the respect for human resources.

5.4.5 Teams are important, yet our systems do not support teamwork

Leadership openly expresses support of teamwork and collaboration in contemporary organisations. Quite often, when this team approach toward business problems is implemented, the performance management and other systems are still geared towards the individual. This is an obvious misalignment and adds to the fact that employees are unsure about what is expected of teams. The ideal is to ensure that all systems, be it leadership, performance management or communication systems, are designed to manage and support team efforts.

I also listened carefully how the people in the interviews in this study expressed themselves. The fact that there are many references to “me” and “I” when I asked questions about the team suggests that the overall culture is still individualistic rather than team-driven. Reward systems are also highly individualistic and do not support team work in any way. Organisations should hold teams mutually accountable, but the recognition and reward systems should be aligned to this. The biggest problem is that “compensation systems are designed to reward individuals, and gain sharing programmes are designed to reward large groups. Small group achievements seldom fit into these programmes” (Katzenbach & Smith, 2001:137).

5.4.6 Team development and continuous learning is our priority but there is no time or budget for these interventions

Both employees and teams in 21st century organisations have a strong need to develop and be visibly supported by the organisation. Dutton (2003:142) observes that “when a commitment to affirming people and fostering their development is part of an organisation’s way of life, high quality relationship flourish, as people are engaged by their hearts as well as their heads. The valuing of development encourages the expression of what each individual

cares about and needs, at the same time that it implies that [an] effort will be made to enable people at work to satisfy their needs". This means that organisations have to allow teams the time and budget to develop those teams. Organisations should demonstrate their strategic intent of continuous learning by creating learning interventions, supporting it and rewarding teams that actually do invest in team learning.

5.4.7 We need to have fun but make lots of money

Many organisations still believe that fun and business results are two separate entities on a business continuum. However, employees expressed a strong need to feel that their work is fun and that they are allowed to enjoy it. In his study of Enterprise, America's number one car rental company, Kazanjian (2007:204) points out that one of the secrets to Enterprise's success is the fact that a culture has been created where individuals and teams can have fun. He notes that this sense of enjoyment spills over to the client and "builds camaraderie and strengthens individuals' ability to effectively work together as members of a unified team".

5.4.8 We need high quality connections between people but our motto is "show me the money"

Dutton (2003:8) argues that good relations in organisations are crucial in that "high quality connections are marked by mutual positive regard, trust and active engagement on both sides. Corrosive connections, on the other hand, make it more difficult for employees to do their work …low-quality connections cause distractions that make it difficult for people to engage fully in their tasks".

Even though relationships are important, it takes time, and, in many cases, money, especially where special team interventions are involved. Leaders seem to expect teams to operate optimally, without allowing for any special "team time". They soft-soap teams with "an annual team-building if the budget allows it" and hope that mutual respect and collaboration will follow automatically.

5.4.9 We introduce virtual teams but fail to re-define team work

Virtual teams have their own complexities owing to issues such as cultural and spatial separation. These affect trust levels in these teams, communication, socialisation and collaboration. Knoll and Jarvenpaa (1998), Warkentin, Sayeed and Hightower (1999) and Jackson (1999), make clear distinctions between "face-to-face" teams and virtual teams. Organisations should follow their advice. Virtual teams cannot merely be expected to operate optimally without the correct skills and leadership.

"As virtual teamwork becomes an integral aspect of contemporary organisational life, and as work arrangements become more complex owing to the variety of task, technologies and cultures involved, there is a strong need to develop novel approaches that can provide insights beyond those generated and validated using the traditional theoretical and methodological perspectives" (Sarker & Sahay, 2003:32). Virtual teams need a specific discipline, application and features software. Their manner of interacting and communicating differs from that of other teams, and the organisation should support these virtual teams in terms of continuous development, systems and leadership style.

5.4.10 We hire for skills or IQ but expect emotional intelligence

Organisations that have flatter structures and that operate on a virtual basis place very high demands on the emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) of their employees (De Vries & Ketz, 2005:62). In this 21st century culture, coaching and commitment should replace the "old" culture of command and control. However, this seems to be missing. Although the organisation expects independent and dynamic behaviour from teams, they do little to support employees at a non-technical level. Many interviewees expressed the need to "be able to speak to someone" or the feeling of "being lonely", even though they are nominally part of a team. Since the relevant industries are highly specialised, the greatest criterion for hiring and assessing remain technical

skills. Yet, when it comes to managing teams, leaders expect employees to be emotionally mature and have the ability to be assertive in difficult situations.

5.4.11 We implement team activities but fail to create a team culture

When interviewees were asked why they work in teams, more than once, the answer was "because that is the way we are structured". Only one individual admitted to ever experiencing synergy in a team. Some teams I interviewed never actually fully engaged in teamwork, and in many cases, they merely shared information. Nadler (1992) calls this "synthetic teamwork", and I found that especially the specialist groups tended to act as synthetic groups rather than as teams. In many cases, groups of specialists expressed a level of superiority, and used their focused skills as an excuse for not being part of the team. Thus, Interviewee 12 said: *"Any idiot can take the customer's Excel spread sheet and recode… but not everybody can code."*

It seems as if 21st century organisations are often so set on becoming team-based organisations that they often do not define teamwork or consider what it means in their environment. Katzenbach and Smith (2001:43) further note that, in contemporary organisations, "change initiatives (often) stress the number of teams created as the measure for success – more is better". This leads to the implementation of teams and teamwork without a clear link to strategic goals and organisational challenges.

5.4.12 We say we embrace change but we do not comprehend "flux"

I found that companies claim to understand change and its impact on individuals and teams. Both companies I reviewed implement change programmes and have continuous innovation as part of their vision statements. However, change is often not fully understood.

Flux, according to Steger, Amann and Maznevski (2007:5) is "change that has a changing nature". Today's solutions for business problems may be outdated tomorrow and change can occur in all directions at one, and at "faster and faster rates". Teams are faced with growing diversity where

nothing is stable anymore. “The future is no longer the prolongation of the past – industry breakpoints that fundamentally alter the value proposition in industries occur more rapidly (Steger *et al*., 2007:6). Contemporary organisations need to empower themselves more in order to facilitate this flux and guide individuals and teams through these ever-changing times.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like all other studies, this study also has some potential limitations. These are set out below.

- There is a voluminous amount of information on teams, and all this available literature is a tremendous challenge for those who seek to remain updated in their understanding of the literature. This is a qualitative study, which in itself may be a limitation in academic circles. In US academic circles, contributions that do not include a quantifiable verification are often less valued (Gherardi & Turner, 1998). Davenport and Markus (1999:19) refer to the fact that studies with a qualitative focus are often discounted, and they call this phenomenon “institutional pressures toward irrelevance”.
- Findings can, and should not, be generalised. Many interpretations were made based on the personal experiences of specific participants, which will also make transferability difficult. However, to generalise was never the intention. This qualitative study was undertaken to create a new meaning and to reach a nuanced understanding of team expectations.
- This research project has an interpretative character, aimed at discovering the meaning that events have for specific individuals. These experiences are interpreted by myself (as the researcher), which might raise the question of objectivity.
- The relatively small sample might be a limitation, although the depth could facilitate further studies in this field. My particular findings are not representative of all teams in all organisations, and the identified themes are not necessarily typical of all teams.

- A further limitation is the lack of focus on the differences in the individual characteristics and personalities of participants, for example, their team roles, cognitive styles etc.
- Lastly, I do not claim to have identified all possible and relevant themes regarding the expectations of teamwork. However, the data I gathered interview transcripts) are saved on CD and could be used by future researchers for possible alternative interpretations and research initiatives.

5.6 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.6.1 Implications for organisations

Teamwork can no longer be viewed from a single dimension construct. Organisations should start thinking strategically about developing teams, and they should do so from a multi-dimensional construct – which includes the individual, the team and the organisation. If organisations are to develop and maintain effective teams, conditions in each dimension should be optimised.

The context in which teams are to operate should be considered before applying team strategies to every organisational problem. Organisations simply can no longer implement teams and teamwork without providing the necessary systems to support those teams. The importance of team-organisation alignment is well known and documented (Allen, 1996; Guzzo & Dickson, 1996). To make teams work, entire support systems must be in place and often structures must be reorganised and relevant sources need to be allocated. Tilleria, Little and MacBryde (2002) remark that many organisations are still experiencing many problems in introducing integrated performance management systems that effectively measure team performance and, simultaneously, are aligned to the company's strategy.

5.6.2 Implications for teams

Teams can only benefit from research that enables them to develop a sound team culture, where the focus is on empowerment, participation, continuous learning, trust and creativity. This culture should be aligned to the organisational vision and should be supported by the relevant systems. The

more teams understand the needs of other individuals and other teams, the greater the opportunity to benefit from this knowledge.

5.6.3 Implications for the individual

Anything that affects how an organisation uses teams in its day-to-day work will obviously affect the employee – be it directly or indirectly.

5.7 RESEARCHER PERSPECTIVES

I feel strongly that there is no one single truth and that different people give different meanings to similar experiences. I chose an area of research that could be described as “well researched”, and yet I discovered new ways of viewing teamwork.

In order to ensure the credibility of this research project, I tried to submerge myself in the data and actively sought themes and their link to each other. No interviewee comment or remark was merely discarded or ignored, and interpretations were only made after careful consideration.

As a researcher, I was both detached and involved. Modern interpretive researchers argue that it is not necessary to deny the interdependence or the consequences of interdependence between the researcher and what is researched (Patton, 1990). A researcher is no longer seen as a “passive bystander who generates representational products, but as one who partly constitutes reality and forges generative communicative relationships” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000:1039). The researcher’s participation in the situation is thus no longer a barrier but rather ensures an increased degree of understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied. Patton (1990) thus advises researchers to simultaneously maintain detachment and personal involvement and to take responsibility for the result of their interventions.

The past year was intense, academically challenging and a continuous learning experience. By working with teams on a daily basis, I had the opportunity to really meet them and ask them face-to-face about their experiences and expectations.

As Angela Brew (2001:132) contends, a research project is a journey and an all-encompassing learning experience:

> …in the journey … research questions go beyond the intellectual issues and are carried over to all aspects of life. Content, issues and processes are viewed as all contributing to the process of critical reflection. In this variation, there is frequently the idea of a personal journey and an emphasis on the assimilation of research into the researcher's life and understanding.

5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Traditionally, organisational behaviour theories were rooted in core humanistic values (Burke, 1982). However, as this field develops, efforts are increasingly being tied to business goals and organisational effectiveness (Fagenson & Burke, 1990). That naturally opens up the terrain for relevant research. Church and Burke (1995) suggest that organisational behaviour will also have humanistic roots, but the emphasis has shifted towards business outcomes and that researchers should take advantage of this development.

In a study by Offerman and Spiros (2001:389), the surveyed organisational behaviour practitioners suggested that the best way researchers could improve practices was to include more of an applied practice focus in research.

Based on these views as well as my own experience, some team development issues were identified as being in need of further research:

- reward systems: how to reward the individual and the team;
- diversity and cross-cultural issues in teams; and
- teams within teams in organisations.

Future research could also be specifically concerned with the role of individual traits in team expectations, and could explore some of the issues relating to the limitations of this study (as set out above).

I definitely suggest more applied research.

Team research should also be focused towards practice in context, meaning that researchers should use real team situations to do their research and should "write reports in plain language that includes 'how's'", and practical examples (Offerman & Spiros, 2001:389). Offerman and Spiros (2001) also found that the majority of published research on teams is not read, not appreciated and not used to guide organisations. Their solution is more field studies, more applied research and greater on-site contact with teams. I gladly add my vote to this suggestion.

To conclude, it can be said that teaming makes business sense in 21st century organisations. If they are implemented correctly, teams can save time, make money and assist organisations in reaching organisational goals. However, contemporary organisations who want to use this approach need to understand teams, invest time in their development, reward them appropriately and ultimately support them.