

**EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORK-LIFE
BALANCE AMONGST BLACK WOMEN AND MEN IN A
CUSTOMER CARE ENVIRONMENT**

by

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Summary:

In contemporary society, work and home represent the two most significant domains in the life of working individuals. South Africa's socioeconomic, political, and societal circumstances will influence employees' experiences of work-life balance differently, compared to that of employees in other countries, suggesting that the construction of work-life balance amongst different race and cultural groups may differ. The present study used in-depth qualitative interviews with ten black women and men employed in a customer care environment, to explore their construction of work-life balance. A grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data and identify themes.

This study suggests that work-life balance is a unique experience for individuals, which varies over time and in different situations. The study confirmed that attaining work-life balance is a process of balancing ever-changing experiences over time, and in different life stages. The results of this study are also discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

Keywords: black women and men, customer care, grounded theory, qualitative research, work-life balance

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SUMMARY

Work-life balance, as a crucial aspect of employee and organisational wellness, has become an interesting field of research especially due to the changing demographic employee profile. Exposure to the problems being experienced by South African black employees in a customer care environment around work-life balance motivated this study. Furthermore, limited research had been previously done within customer care environments in South Africa on the experience of work-life balance which takes into account cultural differences. Although it seems that work-life balance is an important concept to study, it has not frequently been explored in different cultures within a South African context and in particular within customer care environments. In light of the preceding, the aim of this study is to explore how a small group of black South African women and men, employed within a customer care environment, construct work-life balance, using an interpretative qualitative research design.

Ten employees, selected through purposeful sampling, participated in the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. A grounded theory analysis of the data yielded three broad themes, which are that work-life balance is a unique experience for individuals, the experience of work-life balance varies over time and in different situations, and finally that attaining work-life balance is a process of balancing ever-changing experiences over time, and in different life stages.

Keywords: customer care; grounded theory; interpretative qualitative research; work-life balance

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is no coincidence that work-life balance entered the public domain at about the same time when women – especially mothers in dual-career households – started working in force (Patel, Govender, Paruk & Ramgoon, 2006; Welch & Welch, 2005). Suddenly there was a whole group of people juggling two mutually exclusive and conflicting demands (i.e. being great parents and great employees at the same time).

The increasing number of women in the workforce is a global phenomenon, and South Africa is no exception in this regard. Casele (2004) referred to this growth trend as the “feminisation” of the labour market. She noted that, whereas in 1995 about 38 per cent of all women of working age were active in the workforce, in 2001 nearly 51 per cent of them were economically active. Moreover, Noor (2004) suggested that women are becoming more involved and committed to work and family roles. Franks, Schurink and Fourie (2006) expected that in the years to come the female labour force in South Africa would grow faster than its counterpart. Women, in particular, are becoming more career-oriented, with higher educational aspirations and greater extrinsic ambitions. As such, women are the people most likely to be grappling with the issue of work-life balance on a daily basis (Casale, 2004; Casale & Posel, 2002). Casele and Posel (2002) also observed that as a result of the increasing participation of women in “less secure” work in the labour force, there has been an increase in unemployment figures for women. While women constitute 43.8 per cent of the workforce, they comprise 52.3 per cent of the unemployed (Gender Advocacy Project, 2003).

With the growing number of single-parent families (Robles, 1997), the concomitant increase in social and economic responsibilities for single women is inevitable, and the negative impact on the coping resources of single women is even greater (Verbrugge, 1993). According to Census96, there were almost 3.5 million female-headed households in South Africa (reported by Wallis & Price, 2003).

In traditional two-parent families, the father was seen as the breadwinner while the mother was the nurturer and homemaker (Esterberg, 2002; Loscocco, 1997; Lupton & Schmeid, 2002; Patel et al., 2006; Spurlock, 1995). These roles have evolved over time, with more women accepting the role of paid employment in their lives and men beginning to take on household and parenting duties (Haworth & Lewis, 2005; Newell, 1993; Patel et al., 2006; Pleck, 1993; Theunissen, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2003). Therefore, despite the fact that today work-life balance remains largely the purview of working mothers (see Naidoo & Jano, 2002; Patel et al., 2006; Welch & Welch, 2005), balancing household and parental duties has also become an issue for men.

Work-life balance as a concept has grown and expanded. Currently, the debate is about the extent to which we allow work to consume us. According to Welch and Welch (2005) there is a lot of talk about work-life balance, and then there is the reality. It is not just about how mothers can make time to meet all the demands in their lives, it is about how all of us manage our lives and allocate our time. Achieving work-life balance is an iterative process involving the continuous assessment of our priorities and values (Welch & Welch, 2005). Our ability to achieve work-life balance improves through experience and observation, and eventually, after some time lapses, we notice it is not getting harder anymore, it is just what we do (Welch & Welch, 2005).

With the intent of putting my research into context, I dedicate this chapter to reflecting on how I became interested in work-life balance as my research topic. In particular, my interest was sparked by personal experience in this regard, as well as by a study of the relevant literature. Contextualising the study also calls for a formulation of the research problem and the purpose of the research. Following the purpose statement, I briefly indicate the value of a qualitative approach to studying work-life balance. Finally, before concluding with an indication of how the dissertation is structured, I provide a discussion of the anticipated value of the research.

1.2 HOW I BECAME INTERESTED IN WORK-LIFE BALANCE AS A RESEARCH TOPIC

Grant-Vallone and Donaldson (2001) found that people are looking to combine work with living, and acknowledged that to have work becomes part of living. Furthermore, they observed that both organisational leaders and processes are critical in helping employees combine work with living (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). Hacker and Doolen (2003) noted that the broader perspective needed in an attempt to find a solution to the work versus family issue, is that work and family flow from the same source – a personal life and a personal life with a purpose. They contended that balance can only be attained by moving away from an approach associated with achieving balance (Hacker & Doolen, 2003).

Individuals must first get clarity as to why they have a life, and then the various elements of their life will be governed by that purpose. Furthermore, Hacker and Doolen (2003) stated that when an individually tailored purpose is brought to consciousness, the balance equation no longer constrains the actions of the individual. In other words, both work and family flow from, towards, and throughout the life of an individual, in keeping with his¹ own life's purpose (Hacker & Doolen, 2003).

Finding a purpose in life is the first requisite step. Declaring your life purpose to peers and family is the second essential step towards being able to integrate all aspects of the complicated lives which today's professionals live (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). Moreover, through declaring your life purpose, as an individual you are able to enlist the support of family members and peers in your journey (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). Power lies in fulfilling a purpose, not in achieving for the sake of becoming someone. In other words, we are human beings, not human doings.

Generation Xers (born in the 1970s and 1980s) have always been regarded as believing you should work to live, and not live to work (Van der Merwe, 2005).

¹ I will only use the male gender when referring to either the male or female gender.

Being a Generation Xer myself, it is similarly important for me to work to live, rather than to live to work. I will place the direction and focus of this study in context, by reflecting on my personal and work-related experiences, and my initial literature review on work-life balance.

1.2.1 A personal reflection

When reflecting on my past, I realise how major events and experiences in my life impacted on my personal view of work-life balance. Growing up, I found that I enjoyed spending time analysing people's behaviour. I felt this was my purpose and my calling in life. With this in mind, I pursued a degree in the discipline of social and human sciences. I thoroughly enjoyed my studies, and naturally excelled in completing my first degree.

Being young and naïve, and thinking that I knew best, I decided to enter the job market after completing my first degree. Securing suitable employment was more of a challenge than I had anticipated, but perseverance and passion kept me going. Joining a recruitment agency was my lucky break. The work was tough, but being a recruitment consultant gave me the opportunity to network and meet many interesting people.

After a year of working, I enrolled to complete my honours degree part time. I soon realised that I had bitten off more than I could chew. There I was, working full time, setting up house with my fiancé (and partner of five years), and to top it all, studying part time. It became very challenging to balance all my roles and responsibilities, which put a lot of strain on my personal well-being. I felt that my life was completely out of control, and I felt unsatisfied. I needed to change my life and re-evaluate my priorities. After deep reflection I realised that my work and studies were not what was causing me the most stress in my life – it was my relationship with my fiancé. Facing up to this was difficult, because I knew I would need to make personal sacrifices. I ended my relationship with my fiancé at the end of the first year of my honours degree.

The next five years of my life involved a process of healing and regaining perspective. I became a balanced individual once again, and it felt good. I completed my honours degree and continued to study. Work became my priority, at the expense of becoming involved in a new relationship.

Hacker and Doolen (2003) concluded that when individuals push to achieve an accomplishment in one area of their life, it often results in a guilt-plagued mindset, characterised by concern for other, neglected areas. I tend to agree, and realise now that the decision to remain single at the time was my way of avoiding the guilt of trying to have it all. Success and achievement in my career became more important, and this kept me focused. I changed jobs three times, but in doing so I managed to work my way up into a human resource manager role within a short space of time. Long hours became my reality, but I was happy – my life was purposeful and satisfying.

About three years ago I decided to study towards a master's degree, because I wanted to fulfil my goal of registering as an Industrial and Organisational Psychologist. I was invited to participate in the selection process, and was successful. I was so excited. Towards the middle of the first year of the master's programme, one of my study group members introduced me to her stepbrother. He and I were engaged within four months of meeting and married a year later. Life truly does happen when you are making other plans.

Being a married woman has changed my priorities in life. Van der Merwe (2006) concluded that you should always strive to be committed to soul values – not only in your personal life, but also as regards your work ethic. I believe your work should reflect your values and beliefs. Despite finding a great deal of fulfilment in my career and work, I value family life and well-being much more now. You can be like me, and make family your 'soul' value, or you can attempt a kind of literal balance, with work and life each receiving fifty per cent of your time. I concur with Hacker and Doolen (2003) in that both work and family must flow from, towards, and throughout an individual's life, in keeping with his own life's purpose.

According to Welch and Welch (2005) all individuals have to make work-life balance decisions – from working mothers and fathers, to single people who want to write a book or volunteer to help those in need. The authors viewed work-life balance as a swap (Welch & Welch, 2005), in other words – work-life balance is a deal you make with yourself, about what you keep and what you give up. This statement is true for me: achieving my own work-life balance involved a process of making choices and sacrifices.

Being employed in the cellular industry has posed some challenges for me, by competing with my value of family life and well-being. My current work responsibilities involve providing human resource consulting services to the customer care division of a large telecommunications company. The customer care environment is dynamic and ever-changing, yet demanding – some employees are expected to work shifts, since our division operates on a 24-hour basis. As a result, my clients expect to be able to get hold of me at all hours of the day.

I have faced many personal and professional dilemmas in an attempt to manage my clients' expectations of me. I therefore took the advice of Hacker and Doolen (2003) by declaring my life's purpose to my peers, to enable me to integrate all aspects of my life. Doing this has helped me attain a balance in my life. So, to paraphrase Hacker and Doolen (2003), I have become a human being, not human doing.

After undertaking this personal reflection, I realise now that maintaining balance in my life has always been important to me – both on a personal and professional level. Furthermore, the direction of my balance has evolved with the personal choices and sacrifices I have made in my life. My priorities and values have always guided and influenced my choices. For me, work-life balance appears to be a number of unique experiences, unfolding over time.

As part of my services to the customer care environment, I am required to conduct three-month follow-up interviews with all new employees in the division, to establish how well they are integrating into the environment. The interview covers various aspects – work-life balance being one of them. After completing several of these interviews, I began to realise that a common theme was emerging amongst the

employees: both male and female employees seemed to be struggling with work-life balance – particularly those who were married, with young children. Furthermore, employees who were employed to work shifts were struggling to adapt. Moreover, when doing a more thorough analysis of the profile of employees I had interviewed in terms of race groups, I realised that they were mostly of black² origin.

Having reflected on my own experiences of work-life, and on the responses I received from employees I had interviewed at my place of work, I began searching for more information on work-life balance, particularly with a South African focus. I soon realised that there was not much literature available on the topic – especially within the South African context (refer to **Chapter 2**). Furthermore, limited research had been done on the experience of work-life balance which takes into account cultural differences. Thus, being a white female I was more curious about further exploring how other race groups employed within the customer care environment construct work-life balance.

This translated into a research idea, and so my research journey began.

1.2.2 The initial theoretical review

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), researchers sometimes realise too late in the research process that their research problem is too small to make a worthwhile contribution to the field, or that the problem has already been over-researched by others. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) highlighted the importance of a literature review to sharpen and crystallise the research problem, in order to avoid such difficulties.

In this section I focus on some of the research done on work-family interference, and the effect work-life balance has on well-being. Changing views (from an individual and organisational perspective) of work-life balance are also highlighted here, as

² In the South African context, “black people” is a generic term which refers to Africans, Coloureds and Indians (Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998).

part of the initial theoretical review. In **Chapter 2** I expand on the initial theoretical literature review, with the aim of further understanding the research problem and setting parameters for the research questions.

1.2.2.1 The role of gender in work-family interference and inter-role conflict

The phrase “work-family” emerged in the 1980s, a time when married women’s labour force participation experienced a steep increase, and when the spheres of work and family were more clearly separated than they are today (Barnett, 1999; Casale, 2004; Franks et al., 2006; Patel et al., 2006; Welch & Welch, 2005).

Given that women are socialised from childhood to accept home-maker and nurturer roles, and to give these roles precedence over work roles, the issue has occupied the minds of social researchers for decades (Esterberg, 2002; Loscocco, 1997; Patel et al., 2006). While labour legislation has supported the involvement of women in the workplace with the introduction of equity laws and paid maternity leave (intended to lure women back to the workplace after having children), the real tension lies with working mothers – they continue to receive the message from society that they should curb their work involvement in order to minimise the impact their jobs have on their family life (Butler & Skattebo, 2004; Eagle, Icenogle, Maes & Miles, 1998). At the same time it is expected that economic and work pressures should allow minimal, if any, interference from family.

Campbell, Campbell and Kennard (1994) observed that the number of children a woman has, is not a reliable predictor of her work performance. Their explanation for this is that women work hard and do not allow family commitments to impact their work performance (as would be expected), because they are very aware of the financial implications of their work role.

Since the family role has traditionally been seen as central to a woman’s identity, working mothers are usually deemed more likely to experience stress when attempting to juggle work and the demands of family (Eagle et al., 1998), and more likely to allow family to interfere with their work responsibilities. In a meta-analysis by

Davis, Matthews and Twamley (1999), they too found that women reported significantly higher levels of stress in the workplace, compared to men.

Garey (1995) highlighted the dilemma by pointing out that the term “working mother” fuses the individual concepts “worker” and “mother”, each of which carries different and opposing societal expectations. Women’s overall workloads have proven to be greater than those of their male colleagues. Women are therefore faced with reconciling this apparent incompatibility, which results in inter-role conflict (Eagle, Miles & Icenogle, 1997).

Duxbury and Higgins (1991) observed that there is no clear pattern in terms of the relative importance of work or family domain predictors for men and women’s work-family conflict. In other words, both genders’ stressors in each domain predict work-family conflict. To further support this, Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992) found that the dynamics of work and family boundaries may operate similarly among men and women today. This conclusion suggests that gender differences do not account for a substantial amount of variance in the prevalence of conflict between work and family roles.

Burke (2001) argued that although men increasingly express an interest in a more balanced commitment to their work role, it is women who experience the highest levels of conflict between work and family, since they are still expected to manage the bulk of family and household tasks and responsibilities. Similarly, Butler and Skattebo (2004) observed that since the parenting role has stereotypically been associated with women, working mothers may be more prone to family-work conflict than working fathers.

In their review, Eagle et al. (1998) averred that both male and female workers report more work-to-family conflict, than family-to-work conflict, and that family boundaries are more permeable than work boundaries. However, Spykerman (1997) opposed this contention in her review on gender roles and work, by concluding that family roles contribute more to role conflict than work roles. When financial needs force an individual to relinquish traditional roles and re-prioritise values, workers are likely to become acutely aware of the need to keep interference (resulting from family

responsibilities) at a minimum, since – for the majority – a job means survival (Spykerman, 1997).

The increase in the number of families with working parents has made the old models of coordinating work and home life inappropriate for the majority of the workforce (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1999). It is plausible that gender roles will affect the way women and men perceive the domains of work and home. Eby, Casper, Lockwood and Brinley (2005) concluded that it is essential to consider both gender differences and gender role issues, to fully understand the work-family interface. Furthermore, it may be important to consider several family characteristics simultaneously, to understand the work-non-work interface (Grzywacz, Almeida & McDonald, 2002).

Grzywacz et al. (2002) pointed out that structural features of the family, like parental and marital status, are likely to influence work and family dynamics. On the other hand, working mothers may attempt to keep family to work conflict at a minimum, so that their financial contribution to the family is not threatened (Grzywacz et al., 2002). Greenhaus and Powell (2003) argued that family-work conflict is likely to impact work performance when familial demands are high, and when pressure to participate in the work domain is low.

Duxbury and Higgins (1991) stated that work-family conflict is more strongly related to a lower quality of family life for men, than for women. The relationship between the quality of family life and life satisfaction is also significantly stronger for men, than for women. In a later study, Byron's (2005) results indicated that employees with higher family involvement (despite their gender) experience the same level of family-to-work interference and work-to-family interference as those who are less involved with their families.

Frone, Yardley and Markel (1997) proposed an integrative model of the work-family interface. At the heart of the aforementioned model is the construct of work-family conflict, which represents the extent to which participation in one role interferes with a person's ability to meet responsibilities in another role. Haar (2004), on the other hand, pointed out that the "single direction" focus (work-to-family conflict, or family-

to-work conflict) is methodically flawed. While some researchers have begun to recognise the bi-directional nature of work and family demands (Burley, 1995; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998), the review by Kossek and Ozeki (1998) showed that work-family measures that indicate the direction of role conflict perform better than measures that combine items measuring both directions. From a research point of view, the work-family focus may be more appropriate for social inquiry, while the family-work focus may be more relevant to organisational stakeholders.

In general, the work-to-family focus has attracted more research attention than the family-to-work influence (Burley, 1995; Carlson, 1999; Eagle et al., 1998). Research conducted on work-life interaction has mainly concentrated on the conflict between people's work and other life roles. From the literature referring specifically to work-life balance, it is generally accepted that work-life conflict and work-life balance are linked, especially considering that work-life balance is dependent on managing or reducing the conflict between the various roles.

1.2.2.2 The role of work-life conflict in well-being

In order for a person to live in an optimal way, the work and home domains should be in harmony with each other, and influence each other in a positive way so as to assist the individual in his daily responsibilities at work and at home. Consequently, it has become important for employees to integrate their responsibilities at work and home (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Lewis & Cooper, 1995). From an employee's perspective, the work-life domain is certainly a place where individuals are likely to experience many personal or internal conflicts.

Geurts, Rutte and Peeters (1999) concluded that work-home interference seems to function as an important intervening pathway between potential stressors in the work and home situation on the one hand, and psychological health on the other. A later study by Geurts, Kompier, Roxburgh and Houtman (2003) contested that work-home interference plays a significant role in mediating the impact of workload on workers' well-being. Demerouti and Geurts (2004) found that the healthiest employees are the ones who primarily experience a positive influence from work, and, to a lesser extent, those employees who experience a positive influence from home.

Voydanoff (2001) identified three ways in which participants in multiple roles can produce positive outcomes for individuals. First, work experiences and family experiences can have additive effects on well-being. Research has consistently shown that participating in multiple roles can have beneficial effects on both physical and psychological well-being (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Demerouti & Geurts, 2004; Geurts et al., 1999; Geurts et al., 2003; Voydanoff; 2001), especially when the roles are of high quality (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti & Crouter, 2000). In addition, satisfaction with work and family has been found to have additive effects on an individual's happiness, life satisfaction, and perceived quality of life (Rice, Frone & McFarlin, 1992). Second, participating in both work and family roles can buffer individuals from distress in either of the roles. For example, research has shown that the relationship between family stressors and impaired well-being is weaker for individuals who have more satisfying, high-quality work experiences (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). Similarly, the relationship between work stress and impaired well-being is attenuated for individuals who have a more satisfying, high-quality family life (Barnett, Marshall & Pleck, 1992). Third, experiences in one role can produce positive experiences and outcomes in the other role (Voydanoff, 2001).

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) referred to this mechanism as work-family enrichment, that is, the extent to which experience in one role improves an individual's quality of life in the other role. They considered work-family enrichment, like work-family conflict, to be bi-directional. Work-family enrichment occurs when work experiences improve the quality of family life, and family-to-work enrichment occurs when family experiences improve the quality of work life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

In the context of the Effort-Recovery Model, the findings of Frone et al. (1997) suggested that work-home interference – both time-based and strain-based – may compromise opportunities to recover from work demands, which in turn increase the chances that work demands will erode affective well-being and subjective health.

Marks and MacDermid (1996) found that balanced individuals experience less role overload, greater role ease, and less depression than their imbalanced counterparts. Moreover, a balanced involvement in work and family roles may also reduce chronic work-family conflict. According to Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003), imbalanced

satisfaction favouring the family is associated with a high quality of life among individuals who derive substantial satisfaction from their combined roles.

According to Van Jaarsveld (2004), sustaining high performance is perhaps the greatest challenge executives face, as this would mean putting measures in place to protect employees and employers alike from the negative effects of stress and lifestyle diseases. An important part of work-life balance is to make time for enjoyable activities (Van der Merwe, 2005) – give people inner resources, and they can deal with most external stress triggers.

To conclude, maintaining a healthy balance between work and home life is generally perceived as promoting well-being.

1.2.2.3 Changing views of work-life balance

Employees are increasingly concerned about balancing their work and personal lives (Burke, 2001; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Kofodimos, 1993; Lewis & Cooper, 1995; Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997). Research has shown that work and home (or family) are the two most significant domains in the life of an employed individual (Burke, 2001; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997).

There has been a significant shift in organisational values towards work-life balance (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). In today's economy this should be regarded as a positive sign, as a different employment relationship is being established in the sense that organisations owe their workers less. International trends towards work-life balance and employee wellness are becoming a major factor in the workplace (Burke, 2001; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Lewis & Cooper, 1995).

1.3 FORMULATING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Without an identified research problem that is important enough to warrant investing a researcher's resources, there would be no need to conduct research (Terre

Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Furthermore, to be practical, the identified research problem has to be clearly stated, with explicit parameters. While a research problem may be conceived from personal observations and experiences, most researchable problems are identified through reading or examining published historical, theoretical and empirical work (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). From my initial readings on work-life balance, I found that although a lot of research has been conducted with regard to work-family interference, inter-role conflict and the impact thereof on personal well-being (see Burke, 2001; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997), it is evident that perspectives on work-life balance and how it is valued, are still evolving.

Researchers have used a variety of approaches to operationally define and measure role balance, work-family balance, or work-life balance. For example, some studies measured work-life balance by assessing an individual's reaction to an unspecified level of work-life balance (see Milkie & Peltola, 1999), while others focused on assessing satisfaction with work-life balance (Saltzstein, Ting & Saltzstein, 2001; White, 1999). In a more recent study on the work-life balance of professional women, Whitehead and Kotze (2003) found that individuals perceive and define balance differently: work-life balance appears to be a cyclical life process involving not one ultimate experience, but a number of individual experiences unfolding over time. The definitions of work-life balance are, therefore, not entirely consistent with one another, which makes measurement problematic.

Consequently, given current demographic trends in the workforce, for example, increased numbers of working mothers (Casale, 2004; Casale & Posel, 2002; Newell, 1993; Noor, 2004; Patel et al., 2006; Pleck, 1993; Theunissen et al., 2003) and dual-earner or single-earner families (Robles, 1997), it is not surprising that research activity in this area has increased dramatically during the past decade. Yet, apart from different and evolving definitions of work-life balance, and despite the presumed virtue thereof, the concept has not been subjected to extensive scrutiny (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Most major reviews of work-family relations either do not mention work-life balance, or they mention balance but do not explicitly define the concept. According to Greenhaus et al. (2003), further development of the construct

is therefore essential for empirical research on balance to contribute to our understanding of work-family dynamics.

In relation to South African research, it does appear that a substantial amount of work has been covered in other countries regarding work-family integration research. According to De Villiers and Kotze (2003) there are only a limited number of studies on work-life conflict and balance in the South African context, compared to the rich source of international research.

Locally, where research regarding work-family integration is conducted, several limitations impede an accurate and in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. South African studies on work-life balance, for example, appear to manifest in the same way as in other countries, meaning that the underlying mechanisms of work-life balance that are culture specific, are potentially overlooked (De Villiers & Kotze, 2003). Furthermore, very little information is available regarding the prevalence of work-life balance in different demographic and occupational groups in South Africa (Barnett, 1996; Brink & De la Rey, 2001; Grzywacz et al., 2002; Theunissen et al., 2003).

According to Brink and De la Rey (2001), South African socioeconomic, political and societal circumstances will influence the experiences of work-life balance differently, in comparison to other countries. The meaning an individual attaches to this concept could be influenced by various factors, for example, employees with different cultural backgrounds could value the family and work domains differently. Unique meanings could also be attached to work-life balance by the women and men in the different cultures – that prescribe different emphasis for men and women where work-family issues are concerned (Brink & De la Rey, 2001).

It is, therefore, possible that cultural factors affect the way in which women and men perceive the domains of work and home. Furthermore, it is plausible to expect that work and home demands and resources will be experienced differently among different cultural and occupational groups. Ultimately, the meaning that South African employees attach to work-family integration may be different from other countries,

being influenced by factors which are unique to the South African culture and climate (Barnett, 1996; Brink & De la Rey, 2001).

In South Africa, employment equity is a reality. Individuals from groups that were previously disadvantaged and historically excluded, are increasingly becoming part of the white-collar workforce. In light of a review conducted by Barnett (1996), we can conclude that we know very little about how different resource characteristics (such as race) shape the work-family experience. Furthermore, having evidenced the impact of gender differences on the experience of work-life balance in the initial theoretical review, it seems plausible to expect individual differences (such as race) to condition the impact of work-family balance on individual well-being and work outcomes (see also Grzywacz et al., 2002; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1997).

In conclusion, the research problem generally pertains to the need for further clarification of the concept of work-life balance in general, and in the South African context in particular, with regard to how demographic characteristics such as race may influence its meaning.

1.4 THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

“Work-family balance” is a term widely used in the popular press. Sometimes it is used as a noun (e.g. when one is encouraged to achieve balance), and at other times as a verb (e.g. to balance work and family demands), or adjective (e.g. as in “a balanced life”). From the stated research problem the need to explore the meaning of work-life balance in a South African context, and specifically from a particular race perspective, is clear.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) observed that in qualitative inquiry, initial curiosities for research often come from real-world observations, emerging from the interplay of the researcher’s direct experience, tacit theories, political commitments, interest in practice, and growing scholarly interests. Qualitative research is also peculiar to being context specific (Henning, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Terre Blanche &

Durrheim, 1999). Having reflected on my own experiences of work-life balance and having done initial observations of my working “world”, I became curious about how my clients construct work-life balance, being employed within a customer care environment. Moreover, being a white female, I was very curious about further exploring how other race groups (employed within the customer care environment) maintain work-life balance. I therefore decided to entertain my curiosity and explore the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men in a customer care environment.

In light of the preceding, the aim of this study is to explore how a small group of black South African women and men, employed within a customer care environment, construct work-life balance. Many terms are used in the literature relating to work-life balance, for example, “work-home interference” and “work-life integration”. For the sake of simplicity, the term “work-life balance” will be used throughout the dissertation, except where other terms are more relevant or appropriate.

To summarise, I formulated the research objective as follows: **Exploring the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men in a customer care environment.**

1.5 THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO STUDYING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In her border theory, Clark (2000) argued that neither segmentation nor integration is inherently ideal for employees. Using multiple sources of data in her research (e.g. her own experiences, qualitative interviews, and a focus group), she investigated problems on issues relating to balancing work and home responsibilities (Clark, 2000). She stated that happy and productive individuals, as well as people who describe their lives as less than ideal, can be found on all ranges of the work-home spectrum. Alternatively, Clark (2000) argued that we should consider the strength of the borders between the work and home domains before we can conclude which approach of the work-home interface is most functional for the individual worker, that is, integration versus segmentation. Clark considered aspects like the similarity

between the two domains, the attributes of individuals who make transitions (e.g. married employees), as well as similar attributes of other central members of each domain (e.g. partners and supervisors). In this respect, Clark's (2000) research pointed the way forward in utilising qualitative methods to explore the domains of work and home.

Qualitative research gives us a clear and detailed account of actions and the representation of actions, so that we can gain a better understanding of our world, hopefully to use that understanding to bring about a measure of social change (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that well-collected qualitative data are important because they focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, giving us a strong grasp on what real life is like. Another feature of qualitative data is their richness and holism, with their strong potential for revealing complexity (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Locke, 2001).

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's lived experiences, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives, their perceptions, assumptions, and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to appreciate the social world, qualitative researchers must engage with and participate in it, and actively interpret it (Locke, 2001).

In an observation of qualitative research in South Africa, Schurink (2003) stated that many local qualitative studies have been undertaken rather sporadically, and are quite diverse in terms of the approaches applied. Furthermore, he opined that local qualitative work is quite similar to that of the modernist paradigm, largely due to the extent to which South African researchers make use of the "real" world to inform and shape their theorising (Schurink, 2003). Qualitative studies that do not fall within the ambit of the modernist paradigm may, therefore, only enhance the spectrum of good qualitative research methodology in our country.

The literature review revealed limited research on the concept of work-life balance in South Africa. An attempt, therefore, to proceed directly to a positivistic approach to measure a concept that has not yet been fully explored, will put ontological

restrictions and limitations on the study of such a phenomenon. Assuming a relativist ontology (that is, presuming that multiple realities are constructed by people as they go about their lives), and epistemologically believing that we need to apply appropriate research methods to capture the richness of people's social worlds in order to ultimately understand or appreciate them, I chose to adopt an interpretive research paradigm and conduct a qualitative inquiry into work-life balance.

1.6 ANTICIPATED VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

The study of the work-family area has a long tradition of examining people's perceptions of their own experiences, and unmasking their taken-for-granted assumptions about the work and family domains of their lives (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Pitt-Catsouphes & Christensen, 2004). Most research on the impact of work and family policies has focused on the organisational perspective (Eagle et al., 1998; Lambert, 1993). An expansion of research orientation is now needed to examine the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, and the interrelationships between the experiences of each group (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Lewis & Cooper, 1995). While important work (both theoretically and empirically) has been done by South African authors, but especially by scholars abroad, many questions remain unexplored with regard to the phenomenon of work-life balance (Franks et al., 2006). I conclude by highlighting areas I deem particularly prominent at this point in our country, South Africa.

The high cost of living, as well as increased work opportunities due to employment equity policies, seems to have led to South African women – in particular black women – being encouraged to enter the labour market. While they have been entering the labour market pretty rapidly, South African women appear at the same time to maintain, if not increase, the importance they place on the family domain. Not unexpectedly, this has increasingly created stress associated with investing time, energy and resources in multiple life roles. In addition, the nature of our diverse nation implies that we need to understand how different groups of women in the South African context assign meaning to their life roles, and how they anticipate integrating those roles.

Some work has been done in the field of multiple role conflict, especially as regards the way in which South African women in managerial positions integrate their multiple roles (Brink & De la Rey, 2001; Grzywacz et al., 2002; Naidoo & Jano, 2002; Patel et al., 2006; Theunissen et al., 2003; Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). Pressures from the work and family domains have different influences on diverse groups of people, depending on the importance they attribute to life roles (Naidoo & Jano, 2002). Furthermore, women of different ages, races and social classes will differ in the way they chose to integrate work and family roles (Naidoo & Jano, 2002). Franks et al. (2006) explained that more in-depth qualitative work involving black South African women and men, who are currently career-focused and engaged in full-time work, is necessary. I concur, and argue that by using in-depth qualitative research, first-hand data can be obtained on how black South African women and men attach meaning to their experience of their different life roles, and how they manage their everyday life situation.

Such an “insider” perspective into the lives of these black women and men could not only help them manage and integrate their various life roles successfully, and assist them in reaping the benefits associated with occupying different roles, but such data – if carefully and scientifically collected – would also contribute to our existing knowledge in this field.

Not only will insight into the social worlds of black women and men (and particularly the meanings they attach to their life roles) increase our understanding of this issue, but it may contribute to making groups of black South African women and men generally more aware of how their counterparts construct their life roles, thereby generally increasing their self-awareness, while helping them to manage the challenges they face in integrating these roles.

In addition, such knowledge should aid industrial psychologists and other social service providers in helping black women and men enhance their quality of life, and improving their productivity and satisfaction in the workplace.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to explicate the context in which this study originated, and how the research objective and research approach evolved. In achieving that, I reflected on how I came to study the topic of work-life balance from both a personal and theoretical perspective. I also explicated the research problem, the research objective and why I deem a qualitative inquiry best suited to address these issues. I concluded the chapter by indicating the anticipated value of the research. At this point I would like to note that, for me, this study was just the beginning of my exploration: I hope to continue studying work-life balance as part of a doctoral thesis.

In **Chapter 2** I expand on my initial review of the literature (briefly touched on in **Chapter 1**) on the topic of work-life balance, with the intention of further highlighting the need to research the topic in the South African context, in particular. In **Chapter 3** I elaborate on the research design, and share how I came to choose an interpretive paradigm and an inductive, qualitative research type with a view to exploring the construction of work-life balance amongst a small group of black women and men employed in a customer care environment. This chapter also introduces the research participants and explains how I interpreted the data, using a grounded theory data analysis approach.

In **Chapter 4** I present the research findings, and in doing so give my research participants a voice. The findings presented in **Chapter 4** are discussed in **Chapter 5** and integrated with the relevant literature (see **Chapter 2**). In conclusion, in **Chapter 6** I reflect on some final thoughts, share a number of limitations to my study, and also make recommendations to encourage further scientific research.

CHAPTER 2: WORK-LIFE BALANCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on how I became interested in work-life balance as a research topic, and how the research question directing this study evolved and became definite. I also touched on an initial theoretical review on the subject of work-life balance, with the intention of highlighting the need for further research, particularly in the South African context.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explained that one of the most common mistakes a novice researcher can make is to proceed with the rest of the research process immediately after establishing the general research problem. The result is that the researcher discovers too late that the problem is too large to handle, or too small to make a worthwhile contribution to the field. Furthermore, reading the literature helps the researcher focus on important issues and variables that have a bearing on the research question (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Henning (2004) described the literature review as a conversation with your literature, with the researcher playing the host, letting speakers enter the conversation, changing the topic, and keeping it lively and critical.

To conclude, the literature review is used first and foremost for contextualising your study, in order to argue a case (Henning, 2004; Silverman, 2000). The literature review is often a separate chapter of the research report, in which you synthesise the literature on your topic and engage critically with it.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

Henning (2004), Mouton (2001), and Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) touched on the importance of doing a literature review when you embark on a research study. One of your first aims should be to find out what has been done in your field of study. You should start by reviewing the existing body of knowledge to see how other

scholars have investigated the research problem you are interested in (Henning, 2004; Mouton, 2001; Silverman, 2000). As a researcher you want to learn from other scholars: how they theorised on and conceptualised issues; their empirical findings; what instruments they used, and to what effect (Mouton, 2001). The literature review puts your research project into context by showing how it fits into a particular field (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Silverman, 2000).

After reading your literature or the body of available knowledge, you begin the process of writing it up. The literature can be written up in a number of ways, depending on your purpose statement (Henning, 2004; Mouton, 2001). It may be presented thematically, that is, in a way that traces issues and connections between issues, and highlights the gaps in the literature that are not covered by the research (Henning, 2004; Mouton, 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

You may also present your literature review chronologically, dealing with the earliest research first in order to create a context for your own research, and pointing out major advances in research on your topic (Henning, 2004; Mouton, 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Henning (2004) suggested that the best way to present your literature review is to advance your argument.

Finally, a literature review must be well structured and systematically presented. Rather than jumping from one issue to the next, each topic should be carefully developed. All topics that are considered in the review should be arranged into a structured argument (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In line with Henning, and Terre Blanche and Durrheim's approach, I structured my literature review thematically.

This chapter includes a further review and assessment of the literature, which I used to identify and crystallise my research problem. I start the chapter by discussing the meaning of work in an individual's life, and the variables influencing an individual's attitude to work as well as the need for balance. By discussing the important issues and variables in the sections to follow, I hope that the value of my research topic will begin to resonate with you, the reader. I also briefly explore the individual and organisational perspectives on work-life balance. Finally, before concluding, I provide

a discussion on how individuals can move towards finding a balance between their different life roles.

2.3 UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The research problem in this study focuses on exploring the construction of work-life balance. The word “construction” refers to a sense in which words and statements are to be understood (a meaning or purpose) (*Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary*, 2000). In order to make sense of and understand an individual’s construction of work-life balance, you need to consider the context within which it occurs.

Thus far, studies in the area of work-life interaction have mainly concentrated on the conflict between people’s work and other life roles. This leads me to conclude that an individual’s work context plays an important role in the work-life balance equation. It is, therefore, important to understand the meaning of work in an individual’s life, the variables influencing individuals’ attitudes to work, and their need for balance.

2.3.1 The meaning of work

Work includes not only paid work, but also unpaid work such as domestic, childcare and voluntary work. Work has often been equated with labour, in line with the Protestant³ view that work is of service to God (Haworth & Lewis, 2005). However work is defined, it seems of great significance to human functioning. According to Louw and Edwards (1993), the choice of a profession and the development of a career are very important tasks in the life of any adult.

The meaning of work encompasses the importance work has in an individual’s life (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). These authors stated that work sustains an individual’s quality of life, and that different meanings can be derived from different

³ The Protestant work ethic originated from Protestantism, which constituted work meanings sanctioned by religion (Furnham, 1990). The work ethic postulated that work has moral value, that each person has a calling for work, that all people should work (including the rich), and that people should develop their talents. Material wealth was viewed as a sign of God’s grace, and it was deemed taboo to use it for purposes of self-indulgence.

concepts associated with work. Work is usually considered to be paid employment, however, it can also be seen as a means of making a living, keeping occupied, fulfilling a career, developing and applying skills, meeting certain needs, contributing to an all-encompassing lifestyle, or fulfilling a purpose in life (Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Individual meanings of work that are derived from socio-cultural influences must include the context of family socialisation, school socialisation, group affiliations, and work experience. To understand the needs, motivations and expectations of an individual at work, psychologists have come to regard him not simply as a worker, but also as a spouse, parent and member of a community (Kirchmeyer, 1992).

Gender differences also seem to play a role in determining the meaning of work. Gender differences in respect of work values is a topic studied by Beutell and Brenner (1986). Beutell and Brenner (1986) found then that values associated with security, prestige, advancement and challenge were associated with men, whereas values related to the work environment, learning and development, independence, cultural and esthetic interests, and making a social contribution through work were associated with women.

Moreover, a significant difference in values remained when comparisons were made between men and women with similar life orientations; in other words, family first priority and career first priority. An early study conducted by Walker, Tausky and Oliver (1982) compared the reported importance of various aspects of work in respect of men and women. Of interest is a review done by Eby et al. (2005), which pointed out that women with children reported that they attach greater value to extrinsic aspects of work, yet place a lower priority on the value of convenience, relations with co-workers, and intrinsic aspects of the job than their childless counterparts.

Apart from gender differences, an individual's level of work also seems to play a role in the meaning such a person attaches to work. Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) averred that among lower-level workers, the financial imperative is generally the most important reason for work. In addition, when job insecurity is a reality, workers may

hold onto their positions and increase the effort they put into their work, thereby exacerbating family-to-work conflict (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998).

In summary, the meaning of work involves a multi-dimensional phenomenon that can include various variables, and also varies from one individual to the next. Apart from the different meanings individuals attach to work, there are various variables influencing people's attitudes towards work. This aspect is the focus of the next discussion.

2.3.2 Variables influencing individual attitudes to work

The social information processing perspective of Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) explained that individuals selectively perceive and make attributions about their jobs in accordance with the expectations they bring to the workplace. In addition, the social context of work – particularly cues given by the work group – shapes how people react to their jobs. Alternatively, individual characteristics (such as aspects of personality or demographics) have been conceptualised as moderators of the relation between features of the job, and work attitudes (O'Brien, 1986; Burke & Greenglass, 2001).

Psychologists have long emphasised that people come to work with particular needs, values and dispositions which shape their attitude to work (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991; Van der Merwe, 2006; Welch & Welch, 2005). Loscocco and Roschelle (1991) concurred that the most common studies of work attitudes include job satisfaction, job involvement, and organisational commitment. In this regard, researchers have identified a number of ways in which individual differences may be responsible for the variation in employee work attitudes.

According to Lorence and Motimer (1985), an individual's age has an influence on his attitude to work. In a particularly informative longitudinal study, the relation between work conditions and job involvement throughout an individual's work career, was examined. The results showed that employees' job involvement becomes more

stable with an employee's age, largely because job conditions become more stable with an employee's age (Lorence & Mortimer, 1985).

Another important question is how family roles combine to influence individuals' perceptions of their jobs. Roles are perceptions which are shaped by society, and provide people with meaning (Esterberg, 2002). Every person has different life roles, and assigns different meanings to each of these. Greenhaus (1988) stated that it is important to identify how people construe their work and home domains, and how they describe what they actually do within their work and home domains. A good example is evident from a study by Perry-Jenkins, Pierce, Haley and Goldberg (1999), who found that in families of dual-earner couples, where both parents rank being a parent as their most important role, there is great variation in their definitions of what a parent actually does.

This view is supported by Cinamon and Rich (2002), who suggested that you should first identify people in terms of the importance they attach to work and family roles, before examining what relation this has to levels of work-family conflict. Netemeyer, Maxham and Pullig (2005) pointed out that the main shortcoming in their study on the work-family interface was the failure to measure the importance of family role versus the job role for employees.

Rather than examining the number of roles held, Thoits (1992) argued it is better to examine how people structure or combine multiple roles. In other words, the way in which a person merges roles is likely to be as critical an influence on individual psychological outcomes, as the number of roles held (Menaghan, 1989).

Sekaran (1983b) explored the perceptions of men and women in dual-career families, in an effort to understand their concerns, priorities and attitudes as these relate to work and family. The results indicated that both men and women organise their work and non-work experiences around four distinct dimensions: the psychological gratification from work, effective management of multiple roles, investment-return in their careers, and expectations from others in the organisation.

Sekaran (1983a, 1985) conducted several studies on the quality of life among dual-career spouses. In the first of these studies Sekaran (1983a) stated that those who used hired help reported less stress when occupying multiple roles. Furthermore, they reported greater enabling processes, greater integration of work and family roles, and higher job and life satisfaction. Sekaran (1985) concluded that for both genders, less multiple role stress and greater enabling processes predicted higher job satisfaction. Moreover, role stress was negatively related to life satisfaction for both husbands and wives. In contrast, enabling processes were predictive of life satisfaction for wives, but not husbands.

A study of employees in the manufacturing sector found that the impact of financial rewards on job satisfaction was similar for single and married women, but that financial rewards have a smaller impact on the job satisfaction of single women, who are likely to have major economic responsibilities (Loscocco, 1990).

Finally, Lambert (1993) explored the role of gender and family variables on a variety of work attitudes. Counter to prediction, parental status variables were not associated with women's work attitudes. Fathers whose youngest child was two or younger reported higher intrinsic motivation than fathers whose youngest child was a teenager. Moreover, fathers with a child younger than two reported higher intrinsic motivation than their female counterparts. Gender differences were also found with respect to characteristics of the spouse's job. Women's job satisfaction showed a significant positive relationship to their husband's job security, while no such relationship was found for men's job satisfaction. Finally, women reported lower job involvement as their husbands worked longer hours. In contrast, wives' work hours were positively related to men's job involvement.

Thompson, Kopelman and Schriesheim (1992) examined how various aspects of life satisfaction related to work attitudes among self-employed and organisationally employed men. Of relevance here is the finding that the positive relationship between family and job satisfaction was stronger among self-employed men than organisationally employed men.

Scandura and Lankau (1997) also found interactive effects of gender and family responsibility on the relationship between flexible work schedules and work attitudes. Specifically women who perceived their company as offering more flexible work schedules had higher commitment and experienced greater satisfaction than women who did not view their company as flexible.

Having discussed the meaning of work from the perspective of the individual, and the variables that impact on individual attitudes to work, the need for work-life balance seems to be a fairly credible phenomenon. The meaning of work-life balance is, however, still to be explicated. In reviewing literature in this regard I found that the organisation and the individual hold different perspectives in their experience of work-life balance. I now continue to explore the individual versus the organisational perspective on work-life balance.

2.4 DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

2.4.1 An individual perspective on work-life balance

Hacker and Doolen (2003) observed that individuals often feel their lives are out of balance – this, on a day-to-day basis. More importantly, however, Hacker and Doolen (2003) noted that even when life's "pieces" are in balance, the feeling is often unsatisfying.

Burke (2001) found that change and increased demands on time, energy and work commitment led to employees to experience increased concern about balancing their work and personal lives. Similarly, Papalexandris and Kramar (1997) observed that research done in industrial countries showed that employees across different organisational levels, and with different family structures, are concerned with achieving a better balance between their working life, family obligations, leisure activities and socialising.

Both men and men's family roles have changed and continue to change dramatically. Men are beginning to take on household and parenting duties, as more

women accept the role of paid employment in their lives (Haworth & Lewis, 2005; Newell, 1993; Patel et al., 2006; Pleck, 1993; Theunissen et al., 2003). Indeed, there is evidence that more men, as well as women, are valuing shorter working hours and would trade income for shorter hours so that they can spend time with family and maintain a more balanced life (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Lewis & Cooper, 1995). The shift towards the greater valuing of both work and family involvement (for men and women) has numerous potential advantages (Lewis & Cooper, 1995). It is a reality with various implications in terms of work performance and quality of life, for both sexes, that can no longer be ignored.

Edwards and Rothbard (2000) did not consider balance to be a work-family linking mechanism, because it does not specify how conditions or experiences in one role are causally related to conditions or experiences in the other role. Rather, they argued that work-life balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, constituting an inter-role phenomenon that may be changeable over time.

The question logically follows: what do different individuals perceive to be a better balance between working life, family obligations, leisure and socialising? To illustrate that this is not a simple question, Haworth and Lewis (2005) indicated that the meanings and experiences of work and leisure change at the societal level during different periods in history, and at an individual level during the course of someone's life.

Finally, to understand the experiences of work, you need to explore the organisational perspective on work-life balance.

2.4.2 An organisational perspective on work-life balance

Most companies are starting to realise that employees are their most important asset. As a result, they want to assist their staff in improving the quality of their lives and their sense of well-being, while still taking care of the bottom line (e.g. increased productivity and creativity, decreased sick leave and absenteeism) (Van der Merwe, 2006). In some organisations, flexibility of working practices is being coupled with

policies purporting to support the integration of work and non-work life, sometimes in response to the new attitudes, values and aspirations of key workers (Van der Merwe, 2006).

Managing the integration of work and family demands is a critical challenge facing most employees, and the issue is of growing importance in management literature. According to Lloyds TSB and Working Families (2005), UK companies wanting to retain top talent will have to factor work-life balance into their business strategies. The research further shows that 76 per cent of British employees claim they would rather have better work-life balance than a salary increase (Lloyds TSB & Working Families, 2005). This marks a significant change in traditional perceptions of success in the corporate world, as the desire to get a better work-life balance starts to overshadow bigger pay cheques and greater upward mobility.

According to Welch and Welch (2005), employers are fully aware that most competitors in the global marketplace do not invite their people to decrease their productivity in the name of work-life balance. The truth is – your employer wants 150 per cent of you, and if you are good enough he will do almost anything to get it, even if your family wants 150 per cent too (Welch & Welch, 2005). Yet, in my experience, many employers are willing to accommodate work-life balance challenges if an employee has earned it with his performance. Furthermore, I believe employers utilise work-life policies mainly for recruiting purposes, and that real work-life arrangements are negotiated one-on-one in the context of a supportive culture. My observations have been that people who publicly struggle with work-life balance problems and continually turn to the company for help get labelled “ambivalent” and “uncommitted”. Welch and Welch (2005) concluded that even the most accommodating of employers believes that work-life balance is an individual’s problem to solve.

Kossek, Noe and DeMarr (1999) found that employees who have a strategy for role synthesis that fits with their organisational context will tend to experience work-family balance, as defined by themselves, since internal standards are likely to vary greatly from individual to individual. Certainly, the organisation or nature of the occupation

could impose some constraints with respect to the extent to which individuals can allow their boundaries to be permeable (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006).

Kreiner (2006) argued that many jobs now force at least some integration on workers, through technologies such as cell phones and telecommuting which blur the boundary between work and home. In South Africa, the high rate of unemployment has led to employees feeling the need to work harder and longer hours, due to feelings of uncertainty about their future security. In addition, psychological and physical boundaries between work and non-work have become more fluid as organisations become increasingly virtual, and more people work at or from home for all or part of the week, using information and communication technologies (Jackson, 2002; Sullivan, 2000).

The most up-to-date organisational view of work and home indicates that work and home are interdependent, and that this interdependence has a significant impact on individual behaviour in an organisational and private setting, and ultimately on organisational functioning itself (Greenhaus, 1988; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1999). Just as individuals vary in respect of the degree to which they want to segment or integrate work and home, organisations vary in respect of the degree to which they create an environment that promotes either segmentation or integration (Kirchmeyer, 1995).

An employee may, therefore, experience internal conflict if his employer socially pressurises him to use a strategy that is not personally preferred. For example, company policy may allow employees to periodically surf the Net for personal use, while other professions may be restricted from receiving private visitors, or responding to personal phone calls during work hours.

To fully examine the impact of the work role on the individual, it is important to consider the way in which aspects of your work lives influence your non-work lives. To make work-life balance choices and take the actions that ultimately make sense for you, you need to understand the following reality: your employer's top priority is competitiveness.

Keeping in mind that the organisation's priority is competitiveness, and having to make work-life balance choices, the emotional drain of keeping everything in balance is often overwhelming (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). While it is thought to be in an individual's best interest to live a balanced life (Kofodimos, 1993; Lewis & Cooper, 1995), work-family balance often implies cutting back on work to spend more time with the family.

The next section looks at how individuals can move towards finding a balance between their work and non-work roles.

2.5 ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

As a metaphor, balance is neither powerful nor empowering. Hacker and Doolen (2003) also noted that individuals contend that the image of balancing, in itself, contributes to the problem: balancing does not embrace the integration of life, but rather depicts life as a set of competing priorities (Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Welch & Welch, 2005).

Kofodimos (1993) found that work-family balance is associated with quality of life when there is substantial time, involvement, or satisfaction to distribute across individuals' different life roles. From the perspective of Greenhaus et al. (2003), work-life balance is achieved when individuals demonstrate equally positive commitment to different life roles. A person should, therefore, maintain a balanced orientation towards multiple roles. Greenhaus et al. (2003) affirmed that to be balanced is to approach each role (work and family) with an approximately equal level of attention, time, involvement or commitment. Positive balance suggests an equally high level of attention, time, involvement or commitment. Negative balance, on the other hand, implies an equally low level of attention, time involvement or commitment. These inputs reflect an individual's level of role engagement, and according to Greenhaus et al. (2003) it is difficult to imagine a balanced individual who is substantially more or less engaged in a work role than in a family role.

Mostert and Rathbone (2001) found significant relationships between various job resources (autonomy, task characteristics, social support and instrumental support) and work engagement. With reference to the relationship between autonomy and work engagement, it seems that those individuals who had freedom in carrying out work, who had the most influence over their decisions to complete tasks, who could decide on the time spent in completing tasks, and who could solve problems on their own, were prone to be in a high work engagement group. This finding concurs with the findings of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), who found that one of the major antecedents of work engagement is the availability of resources. Therefore when employees have enough job resources, such as participative management, increasing social support, job autonomy, performance feedback, task variety and training facilities (see Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Mostert, Cronje & Pienaar, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), it is likely that they will be more engaged. In a later study, Oldfield and Mostert (2007) also found that a lack of job resources such as low autonomy, poor task characteristics and a lack of social support from supervisor and colleagues, and poor salaries and benefits could further contribute to health-related problems.

Greenhaus et al. (2003) added another component of balance which refers to the resultant outcomes experienced in work and family roles. They suggested that positive balance implies an equally high level of satisfaction with work and family roles, whereas negative balance suggests an equally low level of satisfaction with each role. Again, it is difficult to imagine individuals as having achieved work-family balance if they are substantially more satisfied with one role than the other.

Role engagement can, therefore, be divided into elements of time and psychological involvement, and the resultant satisfaction attained. As such, Greenhaus et al. (2003) proposed three components of work-family balance:

- Time balance: an equal amount of time devoted to work and family roles;
- Involvement balance: an equal level of psychological involvement in work and family roles;
- Satisfaction balance: an equal level of satisfaction with work and family roles.

Greenhaus et al. (2003) suggested that the beneficial effects of balance are based on the assumption of positive balance. Moreover, an equally high investment of time and involvement in work and family would reduce work-family conflict and stress, thereby enhancing an individual's quality of life. They concluded that work-family balance is associated with quality of life, but only under certain conditions and not in the manner they had predicted (Greenhaus et al., 2003). When individuals invest relatively little of their time or involvement in their combined work and family roles, or derive little satisfaction from their combined roles, work-family balance is unrelated to quality of life. Under these conditions there is little time, involvement or satisfaction to allocate between roles. Therefore, imbalance produces such small differences in engagement or satisfaction between work and family roles, that the degree of balance has few or no implications for an individual's quality of life (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Under conditions of limited time involvement, or limited satisfaction across work and family, individuals who are balanced fare no better or worse than those who are imbalanced in favour of work or family (Greenhaus et al., 2003). In contrast, work-family balance is associated with quality of life when there is substantial time, involvement, or satisfaction to distribute across roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003). In a sense these individuals may have made the decision not to let their work responsibilities interfere with their family life. Finally, individuals who were more engaged in work than family, experienced the highest level of work-to-family conflict and stress (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

There are as many work-life balance equations as there are individuals. Sacrifice is required to succeed in the balancing the mindset (Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Welch & Welch, 2005). Working parents who want to be very involved in their children's lives often have to relinquish some of their ambition. People who put business success first most likely have to relinquish some level of intimacy with their children, or forego having children at all (Welch & Welch, 2005). No matter what balance you choose, you will have to make sacrifices or trade-offs.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I explored the important issues and variables that have a bearing on the research problem. Furthermore, I explored the individual and organisational perspectives on work-life balance, and touched on how individuals can move towards finding a balance between their various life roles.

In the following chapter (**Chapter 3**) I elaborate on the research design and share how I came to choose a qualitative research paradigm to conduct my research. In **Chapter 3** I also introduce the research participants and explain the approach I used in analysing the data.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND NATURAL ACCOUNT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first phase of any research project involves transforming an interesting research idea into a feasible, researchable research problem (Mouton, 2001). According to Mouton (2001), this phase is documented in three sections, namely the background, the preliminary literature study, and the statement of the research problem (covered in **Chapters 1 and 2**).

The next logical phase of a research project is to develop a research design. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), a research design is a strategic framework for action to bridge research questions, and execute or implement the research. **Chapter 3**, therefore, presents the research design I chose for my study, and in doing so it outlines the type of study I undertook in order to provide acceptable answers to the research problem or question. I also indicate why I selected this particular design, and the possible challenges or limitations in the design which require attention. Furthermore, I discuss how I envisaged conducting my research under the heading: "Techniques". Finally, this chapter elaborates on the data analysis approach.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Once you have formulated the research problem, your next step is to select an appropriate research design (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mouton, 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). According to Mouton (2001) a research design is a plan or blueprint of how you intend to conduct your research. Researchers often confuse research design with research methodology (Mouton, 2001). The research design focuses on the end product (e.g. the kind of study being planned), whereas the research methodology focuses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used. Henning (2004) views the research design type as the epistemological and thus also the methodological "home" of the study.

Designing a research study is often compared to designing a building. Like building plans, research designs ensure that the study fulfils a particular purpose, and that the research can be completed with the available resources (Mouton, 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Although there is nothing wrong with understanding research designs as blueprints, there are other legitimate research designs that cannot be defined in these terms.

Qualitative researchers in particular propose designs that are more fluid and open, and are not defined purely on technical terms. According to this view, research is an iterative process that requires a flexible, non-sequential approach (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Although you would begin by proposing a research question and developing a design, things can change when the research is being carried out, and there may be good reasons why you would want to change the original design.

A general rule of research design is to better focus your research question in such a manner that you can explore a small instance of a phenomenon in detail, rather than attempting to study a broader issue with an inadequate sample (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

There has been much debate about the nature of the research process and the type of research design which is more appropriate for the social sciences (Henning, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Some quantitative researchers argue that flexible and pragmatic designs are non-scientific, and warn that bias may be introduced when designs are modified during the execution stage of the research (Henning, 2004; Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, argue that fixed technical (blueprint) designs are restrictive and unsuited to much exploratory and inductive research which does not begin with general theories to be tested (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). For the purposes of this study, I understand research design as a framework and plan that guides research activity, to ensure that sound and valid conclusions are researched.

The blueprint of a building is developed according to principles of civil engineering, to ensure that the construction is sound. Similarly, research designs should be

developed in accordance with scientific principles to ensure that the findings will stand up to criticism (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

3.2.1 Principles of research design

In developing a research design the researcher must make a series of decisions along four dimensions, namely the *purpose* of the research; the theoretical *paradigm* informing the research; the context or *situation* within which the research is carried out; and the research *techniques* employed to collect and analyse the data (Henning, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The framework (research design) that links the research question to the execution of the research is developed through a process of reflecting on issues relevant to each of these four dimensions, to produce a coherent guide for action which will provide valid answers to the research question (Henning, 2004). This process of reflection is guided by two principles of decision-making: design validity and design coherence.

3.2.1.1 Design validity

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), research in the social sciences has traditionally been restricted to one paradigm (positivism). Furthermore, it has used a standard set of research techniques and has approached research contexts or settings with the main purpose of controlling them (Henning, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This made research design an intricate technical affair, but restricted the complexity and scope of the decision making.

In making design decisions, the researcher proceeds by identifying plausible rival hypotheses and eliminating their impact (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Thinking about plausible rival hypotheses is a general principle of decision making in designing research. Although historically associated with positivism, the principle of looking for plausible rival hypotheses is a way of checking the validity of all kinds of research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). All researchers should ask themselves

whether their research is designed to give valid and believable conclusions, or whether the conclusions can be explained by factors that the researcher has not taken into account.

3.2.1.2 Design coherence

The increasing legitimacy of research paradigms other than positivism has expanded the decision-making process (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It is necessary to also consider the coherence of the design. Researchers achieve coherent designs by ensuring that the research purposes and techniques are arranged logically within the research framework provided by a particular paradigm (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

An example of this would be a researcher adopting an interpretive paradigm to investigate the experience of fatherhood. The researcher plans to collect qualitative data by interviewing fathers in the context of their homes, while they are interacting with their children, and employs techniques of qualitative data analysis to produce findings. This design is coherent because the techniques of sampling, data collection and interpretation, as well as the context of the study “fit” within the logic of the interpretive paradigm and with the purpose of the research. Although the uncontrolled environment of the interviews may undermine the validity of the study from a positivist⁴ perspective, from an interpretive⁵ perspective this context is the key to valid research.

Both principles aim to ensure a level of consistency between the researcher’s paradigmatic assumptions, the purpose of the research, the methodology employed, and the eventual conclusions. This consistency is achieved when the research activity produces data that provide valid answers to the research question. In post-positivistic research, research coherence is a broader concept that accommodates research designs with different understandings of validity.

⁴ In positivist research, a hypothesis is a formal statement postulating a relationship between variables (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

⁵ In interpretive research, terms like “research question” or “problematic” are used to convey a similar idea, that is, something that the researcher believes could be the case and intends determining by means of research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

3.2.2 Making design decisions

In planning an investigation, the researcher must make a series of decisions about how the research questions can best be answered by the investigation. The researcher must find a compromise between the ideals of good research and the numerous practical constraints that present themselves in real-life research settings (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The different ways of thinking about the research process involve different paradigms or worldviews which, in turn, shape the research strategies to be used (Esterberg, 2002). According to Craffert (2001), a variety of aspects influence the choice of a particular research strategy, such as the researcher's epistemological framework, the objective of the study, the phenomenon being studied, and the researcher's training and skills.

3.2.2.1 Paradigms

Paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define (for researchers) the nature of their inquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Before elaborating on these three dimensions, I would like to touch on three types of paradigms: positivist, interpretive, and constructionist.

(a) The positivist paradigm

Researchers who employ this approach believe that what is to be studied consists of a stable and unchanging external reality. The researcher can adopt an objective and detached epistemological stance towards that reality, and can employ a methodology that relies on controlling and manipulating reality. The aims of such research would be to provide an accurate description of the laws and mechanism that operate in social life (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), researchers who work from a positivist paradigm work from within a realist and critical realist ontology and objective

epistemologies, and rely on experimental survey and rigorously defined qualitative methodologies.

(b) The interpretive paradigm

If the researcher believes the reality to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world, he may adopt an intersubjective or interactional epistemological stance toward that reality, and use methodologies that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subject (e.g. an interview or participant observation). This is characteristic of the interpretive approach, which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings underlying social action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

(c) The constructionist paradigm

If the researcher believes reality consists of a fluid and variable set of social constructions, he may adopt a suspicious and politicised epistemological stance, and employ methodologies that allow him to deconstruct versions of reality. This is characteristic of constructionist research, which aims to show how versions of the social world are produced in discourse, and demonstrates how these constructions of reality make certain actions possible, and others unthinkable (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Findings are usually presented in terms of criteria of grounded theory or pattern theories (Charmaz, 1995).

Thus, positivism may suit those who seek objective facts; interpretive research would be ideal for those who care about meanings people attach to such facts; and social constructionism may suit those who wonder how the social world gets constructed in the first place, as one which contains facts.

Paradigms are thus central to research design because they impact both on the nature of the research question and on the manner in which the question is to be studied. In conclusion, what is important is that researchers recognise that their findings and conclusions are embedded in paradigms, and employ research designs that are coherent.

Henning (2004) argued that the research question, the way the researcher perceives the world and knowledge (that is, his ontological and epistemological position) influences what he will research and how he will design his inquiry. As mentioned before, ontology, epistemology and methodology are three dimensions along which the nature of a researcher's inquiry is defined. These three dimensions are discussed below.

(i) Ontology

Ontology specifies the nature of the reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2004) one of the key ontological debates centres around whether there is a captive social reality, and how it should be constructed. In broad terms, there are three distinct positions, namely realism, materialism, and idealism. Realism involves the belief that there is an external reality which exists independently of people's beliefs or understanding (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). Materialism claims that values, beliefs or experiences arise from the material world, but do not shape the material world (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). Idealism asserts that reality is only knowable through the human mind and through socially constructed meanings.

Questions of social ontology are concerned with the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2004). The central point of orientation here is the question whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built from the perceptions and actions of social actors. These positions are frequently referred to respectively as objectivism and constructivism (Bryman, 2004).

(ii) Epistemology

Epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Henning (2004) explained that epistemology comes from the Greek word *episteme*, the term for knowledge. In simple terms, epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge or how we come to know the world.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) distinguished between interpretive (the knower and know interact and shape each other), and subjective epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understanding).

(iii) Methodology

Methodology specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he believes can be known. Henning (2004) argued that a researcher needs to have studied different methods and traditions of doing research in order to be an informed researcher and also a methodologist. The philosophy and study of methods of different ways of doing research all impact on the design and execution of a study.

The way in which a researcher argues the suitability and utility of his choice of methods is thus his methodological reasoning. Methodology is, therefore, more than a collection of methods: it is about reasoning what their value in a study is, and why they have been chosen, while using rich literature in methodology to inform the argument (Henning, 2004). Furthermore, Henning (2004) averred that the group of methods of data collection and analysis would also be coherent because the researcher has philosophised in a certain way about them, and has made sure that they are compatible.

Silverman (2000) explained that methodology defines how one goes about studying any phenomenon. In social research, methodologies may be defined broadly (e.g. qualitative or quantitative), or more narrowly (e.g. grounded theory or conversation analysis) (Silverman, 2000). Methodologies cannot be true or false, only more or less useful.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), however, acknowledged that pretending that social science research operates from within a single paradigm leads to an exclusive focus on technical issues, such as accurate measurement and proper research design, with no concern for the broader context within which knowledge is produced.

Assuming a relativist ontology (multiple realities are constructed by people as they go about their lives), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understanding), and believing in a naturalistic set of methodological procedures, I chose to adopt an interpretative paradigm. Exponents of this paradigm are interested in understanding the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In order to appreciate the lived experience, qualitative researchers must engage with and participate in it, as well as actively interpret it (Locke, 2001).

To conclude, by specifying the nature of the reality that can be known, paradigms provide broad frameworks for the research purpose.

3.2.2.2 Purpose

The purpose of a research project is reflected in the types of conclusions the research aims to draw, or the goals of the research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In other words, what do the researchers wish to attain by means of their study?

Social research can serve many purposes. Three of the most common and useful of these are exploration, description, and explanation. According to Babbie (2001) much of social research is conducted to explore a topic, or to begin to familiarise the researcher with that topic. This approach typically occurs when a researcher examines a new interest, or hopes to satisfy his curiosity and desire for a better understanding, or when the subject of study itself is relatively new.

As mentioned in **Chapter 1**, my personal experiences of work-life balance initiated my interest in the topic. Furthermore, having exposure to some of the problems being experienced by black South African employees (employed in a customer care

environment) around their experience of work-life balance focused my interest to explore work-life balance further taking cultural differences into account. Consequently, my literature research on work-life balance led me to take note of the limited research in South Africa, and the possibilities of research within our unique socio-political context. South Africa experiences unique circumstances in the workplace like the diverse multicultural work environment (Mageni & Slabbert, 2005). Because individuals are socialised in dissimilar cultures, languages and communities, their value and belief systems are often incompatible (Kotze, 2005). Furthermore, factors leading to and consequences of work-life balance can be dissimilar for different language groups. South African employees in general, but particularly individuals from different cultural groups can use different types of strategy to deal with work-life balance issues compared to with each other to other countries. It therefore seems important to investigate the experience of work-life balance for different cultural groups. As such I became curious about further exploring the construction of work-life which other race groups employed within the customer care environment. Hence, the overall purpose of my research can be regarded as exploratory, and relates to the stated research objective, namely to explore the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men in a customer care environment (see **Chapter 1**).

Part of my research process involved exploring different types of research, thereby identifying a suitable research type to use in order to achieve my research purpose.

3.2.2.3 The types of research

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explored three different ways in which to distinguish types of research. These ways of distinguishing different research types, are discussed below.

(a) Exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research

Exploratory studies are used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research. They employ an open, flexible and inductive approach to research as they attempt to look for new insights into phenomena (Terre Blanche &

Durrheim, 1999). Furthermore, exploratory studies are also a source of grounded theory (Babbie, 2001). Descriptive studies aim to describe phenomena accurately through narrative-type descriptions, classification, or measuring relationships (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Explanatory studies aim to provide causal explanations for phenomena (Gummerson, 2003).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) argued that it is important to know that there is no consensus in the social science research community about exactly what counts as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research. Furthermore, because qualitative research is open-ended, many positivist researchers believe qualitative research is always exploratory, leaving the work of accurate description and explanation to more rigorous quantitative research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Interpretive and constructionist researchers, however, contend that qualitative research can be used not only for exploratory purposes, but also to formulate rich descriptions and explanations of human phenomena (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

(b) Applied and basic research

The findings derived from basic research are typically used to advance our fundamental knowledge of the social world. Knowledge of the world exists as general theories about how the world operates, and basic research is used to refute or support these theories (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The findings derived from applied research, in contrast, have a practical application. Applied research aims only to generalise the findings of a study to the specific context under investigation, in order to help decision makers draw conclusions about the particular problems they are dealing with (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

In the current study I found myself using a bit of both applied and basic research.

(c) Quantitative and qualitative research

Quantitative researchers collect data in the form of numbers, and use statistical types of data analysis (Christensen, 2001; Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche &

Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers collect data in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations that are recorded in language, and analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes (Silverman, 2000). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study selected issues in-depth, with openness and in detail, as he identifies and attempts to understand the categories of information that emerge from the data (Henning, 2004).

Qualitative research gives us a clear and detailed account of actions and representation of actions, so that we can gain a better understanding of our world, hopefully to use that knowledge to bring about a measure of social change (Denzin & Lincoln, (2003). Furthermore, Locke (2001) argued that there is great depth and complexity to both traditional and applied qualitative research perspectives, into which a socially situated researcher can enter. These traditions locate the researcher in history, simultaneously guiding and constraining work that will be done in any specific study. It is therefore important that the researcher, from the outset and to the best of his ability, “unpack” his scientific beliefs.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) argued that the many nuanced traditions of qualitative research can be categorised into those focusing on individual lived experience; those focusing on society and culture; and those with an interest in language and communication.

Deciding whether to use quantitative or qualitative research has many implications for research design – it impacts sampling, data collection, and analysis. Ultimately, this decision is made after considering the purpose of the research and the type of data that will achieve this purpose.

Qualitative research is naturalistic (e.g. studies real-world situations), holistic (e.g. cause-effect relationships) and inductive (e.g. immersion in the details, to discover important categories). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) referred to this characteristic as the “themes” of qualitative inquiry. If the research purpose is to study phenomena as they unfold in real-world situations, without manipulation; to study phenomena as interrelated wholes rather than split up into discreet

predetermined variables, then an inductive, qualitative approach is required (Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

There is increasing awareness and growing recognition that qualitative research – and particularly in grounded theory – portrays dimensions of both induction and deduction (Kelle, 2005; Orton, 1997). Marecek (2003) recognised the deductive stance that is unavoidable at the start of any research project, and cautioned against overstating the fact that qualitative research has no deductive qualities.

After carefully studying the different types of research and themes of qualitative inquiry, an inductive, qualitative research approach was used as it afforded me the opportunity to describe an experience from the participants' point of view, and to record their impressions (including words, gestures and tone). This is in line with the interpretive paradigm, which supports the need to apply appropriate research methods to capture the richness of people's social worlds, in order to ultimately understand or appreciate them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This approach also enabled me to obtain detailed information in order to share in the understanding and perceptions of others, and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (see Berg, 1998; Silverman, 2000). Furthermore, through this approach the researcher can focus on the subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols and descriptions presented by the participants (Denzin, 1989).

By considering both the object of study and the type of study implicit in a research question, the researcher begins to make explicit decisions about how the research will be implemented. Marshall and Rossman (1999) referred to this as epistemological integrity between the research genre, overall research strategy, research question, design and methods.

To conclude, the object of study and the type of study should fit logically within a particular paradigm of research, and should inform decisions about the techniques to be used in implementing the study, in order to ensure the validity of findings. These aspects are discussed as part of the research methodology employed in this research.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research design should provide an explicit plan of action. This should include the techniques or research methodology that will be employed in implementing the research. The research methodology is divided into three categories: sampling, data collection, and analysis (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Research designs should provide detailed and extensive information about all three aspects of the research, which are discussed below.

3.3.1 Sampling

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) stated that in developing a research design, the researcher must ask two further questions about the research purpose: about who or what do you want to draw conclusions, and what type of conclusions do you want to draw about your object of analysis?

In defining the object of a research study, the researcher is specifying who or what he wants to draw conclusions about. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) referred to this as “units of analysis”. Babbie (2001) distinguished between four different units of analysis that are common in the social sciences: individuals, groups, organisations, and social artefacts.

In defining the object of a research study, the researcher must also specify what information about these units is the focus of the study. In this study the unit of analysis is a small group of black women and men employed within a customer care environment, and the information to be collected about them relates to how they construct work-life balance.

The units of analysis impact sample selection, data collection, and the types of conclusions that can be drawn from the research (Babbie, 2001). Sampling involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours and social processes to observe. Locke (2001) stated that as researchers begin a study they select particular individuals, groups, and / or settings which they believe will provide rich information on the research topic. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explained that some of

the main concerns in sampling include representativeness and the size of the sample.

The research must justify why a particular sampling strategy suits the particular research study. Sampling to redundancy involves not defining one's sample size upfront, but interviewing more and more people until the same themes and issues come up repeatedly (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers continue to collect data until they reach a point of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the researcher is no longer hearing or seeing new information (Babbie, 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Unlike quantitative researchers who wait until the end of the study to analyse their data, qualitative researchers analyse their data throughout their study.

Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people in their natural context and studied in-depth to ensure that their findings are transferable, that is, they help to understand other contexts or groups similar to those studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2000). Consistent with assertions regarding the importance of making sample size considerations, a few methodologists have provided sample size guidelines for several of the most common qualitative research designs and techniques. Specifically, Creswell (2002) has recommended that three to five participants be used for case study research. Also, with respect to phenomenological studies, sample size recommendations range from six (Morse, 1994) to ten (Creswell, 1998). For grounded theory research sample size guidelines have ranged from ten to 20 participants (Creswell, 2002) to 20 to 20 participants (Creswell, 1998).

Interpretive and constructionist research, as well as qualitative and exploratory research, are more concerned with detailed and in-depth analysis, and typically do not draw on large or random samples (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Various types of purposeful (non-random) sampling may be used.

Sometimes it is appropriate to select a sample on the basis of knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study (Babbie, 2001). This type of non-probability sampling is called "purposive" or "judgemental sampling". Miles and Huberman

(1994) concurred that qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random. This tendency is partly due to the initial definition of the universe being more limited, and partly because social processes have logic and coherence that random sampling can reduce to uninterpretable data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, qualitative sampling is often decidedly theory driven, either upfront or progressively, as in a grounded theory mode (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to Henning (2004), and Kerlinger and Lee (2000), purposive sampling looks for people who can help to build and expand on the substantive theory. Furthermore, this type of sampling procedure has elements of theoretical sampling. Both purposive and theoretical sampling look to people who fit the criteria of desirable participants. In purposive sampling, the participants represent a theoretical population in that they are spokespersons for the topic of inquiry, hence the notion of theoretical sampling (Henning, 2004; Silverman, 2000); they are not representative of a population, and the findings from the interviews cannot be generalised to a population. In other words, purposive sampling does have its uses – particularly in qualitative research – but researchers must take care to acknowledge the limitations of this method, especially regarding the accurate and precise representations of populations (Babbie, 2001).

In line with Creswell's (2002) guideline on sample sizes, I chose to work with a sample size of ten participants. I wanted to ensure that the sample size was not too small that it would be difficult to achieve data saturation, and at the same time not too large that it would be difficult to undertake a deep analysis. In selecting individuals as research participants who had been exposed to the subject of the study, I chose purposive sampling. In order to gain entrée into the field, I approached black women and men I personally knew (who fit the required profile) and asked if they would participate in the study. The individuals were sampled based on their potential to contribute to the development of an understanding of black women and men's construction of work-life balance within a customer care environment.

Research always takes place in a specific context. Some researchers choose to ignore context altogether, or disregard the impact of context on their findings. Others attempt to control and manipulate the context to determine the influence of these

manipulations on the responses of the research participants. Still others acknowledge the impact of context on human and social behaviour, and attempt to study these aspects as they occur naturally in context (Geertz, 1973).

Sampling involves making decisions not only about which people to observe or interview, but also about settings, events and social processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A qualitative approach was decided on because this approach is specifically suitable when research takes place in a natural setting. The setting of this research study was the customer care environment of a multinational telecommunications company. This setting was natural to me, the researcher, as well as the participants.

Schurink (2003) explained that qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding behaviour from the subject's frame of reference, and through sustained contact with people in settings where the subjects normally spend their time. I chose this setting for a number of reasons: I was employed within the customer care environment, which brought me into contact with the people in the setting; access could be negotiated and maximised; it was the natural setting for my research participants as they were also employed within the customer care environment and spent time there; and the research idea came from observations made of events taking place within the customer care environment. This is in line with Marshall and Rossman (1999) who argued that the study should be conducted in the setting where the complexity you want to research, operates.

Naturalistic inquiry is a non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling form of qualitative research that is open to whatever emerges from the research setting (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Positivist research (e.g. through surveys) has been criticised for ignoring the social nature of the interaction that takes place in research with human subjects (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) acknowledged two kinds of influence: experimenter effect⁶ and demand characteristics.⁷ Qualitative

⁶ If a black experimenter, for example, asked a white subject to complete a questionnaire used to measure racism, their responses could easily be influenced by what they think the experimenter expects (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

researchers prefer naturalistic forms of inquiry. Therefore, in keeping with the demands of qualitative research, I adopted a naturalistic form of inquiry because I wanted to explore the construction of work-life balance of a small group of employed black women and men, within their natural setting.

Finally, design coherence is achieved by matching the sampling and data collection strategies to the units of analysis (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The next section looks at methods of data collection.

3.3.2 Data collection

Data are the basic materials with which the researcher works. To draw valid conclusions from a research study, it is essential that the researcher have sound data to analyse and interpret (Christensen, 2001). Data should capture the meaning of what the researcher is observing.

Positivist researchers prefer to use quantitative measures that predefine the objects to be studied (Henning, 2004; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Interpretive (and especially constructionist) researchers maintain that the meaning of phenomena varies across contexts, and they adopt a more inductive approach to data collection, observing how categories of observation emerge in context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Henning, 2004). Furthermore, positivist research aims to attain measurement reliability and validity, while qualitative researchers reject reliable measures as invalid (Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Many qualitative researchers argue that social phenomena are context dependent, and that the meaning of whatever the researcher is investigating depends on an individual's particular situation (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of observation. Data are collected either by interviews, or by observing and recoding human behaviour in contexts of interaction (Silverman, 2000). These particular observations are then categorised

⁷ If subjects are asked to complete a questionnaire measuring their attitudes towards alcohol, one would expect different responses, depending on whether this were completed in an experimental laboratory, a bar or a church (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

into themes, and a more general picture of the phenomenon under investigation is built up from particulars. One approach which is regarded as consistent with a contextual epistemology, is the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1995).

Schurink (2003) viewed qualitative research as the collection of “soft” data, that is, rich in its description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Also, research questions are not framed by operationalising variables, rather, they are formulated to investigate complex topics in context (Schurink, 2003; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers may develop a focus as they collect their data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test (Babbie, 2001; Schurink, 2003).

According to Henning (2004), a qualitative study is used to understand what the phenomenon being studied is about, by using evidence from the data and the literature. In qualitative research we want to find out not only what happens, but also how it happens and importantly *why* it happens the way it does. Furthermore, the researcher, as the main instrument of the research, makes meaning from his engagement in the project (Henning, 2004).

Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that well-collected qualitative data are important because they focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong sense of what real life is like. Thus, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Another feature of qualitative data is their richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing complexity (Locke, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experience, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structure of their lives, their perceptions and assumptions, and also for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In developing a coherent research design, the researcher should take care in describing strategies of observation that fit the research paradigm and research purpose. Qualitative methods of data collection (e.g. observation and interviewing)

are favoured by researchers working within the interpretive and constructionist paradigms (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). For this study I used the interview as the main method of data collection.

3.3.2.1 The interview guide

A guide was prepared to give structure and guidance to the interview (Denzin, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Stroh, 2000). While constructing the interview guide (see example of interview guide in Appendix A), I first brainstormed a list of possible questions related to the research topic. I put the questions in a logical order so that easier, less threatening questions were placed at the beginning of the conversation, and more sensitive ones at the end. According to Henning (2004), a researcher must design questions only as possible guides, and should change them as he communicates with the participants.

3.3.2.2 The interview

Marshall and Rossman (1999) contested that interviews have particular strengths. An interview is a useful way of accessing large amounts of data relatively quickly. The qualitative interview can be applied to describe and interpret a particular theme or phenomenon in the life-world of the subject, and the way in which the subject relates to it (Kvale, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Silverman, 2000), and was therefore decided on as an appropriate and valid method for gathering data in this study.

Interviewing has limitations and weaknesses, however. Interviews involve personal interaction, therefore cooperation is essential. Interviewees may be unwilling or uncomfortable with sharing all that the interviewer hopes to explore, or they may be unaware of recurring patterns in their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Furthermore, the interviewer may not ask questions that evoke long narratives from participants, either because of a lack of expertise or familiarity with the local language, or because of a lack of skill.

Rubin and Rubin (1993) observed that qualitative interviewing emphasises the active participation of the interviewer, and the importance of giving the interviewee a voice. Qualitative interviewing requires intense listening, and respect for and curiosity about what respondents are saying (Denzin, 1989; Mohan & Uys, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1999) agreed that interviewers should have superb listening skills, and should be skilled at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration.

Tuttery, Rotnery and Grinnell (1996) recommended that a semi-structured interview be used when the researcher wants to understand people's experiences. According to Polkinghorne (1989), the phenomenological interview is seen as a discourse or conversation involving an interpersonal engagement in which subjects share their experience with the researcher.

According to Esterberg (2002), the interviewer is usually not allowed to deviate from a rigid protocol or interview schedule during a structured interview: questions must be asked exactly as written, and probes must be standardised. If a research participant does not understand a question, the interviewer typically does not rephrase it in the research participant's own words. Instead, he simply repeats the question, perhaps with minor changes in phrasing. Esterberg (2002) found that a structured interview provides the researcher with great depth of insight into the views of the research participants.

I wanted the interviews to be fairly flexible and conversational in nature. Thus, having taken all of the above into consideration, I chose to use semi-structured interviews in order to gather the data. Using a semi-structured interview approach allowed me to understand the participants' experience of work-life balance more in-depth. Appointments were set up with ten of the consenting participants, for a semi-structured face-to-face interview. The sample was limited to ten so that a rapport could be established, and in-depth data gathered from each of the participants.

Henning (2004) suggested that the researcher provide the interviewee with a set of prepared questions to scan and reflect on for a while. I chose to not do this, because I believed it would pre-empt certain responses and unnecessarily alert the

interviewee to possible sensitive points, thereby blocking the conversation. The interviews, which were conducted over a two-week period, gathered data on participants' subjective construction of work-life balance.

During the interviews open-ended questions were put to participants to obtain their specific experience of work-life from a grounded perspective. The semi-structured interview included six pre-determined questions used as a guide. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in addition to reflecting on how many cases to sample and how to select this sample, qualitative researchers should make decisions as to how many interviews to conduct and how long each interview should be. These decisions should not be automatic, but should result from adequate reflection. If we do not enough of these textual units, the quality of our data will be affected, and our data will not be sufficiently rich and thick, making it more difficult to find meaning. In the current study, each interview lasted for about an hour, depending on the need to explore the participant's experience more fully.

Participants shared their experiences in a way they felt comfortable. To the best of my ability, I avoided asking leading questions. I interacted with the participants in the interview only by asking them to clarify or elaborate on specific comments. Furthermore, at certain points my understanding of the experiences was communicated to the participants, in order to validate the accuracy of my interpretation and to ensure that the truth was being "co-created". Being interested in the topic of work-life balance helped me to be open to new meanings and perspectives.

I felt that the information gathered was comprehensive in terms of obtaining an answer to the research question. Since I noted that the themes tended to recur in the participants' accounts, I believed the data were saturated.

3.3.2.3 A pilot interview

From the pilot interview it was clear that the first two questions provided the required reaction, but since the third and the fourth questions were quite similar, it created some confusion for the participant. However, I decided against changing the

questions, as I was curious to hear the other participants' responses to the same questions. Huysamen (1997) stated that the qualitative paradigm allows the researcher to meticulously watch for unanticipated leads to explore, and to continually adjust his data collection strategies to benefit from information he has become aware of only during the research process itself. What I observed in the end was that questions three and four did not create confusion for all participants.

3.3.3 Data capturing and storage

3.3.3.1 Recording and transcription

Silverman (2000) observed that tapes and transcripts offer more than just a point of departure. In the first place, they are a public record which is available to the scientific community, in a way that field notes are not. Second, they can be replayed; transcriptions can be improved and analyses taken off a different tack without affecting the original transcription. A third advantage of detailed transcriptions is that, if you prefer, you can inspect sequences of utterances without being limited to the extracts chosen by the first researcher (Silverman, 2000).

With this in mind, I chose to record the interviews by means of a digital recorder, and then had the recordings transcribed. A digital recorder was used to ensure that I captured the responses of the participants accurately and verbatim, and also to give me the opportunity to relax, listen and be more attentive to the participants during the interview.

Henning (2004) suggested that immediately after an interview, the interviewer should speak into the recorder to comment on what he observed, how respondents reacted, and what stood out in terms of non-transcribable text. Many authors warn that the transcription text may be reified as the actual interview, and argue that researchers need to recall their experience and what they observed during the interview to complement the text.

3.3.3.2 *Observational notes*

Babbie (2001) stressed the need to review observational notes every night, in order to make sense of what you are studying, and to find out what you should pay more attention to in further observations. In the same fashion you need to review your notes on interviews, recording especially effective questions and detecting all those questions you should have asked, but failed to (Babbie, 2001).

Wilkinson (1999) proposed that you describe the conditions under which measurements are taken, for example, the format, time, and place. I was particularly interested in noting the issues around time, and therefore kept notes of the time interviews were scheduled for, whether requests were made to interview earlier or later in the day, and whether requests were made to re-schedule due to work commitments. Furthermore, relevant events and circumstances in each context were also noted.

3.3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis issues should be carefully considered when designing a study, since the aim is to transform information (data) into an answer to the original research question. Data analysis procedures can be divided into quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative techniques employ a variety of statistical analyses to make sense of data, whereas qualitative techniques begin by identifying themes in the data, and relationships between themes (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The researcher needs to explicitly indicate his position, namely, where he stands in terms of methodology and also in respect of methods. In my quest to identify a suitable method to analyse my data, I studied the phenomenological and grounded theory approaches to qualitative data analysis. I will now delicately philosophise about these two qualitative methods in particular.

3.3.4.1 Phenomenology

According to Tesch (1990), some consider phenomenology to be a paradigm, rather than a research strategy. Phenomenology began as a school of philosophy. In the course of applying this philosophy to the scientific exploration of the social world, however, scholars developed explicit investigative methods (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Tesch, 1990).

Karlsson (1993) and Danner (1997) branded phenomenology a descriptive approach which attempts a definition through description alone, not by means of defined terms (by descriptive is meant an approach that aims to answer questions about what and how something is, rather than why). Therefore, if you wish to know what you are explaining, you must engage in a descriptive analysis of the phenomenon in question.

The phenomenological researcher believes participants can share their experiences best when asked to do so in their own words, in lengthy individual reflective interviews, and in observing the context in which some of this experience has played out (Henning, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The phenomenological researcher aims to be as faithful as possible to the experience (Karlsson, 1993). Phenomenology regards the context in which human experience occurs as important (Kruger, 1988). Human experience and behaviour are always linked to the world which the individual lives in, and every human experience is linked to the situation in which the person lives. Thus, the commitment to understanding human phenomena in context, as they are lived, using context-derived terms and categories, is often referred to as the “phenomenological perspective” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

Phenomenology does not view individuals as organisms that react to stimuli, but as organisms that perceive or experience reality in unique ways. It also accepts that every human being experiences the world in which he lives in, in a unique and non-repeatable way. To this effect, the phenomenological method is seen as appropriate and best suited for obtaining an authentic understanding of an individual's

experiences. The researcher tries to capture the world of the participant without prescribing a structure in which the participant must reflect this world.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach to qualitative research that aims to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The analyst reflects upon his own preconceptions about the data, and attempts to suspend these in order to focus on grasping the experiential world of the research participant. Transcripts are coded in considerable detail, with the focus shifting back and forth from the key claims of the participant, to the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of those claims (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus, one might use interpretative phenomenological analysis if one had a research question which aimed to understand what a given experience was like (phenomenology) and how someone made sense of it (interpretation).

While phenomenological studies can follow a general inductive data analysis format (coding, categorizing, thematizing), some qualitative researchers use Moustaka's (1994) work for chunking and managing data. Moustaka (1994) came up with some very specific techniques for phenomenological data analysis. He calls for more collaborative research participation than the researcher being the creator of knowledge. Furthermore, he suggests that the participants become co-researchers but the problem with that is that sometimes you might choose phenomenology as your framework, but your participant might not want to invest time, effort, or the energy in becoming your co-researcher.

Moustaka (1994) emphasises two broad aspects of the phenomenological method:

- Bracketing and phenomenological reduction, and
- An emphasis on intuition, imagination, and universal structures in analysis.

Finally, data analysis for Moustaka (1994) involves a process of reduction and elimination to determine invariant themes.

3.3.4.2 Grounded theory

According to Babbie (2001), grounded theory brings together two main traditions of research, namely positivism and interactionism. Charmaz's (1995) work also introduced grounded theory into constructionism. Grounded theory studies have become one of the hallmarks of contemporary qualitative research (Henning, 2004). It is a good qualitative inquiry that is not theory but data driven, with varying views of data: from objectivist to subjectivist, or socially constructivist.

Charmaz (1995) described grounded theory methods as being used to discover the worlds of the people, by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings and actions, and relying on portraying research participants' lives and voices. The participants' concerns shape the direction of the research, as the researcher only seeks to learn how participants construct the experience through their actions, intentions, beliefs, and feelings (Charmaz, 1995). Furthermore, the role of the researcher can be described as that of an active, thinking co-participant in the process, not merely as a mirror reflecting reality (Craffert, 2001).

Babbie (2001) suggested that a grounded theory approach allows the researcher to be scientific and creative at the same time, provided he follows three guidelines:

- Periodically step back and ask what is going on;
- Maintain an attitude of scepticism (all the theoretical explanations, categories and questions about the data, whether they come directly or indirectly from the making of comparisons, the literature, or from experience, should be regarded as provisional);
- Follow the research procedures.

Grounded theory emphasises research procedures and the discovery of theory from the data through the general method of constant comparison (Dey, 1999; Locke, 2001; Tesch, 1990). In particular, systematic coding is important for achieving validity and reliability in the data analysis (Babbie, 2001). Essentially, grounded theory is an attempt to derive theories from an analysis of the patterns, themes and common categories discovered in observational data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

I decided to utilise the grounded theory approach to analyse the data. Esterberg (2002) preferred that the grounded theory approach be used to work with data and develop meanings. Referring to grounded theory as a methodology, Charmaz (2002) noted that its methods consist of flexible strategies for focusing and expediting qualitative data collection and analysis. These methods provide a set of inductive steps that will successfully lead the researcher from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of them. Put simply, grounded theorists theorise reality according to a set of empirically organised categories.

Within the grounded theory approach, various perspectives developed based on evolving epistemological notions of grounded theory research. These are discussed below.

(a) The objective (naïve realistic) grounded theory approach

Objective (naïve realistic) versions of the grounded theory approach see data as real and presenting objective facts about a world that is knowable and reflectable in the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Henning, 2004).

(b) The constructive grounded theory approach

Constructive versions of the grounded theory approach see data and analysis as being created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants, and from the researcher's relationship with participants (Charmaz, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Constructivist analysts define what is happening in the data, and do not attempt to discover the data. They accept accountability for what the data reveal, because they see themselves as the ones who award codes and construct categories, and ultimately the ones who compose the theories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Henning, 2004).

This type of grounded theory, according to Locke (2001), recognises that the interviewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through his interaction with the interviewee. Locke (2001) argued that data do not provide a window on reality, but

rather that the discovered reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. The researcher and participants frame that interaction and confer meaning on it. The researcher is part of what is viewed, rather than being separate from it. What a researcher sees, shapes what he will define, measure, and analyse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Locke, 2001).

When applying the constructivist grounded theory approach, the researcher asks questions about how one set of categories may illuminate another, and how there may be explanations and clarifications for social processes and phenomena in the data, before fitting the data logically into patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Henning, 2004; Locke, 2001).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) speak about grounded theory developing during the era of the “blurred genres”. I too felt unsure on what approach to adopt, therefore I found myself oscillating between the objective (naïve realistic) and constructive approach to grounded theory during my research.

3.3.4.3 Coding in grounded theory data analysis

One procedure which is used in grounded theory to analyse such large amounts of data, is known as coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). According to Lonkila (1995), at the heart of grounded theory is the highly detailed and explicit coding of texts. Coding plays an important part in my analysis. In coding, a category stands for a phenomenon such as a problem, an issue, or an event that has been identified by the respondents as being significant (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Texts give clues as to how categories do or do not relate. The actual linking of categories does not take place descriptively, but rather on a conceptual level, which implies that text is converted into concepts (Henning, 2004).

I chose to use open, axial, and selective coding grounded theory strategies (Locke, 2001; Pandit, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1999; Tesch, 1990), which are discussed below.

(a) Open coding

Every individual interview was digitally recorded to enable me to conduct the interviews in a consistent and efficient manner, to assist in data analysis, and to enhance the validity of the study. Given that data should be transcribed as soon as possible to facilitate analysis (Henning, 2004; Silverman, 2000), I outsourced the transcription of the interviews to an independent transcription company, to ensure that the data would be typed faultlessly and remain as natural and real as possible. The captured format of the data gathering produced a vast amount of data to be analysed – the interviews yielded 226 pages of transcribed data.

Open coding refers to that part of the analysis that deals with the labelling and categorising of phenomena, as indicated by the data (Pandit, 1996). According to Henning (2004), during open coding the analyst reads through the entire text in order to get a global impression of the content.

Motileng, Wagner and Cassimjee (2006) recommended that themes initially be expressed in the everyday language of the participants themselves, before later being transformed into formal psychological language. It is important to develop a sense of the language participants use, for example, metaphors or families of metaphors that are frequently used. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) suggested that the researcher immerse himself in the data, so as to be sensitive to the meanings of even the subtlest detail. Strauss and Corbin (1999) proposed that open coding be done line by line, which is time consuming, but most generative.

In an attempt to ensure that the data were analysed in a systematic and thorough manner, I employed the following open coding strategies to the transcribed interviews:

- I read and re-read each sentence and paragraph, attempting to answer the question: “What is this all about?” Here, my analysis took place on two levels. The actual words used by the respondents were analysed, and then these words were conceptualised by asking questions such as: Where? How? When? Why? Who?

- Once I felt I had good insight into the data, I compared the data with my interview notes, to verify my initial thoughts;
- The next step was to perform the actual coding, which I completed manually by making notes and writing them as codes on a printed copy of the transcribed interview;
- I then underlined statements or phrases made by respondents. I highlighted key phrases and words in the written transcript and then wrote categories in the margins. The process of grouping concepts at a higher, more abstract level, is termed “categorising” (Pandit, 1996). A category will already begin to show the themes that will be constructed from the data, and those themes will be used in the discussion of the inquiry;
- I then transferred (hand wrote) the themes and trends emerging from each interview onto a separate piece of A4 paper, so as to have a summary for myself to facilitate axial coding (the next phase of grounded theory);
- Within the various codes which were created, I looked for recurring themes. I was careful to also note categories and themes that did not seem relevant to the research question;
- The next step was to integrate the themes emerging from my interview notes and the interviews. This resulted in 48 themes;
- Finally, I recorded the themes that emerged from the data. This implied that the participants’ voices emerged through excerpts of their views and accounts, thus I gave them a voice. These verbatim quotations also served to authenticate the identified trends, and to explain my thinking and analysis patterns.

During the open coding phase I made no conscious attempt to interpret the data in relation to the themes that emerged – I reserved this for axial coding, which I will now discuss.

(b) Axial coding

Whereas open coding fractures the data into concepts and categories, axial coding puts them back together in new ways by making connections between a category

and its sub-categories (Pandit, 1996). Thus, axial coding refers to the process of developing main categories and sub-categories. The focus is on the relationship between categories and codes (Henning, 2004).

The steps I applied during axial coding, were as follows:

- I reduced the number of themes that emerged during open coding to a more manageable number. After close scrutiny, I explored the 48 initial themes and examined the relationships between them. This process assisted me in integrating the themes into three broad categorised themes, which eventually encompassed all the themes that had emerged during open coding;
- I then further explored the three main themes and sub-themes relating to work-life balance that surfaced from the data, and examined relationships by means of combining inductive and deductive reasoning. This enabled me to construe new patterns and at the same time confirm associations. I then related these three broad categorised themes individually and collectively;
- The preceding step allowed me to relate and write up the identified themes with existing theory.

(c) Selective coding

Selective coding is the process of selecting the central theme (or phenomenon), which integrates all other inferred themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). According to Pandit (1996), selective coding involves the integration of the categories that have been developed to form the initial theoretical framework. At this stage, I noted specific themes on the most frequently emerging categories.

In the present study I found the central theme to be “work-life balance seems to be an individual concept that varies over time and situations”. Work-life balance is significantly impacted by complex social and workplace issues, such as parental responsibilities, lifestyle, support structures, communication and understanding, values, aspirations, leadership, and organisational culture.

In thinking about the emergence of a main theme, I used the following guide recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1999):

- The theme had to represent the central element of the research;
- The theme had to recur often in the data and develop patterns;
- The theme had to connect other categories without me making major efforts in this regard;
- The core theme had to emerge through the process of identifying, describing and conceptualising;
- The core theme only fully developed towards the end of the research.

Since the identified themes overlapped, I was able to depict relations between the themes. The data were analysed until they had been theoretically saturated, that is, no new themes regarding the identified concepts emerged, and the relationship between the various concepts had been well established and validated.

At this point I withdrew from the research for time periods ranging from a span of hours to days, depending on the need. This was done so that ideas could incubate, before emerging more clearly in my mind. During the periods of incubation I reflected on my analysis, considering the rationale for various steps in the analysis and interpretation, and the possibility of new patterns surfacing.

In order to analyse the vast amount of data I had gathered from the participants, I made use of the grounded theory method, specifically using open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and memos. The coding, categorising, and classification of the data from the responses were done strictly according to the procedure described above, in order to facilitate any future replication of the study.

I also applied constant comparison during the data analysis phase, comparing data sets to one another, as well as to the emerging theory. This led to both a conceptual and theoretical discussion of the construction of work-life balance for a small group of black women and men in a customer care environment.

In concluding the discussion on coding, I want to emphasise that I provided the participants with a voice in the study, and obtained rich and substantive data in return. According to Mouton (2001), interpretation involves the synthesis of one's data into larger, coherent wholes. During the process of analysis, the codes, like the themes, were never considered final or unchanging. The results of the analysis were presented in discussion form (refer to **Chapter 5**). Here, latent content was articulated and themes were related to relevant literature.

3.3.4.4 The use of memos in grounded theory

According to Babbie (2001), in the grounded theory method the coding process involves more than simply categorising chunks of text. As you code data, you should also use the technique of memoing, i.e. you should write memos or notes to yourself, to ensure that you have a clear account of what you mean by the codes used in your analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) also recommended memo writing as an intermediate step between coding and writing the first draft of the complete analysis, as this step helps to spark the researcher's thinking, and encourages him to look at the data and codes in new ways.

Punch (2000) explained that memos assist the researcher to think, make decisions and interpret while analysing data. Tesch (1990) referred to this step in the process as the keeping of theoretical memos, which form a running record of insights, hunches, hypotheses, and discussions about the implication of codes. The researcher should keep such theoretical memos in order to move the analyst further from the data, and into a more analytical realm. I wrote detailed memos throughout the research process, recording reflective notes about what I was learning from the data.

3.3.4.5 Deciding not to use data analysis software

There is an increasing tendency amongst contemporary qualitative researchers to utilise computer-assisted data analysis software, to facilitate the systemisation of the data. Coding, as a grounded theory strategy, has been incorporated into software applications (Henning, 2004). In computer-aided qualitative data analysis, coding is

conceived as attaching keywords to text segments. The development of Atlas.ti has been strongly influenced by grounded theory (Muhr, 1997b), but that does not imply that this software may be used only in an analysis that takes a grounded theory approach.

I chose not to use this technology to analyse the data. My views correspond with those of Esterberg (2002), who stated that qualitative researchers work with texts, not numbers, and computers cannot crunch texts as easily as they can numbers. In addition, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQPAS) promotes an illusory order in qualitative research (Silverman, 2000). This means these programs have a built-in structure to code and build concepts which, in turn, create an illusory order, since these do not arise from a careful study of patterns in the data, and encourage data collection rather than creative thinking (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Silverman, 2000).

Coding in grounded theory is more complex than just attaching labels to text segments, and isolating and naming categories (Henning, 2004). The distinctive feature of coding in grounded theory is striving to build theory (Lonkila, 1995). Using computer-aided text analysis, the researcher needs to appreciate that computers are not capable of comprehending or discerning the meaning of words or constructs. Simply put, computer software can help to analyse data, but it cannot do the analysis for the researcher.

3.4 THE ETHICS OF DESIGN

Research designs should always reflect the fact that the researcher pays careful attention to ethical issues embodied in his research project. The essential purpose of ethical research planning is to safeguard the welfare and rights of research participants, although there may be many additional ethical considerations to address in the planning and implementation of research work (Babbie, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Before outlining more specific ethical issues in research, it is useful to identify three broad principles on which many ethical guidelines are based (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

3.4.1 Three ethical principles

The first principle is that of *autonomy*. This principle requires the researcher to respect the autonomy of all personnel participating in the research work, i.e. it requires the researcher to address issues such as the voluntary and informed consent of research participants, the freedom of participants to withdraw from the research at any time, and participants' rights to autonomy in any publication that may arise from the research (Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The second principle is that of *non-maleficence* (Babbie, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This means the research should do no harm to the research participants, or to any other person or groups of persons.

The third principle is that of *beneficence* (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This requires the researcher to design the research in such a way that it will be of benefit to the research participants, then more broadly to other research participants and society at large.

These three principles are more fully expressed in specific ethical guidelines for research.

3.4.2 Ethical guidelines for research

Ethical guidelines are essential reference points in the planning and evaluation of research proposals.

3.4.2.1 Consent

Obtaining consent from participants is not merely the signing of a consent form – consent should be voluntary and informed. This requires that participants receive a full, non-technical and clear explanation of the tasks expected of them, so that they can make an informed choice to participate voluntarily in the research (Babbie, 2001; Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Furthermore, the researcher should be available to answer participants' questions even after the research work has begun.

In this particular study, after permission had been obtained from the executive director of the customer care department to conduct research in the department, the sample of participants was selected. As the most important criterion through the sampling process was the willingness to participate, potential participants were not pressured to participate in the study, thereby honouring the principle of voluntary participation. Potential research participants were contacted by e-mail to explain the context and purpose of the study, and request an interview of approximately one hour. Individuals replied via electronic mail to indicate their willingness or unwillingness to participate. All participants agreed to participate. No motivation for their decision was requested.

Permission was asked to audio-tape the interview, which allowed me the freedom to be attentive to the individual and participate in the process at the same time. Since it was impossible to take notes and listen to the participants, I used a digital recorder, which enabled me to extract verbatim quotes from the transcriptions made from the interviews. All participants gave their consent. I asked participants to sign informed consent forms (see example of consent form in Appendix B) to demonstrate their understanding of the ethical issues involved in the research.

3.4.2.2 Confidentiality

The informed consent form, signed by participants, should also assure them of the parameters of confidentiality of the information they supply. The intended format of

publication of the research results should be specified, and participants should be told how the data are to be recorded, stored and processed for release (Silverman, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In most social science research, the personal identify of participants is concealed, and only summarised group information or anonymous quotations are published.

In each case the interview was introduced by giving participants a re-explanation of the nature and objective of the study, underlining my commitment to total confidentiality, and providing an opportunity for questions, to address any further concerns regarding their participation in the study. The participants were therefore assured of the anonymity and confidentiality with which the information would be handled. It was also emphasised that participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

All participants in any research have the right to know about the intent of the research project, as well as their right to privacy. As a research principle, participants were assured of confidentiality prior to the interview, with the affirmation that information shared was to be used solely for the purposes of the study.

3.4.2.3 Competence

In planning research, the researcher or his team members should only carry out procedures they are competent to conduct. Suitably qualified and licenced professionals should be asked to collaborate in studies requiring specific practical procedures, where these are psychological, medical or relating to another professional field (Babbie, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Competence is further enhanced by attending to issues regarding the use of instruments or techniques that are reliable, valid and current.

Having opted to do my research in the customer care environment in which I am employed, I first needed to obtain permission from the executive director of the customer care environment to do the research, and I also needed participants' permission to include them in the study.

3.4.2.4 Reporting results

Results of studies should be published with careful attention to the rights of participants. Care should be taken to protect the identities of individuals and groups – especially if anonymity was guaranteed in the consent agreement. Researchers should not falsify or fabricate data in their publications, and should point out the limitations of their findings (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The results of this study are presented and discussed in **Chapters 4** and **5**, respectively. Special care was taken to protect the identities of individuals, as anonymity was guaranteed in the consent agreement. The personal identify of participants was concealed; and only summarised, anonymous quotations were cited.

3.5 CRITERIA OF SOUNDNESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

All research must respond to canons of quality. Marshall and Rossman (1999) referred to this aspect as criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. These canons can be phrased as questions to which all social science research must respond (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, how credible are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can we judge them? Second, how transferable and applicable are these findings to another setting or group of people? Third, how can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants, in the same context? And fourth, how can we be sure that the findings reflect the participants and the inquiry itself, rather than being a fabrication of the researcher's biases or prejudices?

Qualitative researchers, however, still need to argue that their research will meet the more traditional criteria of soundness (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Silverman, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this as establishing the value of the study, in other words, its applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Every systematic inquiry into the human condition must address these issues.

Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) matched these terms to the conventional positivist paradigm (e.g. internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity), they emphasise the need to rework these constructs for naturalistic or qualitative inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four alternative constructs that more accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm. The first is *credibility*, in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. The inquiry must be credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The strength of a qualitative study that aims to explore a problem or describe a setting, process, social group, or pattern of interaction, will rest with its validity. A qualitative researcher should adequately state the parameters of the setting and theoretical framework, thereby placing boundaries around the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The second construct is *transferability*, in which the researcher must argue that his findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Here, the burden of demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context rests more with the researcher who would make that transfer, than with the original researcher.

Traditional canons view the generalisation of qualitative findings to other populations, settings, and treatment arrangements (external validity) as a weakness in the approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To counter challenges, the researcher can refer to the original theoretical framework to show how data collection and analysis will be guided by concepts and models (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In doing so, the researcher states the theoretical parameters of the research. An additional strategic choice that can enhance a study's generalisability is triangulating multiple sources of data. Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Silverman, 2000).

Marshall and Rossman (1999) studied the quality of data gathered from in-depth interviews. When the researcher uses the in-depth interview as the sole means of

gathering data, he should demonstrate – through the conceptual framework – that the purpose of the study is to uncover and describe participants' perspectives on events; that is, that the subjective view is what matters (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Studies making more objectivist assumptions would triangulate interview data with data gathered through other methods.

The third construct is *dependability*, in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study, and changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Positivist notions of reliability assume an unchanging universe, where inquiry can be replicated. This assumption of an unchanging social world is in direct contrast to the qualitative / interpretive assumption that the social world is always being constructed, and that the concept of replication is itself problematic (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Silverman, 2000).

The final construct, *confirmability*, captures the traditional concept of objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the need to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another. In doing so, they removed evaluation from some inherent characteristic of the researcher (objectivity), and placed it squarely on the data. Thus, the qualitative criterion is: does the data help confirm the general findings?

A qualitative research design should respond to concerns that the natural subjectivity of the researcher will shape the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Again, the research should assert the strengths of qualitative methods by showing how the researcher will develop an in-depth understanding – even empathy – for the research participants, in order to gain entry into their worlds.

The qualitative researcher should be familiar with the issues in data quality control and analysis, and should display an ability to develop strategies appropriate to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mouton, 2001). Qualitative researchers can respond to the traditional social science concern of replicability, by taking the followings steps: first, they can assert that qualitative studies by their very nature cannot be replicated, because the real world changes

(Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Second, by planning to keep thorough notes and a journal that records each design decision and the rationale behind it, research can allow others to inspect their procedures (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mouton, 2001). Finally, by planning to keep all collected data in well-organised, retrievable form, researchers can make said data available, if the findings are challenged (Mouton, 2001).

Marshall and Rossman (1999) recommended additional criteria for assessing the value and trustworthiness of qualitative research. These criteria or standards, which were developed for application to written reports of qualitative research, include the following:

- The design and methods are explicitly detailed so that the reader can judge whether they are adequate and make sense. This includes a rationale for qualitative research and the specific genre in which the study is situated;
- Research questions and the relevance of the data are made explicit and are rigorously argued;
- The study is situated in a scholarly context. This means acknowledging the limitations of generalisability, while assisting the readers in seeing the potential transferability of findings;
- Records are kept.

Silverman (2000) stipulated four criteria of “quality”:

- Can we demonstrate that our research has helped to build useful social theories?
- How far do the data, methods and findings satisfy criteria of reliability and validity?
- To what extent do our preferred research methods reflect a careful weighing of the alternatives, or simple responses to time and resource constraints?
- How can valid, reliable and conceptually defined qualitative studies contribute to practice and policy, by revealing something new to practitioners, clients and/or policy makers?

Silverman (2000) further recommended the following to researchers, in ensuring “quality” research:

- Think theoretically through data;
- Develop empirically sound findings;
- Use interviews only when demonstrably appropriate to the research problem;
- Contribute to practice and policy.

Under close examination, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985); Marshall and Rossman (1999); and Silverman (2000) seem to (in essence) cover the same broad concepts of soundness in qualitative research. Having considered various options, I decided to use a combination of the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985); Marshall and Rossman (1999); and Silverman (2000), as criteria to assess the soundness and trustworthiness of this study. These **criteria** are addressed throughout the natural account of the research process.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I discussed the research design and provided a natural account of the research process. In addition, I introduced the research participants and explained the approach I used to collect and analyse the data. The final section of this chapter looked at some of the ethical guidelines for research, and criteria for soundness in qualitative research which I applied throughout the research process.

In **Chapter 4**, which follows, I present the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE: RESULTS OF A GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The final stage of the qualitative research process entails reporting and presenting the findings. The reporting stage is the culmination of the analysis process, and is critical to the success of the research process (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). This stage provides an opportunity for further thought, as the data are assembled into a coherent structure, in order to share research evidence with the target audience (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). Ritchie and Lewis (2004) noted that reporting also poses substantial challenges to the researcher, because there is a need not only to present the social world that has been researched, but also to represent it in a way which remains grounded in the accounts of research participants, and explains its subtleties and complexities. As such, integrity in reporting requires a demonstration that the explanations and conclusions presented, are generated from and grounded in, the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004).

Ritchie and Lewis (2004) suggested that qualitative researchers strike a balance between descriptive, explanatory, and interpretive evidence. The temptation to pack qualitative research reports full of verbatim quotations is widely recognised (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). There is, however, strong advice to resist this temptation and use original passages both sparingly and for well-judged purposes (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1993). Despite this general warning, verbatim passages and case histories have a crucial role in qualitative reporting, because of the generative and enhancing power of people's own accounts (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004).

Finally, reporting is a continuation of the journey of interpreting and classifying data requiring continued exploration, further interrogating patterns and associations, and giving a more detailed interpretation and explanation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). This chapter, therefore, provides an account of the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men employed in a customer care environment. Furthermore, it provides a brief description of the research participants. A profile of the research participants is also provided in tabular format.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS

Participants were employed in a customer care environment at the time of the study. Purposeful sampling was used to select ten employees as participants in the study. To control for individual variables, they were selected on the basis that they were either black women or men who were married or had been in a relationship for more than two years, or single individuals who had no children, or at least one child.

The group of participants consisted of five men and five women, whose average age was 36. The average age of the female participants was 39, whereas that of the male participants was 33.

The participants were diverse in terms of ethnic group and gender: there were four coloured, three African, and three Indian participants. Amongst the participants, eight were married or had been in a committed relationship for more than two years, and eight of the participants had at least one child each.

All participants indicated that they have strong family ties. The majority of the participants represented the middle management level, and all were at that stage working in the customer care environment.

Participants averaged 14 years of experience and eight years in the current customer care environment. Female participants averaged 14 years of experience and nine years in the current customer care environment. Male participants, on the other hand, averaged 13 years experience, with seven of those years being spent in the current customer care environment. Only one participant was working shifts at the time. Participants worked five days a week, and an average of 49 hours a week. The female participants worked an average of 46 hours a week, while the male participants worked an average of 52 hours a week.

All participants were South African. I deliberately excluded white women and men, since I anticipated that culturally, their experiences and perspectives would be varied

in relation to their counterparts from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, and I was interested in the latter.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the profile of the research participants at the time of data gathering, indicating homogeneity as well as heterogeneity.

4.3 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Open coding requires the application of what is referred to as the “comparative method”, that is, the asking of questions and the making of constant comparisons (Dey, 1999; Locke, 2001; Tesch, 1990). Data are initially broken down by asking simple questions such as what? Where? How? When? How much? Subsequently, data are compared and similar incidents are grouped together and given the same conceptual label. The themes that emerge during this phase are based on indicators that convey underlying uniformities in the data (Dey, 1999). During open coding, I integrated the themes that emerged from the interviews to form the foundation for axial coding. Data analysis was done until the point of theoretical saturation, that is, until no new themes regarding the identified concepts emerged (see Strauss & Corbin, 1999).

During the interviews the participants demonstrated an awareness of work-life balance, and shared their thoughts and experiences on the subject. An interesting observation made was that when participants were asked to introduce themselves and share something about themselves, only two out of the ten participants began by talking about their family life first. The eight remaining participants began by talking about their work, academic history and career achievements. In a study by Montgomery, Panagopoulou, Peeters and Schaufeli (2005), participants talked about their work life when asked about their home life to a greater degree than they talked about their home life when asked about their work life. This suggests that both domains are indeed interdependent, and that the boundaries between the two are negotiable.

TABLE 4.1: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

	Race	Gender	Age	Position held within organisation	Level of position within organisation	Business area	Total number of years of work experience	Number of years spent in customer care environment	Shift worker – yes or no	Number of days worked per week	Average number of hours worked per week	Involved in a committed relationship (more than 2 years)	Strong family ties – yes or no	Children – yes or no and number
1.	Coloured	Male	33	Executive Head of Customer Care	3	Customer Care	14	10	No	5	60	Yes	Yes	Yes = 1
2.	African	Male	41	Manager Business Operations Support	4	Customer Care	19	10	No	5	55	Yes	Yes	Yes = 2
3.	Coloured	Male	32	Specialist NEPSI	5	Customer Care	12	12	No	5	50	Yes	Yes	Yes = 2
4.	Indian	Male	31	Supervisor Call Centre	5	Customer Care	13	1	No	5	45	Yes	Yes	No
5.	Indian	Male	27	Communications Coordinator	5	Customer Care	9	10 months	No	5	50	No	Yes	No
6.	Indian	Female	37	Senior Specialist Business Operations Support	4	Customer Care	14	8	No	5	50	Yes	Yes	Yes = 4
7.	African	Female	35	Manager Call Centre	4	Customer Care	14	12	No	5	50	Yes	Yes	Yes = 1
8.	African	Female	40	Senior Quality Assessor	5	Customer Care	7	7	No	5	40	No	Yes	Yes = 1
9.	Coloured	Female	52	Supervisor Call Centre	5	Customer Care	25	13	No	5	45	Yes	Yes	Yes = 1
10.	Coloured	Female	29	Team Leader	5	Customer Care	10	7	Yes	5	45	Yes	Yes	Yes = 1

When fragmenting the data during the open coding phase, I gained various insights. The 48 themes extracted from the data were categorised into three broad themes pertaining to the research topic for this study. These three broad themes constitute the main themes of this study and are illustrated in **Table 4.2** below. The three main themes and their sub-themes are supported in the discussion which follows, by verbatim extracts from the interviews.

TABLE 4.2: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Main theme	Sub-theme	Consideration
The unique work-life balance experience	Quality versus quantity	The quality of work-life balance is more important than the frequency of balance
	Structuring time between work, family and self	Work-life balance pertains to the management of one's time, and structuring time for work, family and oneself
	Work-life balance should be outcomes-based, rather than have rigid time boundaries	The outputs should be more crucial than having strict time boundaries, however, some environments are more structured than others in terms of start and finish times, for example, shift environment
	Flexible work hours	Being able to practise flexibility helps individuals manage the time they have available for work and home matters
	Unique views	Work-life balance is a unique experience; different for each individual. Each individual has his own unique way of balancing work and home
Aspects that impact work-life balance	Diffusing of work-life balance boundaries due to seniority of role in the organisation	Work-life balance becomes more of a challenge, the more senior your position in the organisation
	Shift work	The shift environment is quite structured in terms of start and end times, and individuals working shifts need to plan their life around their shifts
	Work context and organisational culture	The call centre environment is constantly changing. Poor planning in this type of environment has an impact on individuals' work-life balance
	Understanding and support from work colleagues and management	Having an understanding and supportive manager is important, as is being able to communicate with your manager about your personal situation, to ensure an understanding and provide you with the necessary leeway when a personal crisis arises
	Attitude to work	The way you view your work will influence your view on

		work-life balance
	Changing role of women	The role of women is changing. More and more women are working, and in some cases they are the breadwinners
	Having a family versus being single	Individuals who are single and/or do not have children, do not experience problems with balancing their work and home life
Balancing techniques	Spend free time with family	People who have children, spend their free time with their children
	Establish rules	To maintain work-life balance you need to set boundaries and rules
	Role prioritisation	The need to prioritise roles appears to be influenced by individual participants' values and goals, and the varying importance they place on work and family roles
	Ensure family understand your role(s)	Evidence of significant life-to-work interference was not apparent, but scenarios of supportive home lives and families were portrayed
	Put support structures in place	Put structures in place to support you with work commitments
	Manage people's expectations of you at work	Make sure that you communicate your needs and values to your work colleagues to gain their understanding and to be able to manage their expectations of you
	Outlet for pressure	It is important to have an outlet for stress, to maintain well-being

4.3.1 Theme 1: The unique work-life balance experience

The purpose of the research was to explore the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men employed in a customer care environment. It is, therefore, important to determine how participants define and experience work-life balance. Five sub-themes emanated from the participants' descriptions of work-life balance:

- Quality versus quantity;
- Structuring time between work, family and self;
- Work-life balance should be outcomes based, rather than have rigid time boundaries;
- Flexible work hours; and
- Unique views.

I will now elaborate on these sub-themes, as shared by the participants.

4.3.1.1 Quality versus quantity

The participants seemed more concerned with the quality of the balance in their life, than the frequency of balance. One of the male participants explained that for him it is not about the frequency of balance, but more about the quality of the balance in his life over a particular period of time.

P1: Don't try and get balance everyday because something will happen so then you have nothing to look forward to because you are trying to do it every single day. I look at it from the quality, like I said, you know, there is a frequency how often I am going to do it, and if once a year is fine for me, it is how much I get out of that once a year as opposed to doing it every day. For me, it is make the sacrifice, but reward yourself at that particular period in time.

Overall, participants were conscious of the need to attain balance in their life, and to make an effort to attain such balance in a way that suits their individual lifestyle, and is significant to them.

4.3.1.2 Structuring time between work, family and self

Overall, participants felt that balance is not just about you and your family, it is also about having your own time and finding time to be by yourself. A male participant explained that for him, balance was about being able to do what he wants in a period of time that he determines, and about giving himself personal space to breathe.

P1: Balance is not just me and the family, it is also my own time, you know, sometimes I just need to be by myself and that is how I deal with stuff.

P2: *I think in every person's life, let me personalise it, my life, I try and ensure that my life or day's life is partitioned equally and proportionately to what my work requires of me, as well as what my family also requires of me.*

Participants further indicated that they sometimes work 18 hours a day, several days a week.

P2: *I would find myself working 18 hours a day, and it is something that has to be done, you know, I am not saying it happens every day, but when it happens it happens and yes I have experienced that in more cases than just once.*

One male participant also explained that his energy levels are at their highest in the evenings – during these times he focuses on what needs to be done until it is done, and attains balance by ensuring that he takes the time to recoup.

P1: *And for me it is not eight hours a day, you know, if anything it is something like 16 hours in a day, and that is not just one day a week, it is a few days in the week. So my deal is, what needs to be done that is the focus, when your energy levels are at the highest you know, and if that is between 11 at night and four in the morning, I think that is when you should focus on it. And the balance is being able to say, well, you know, I need this half-day to recoup.*

Some male participants shared experiences of how not attaining a balance had negative consequences for their family life, therefore they make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the time they spend on work activities, and home or family responsibilities.

P3: *If I spend too much time at work, it could make things at home suffer. I have been on that side before. I have been where I give more of my time to work, and you start becoming a stranger in your own home, you need to find balance. A couple of years ago, I mean, I think my work balance was more on the work side, and when I work at night, stay at work late,*

studying, not paying enough, or spending enough time with the family, and that almost led to my family breaking up.

4.3.1.3 Work-life balance should be outcomes based, rather than have rigid time boundaries

Most male participants explained that work-life balance should not have time boundaries, rather, it should be outcomes based. For them, the outputs are more crucial because they have several projects on the go at any given time.

P1: You shouldn't have the time boundary. A lot of projects, a lot of environments have become outcomes based. It is like I have got to deliver on stuff, and I have got to manage my time in order to deliver it by a specific date.

Some participants also acknowledged the fact that the call centre environment is structured in terms of start and finish times, which makes it difficult to practise flexibility in how employees manage their time.

4.3.1.4 Flexible work hours

Male participants spoke of exercising flexibility in their work schedule. They further spoke of putting in long hours when their work requires it, but added that they would make sure to find the time to re-energise themselves, and make up for it.

P1: Being an hour later in the mornings is fine, or maybe an hour earlier in the afternoons is fine you know. That is being able to say, well, you know, I need this half a day to recoup or you know, you have a kid a school, and you know, today they are finishing at 12 o'clock, the balance for me is being able to say, can I go and pick them up at 12 o'clock and not be stressed out that, you know I have not done the following four or five things.

P3: *Our job is very flexible, where if I do not have pressing deadlines or anything to do, I do not need to work conventional hours, come in at eight, leave at five which is also a plus and a minus, it is a pro and a con, because like I say, the flexibility is there, it is great but, I will come into the office like on Mother's Day and I have to be here, but I think I have got the guys to understand the importance of trying to balance it out.*

Long hours were tolerated in exchange for participants being able to practise some flexibility as regards their working hours and recovery time.

4.3.1.5 Unique views

The participants all agreed that work-life balance is important to have and to maintain. When highlighting the dilemma of finding work-life balance, in their own words, individuals expressed similar opinions.

Male interviewees view work-life balance as a matter of personal sacrifice and compromise, needed in order to maintain a desired lifestyle. The male research participants felt they had to make some sacrifices, i.e. not spending time with their family during important times of the year, due to work commitments. They stated that they did this to provide their family with a better life and financial security.

P1: *My wife and daughter, they make the biggest sacrifices, you know, one for me to develop and grow, and you know, for me to be able to do what I need to do for them as well.*

For them it came down to a lifestyle choice, and working to maintain that chosen lifestyle, but not at the risk of losing their family.

P3: *Work-life balance. Well it is tough, it is not easy, it is not simple. You need to get both parties on both sides, whether it is work or family to understand the importance of the other side. I think my family understand, although it can be tough. I mean, I am not there as much as they would want me to be all the time, but they understand that the reason I am doing it is*

obviously to afford them more and to give them more options in life. I believe that to maintain a particular lifestyle you need to do what you have to do and obviously work is key in there, as it provides you with finance, provides you with the capability of having options of living whatever type of lifestyle you want to live. There needs to be a balance. If you are giving too much of the one, the other side suffers. I said the determining factor is your lifestyle.

Female interviewees provided a more personal perspective on work-life balance. Some described work-life balance as a matter of personal growth:

P8: *I would say I view it as, you know, it contributes towards your personal growth. You grow as a person, so it is more of personal growth.*

Work-life balance seems to be unique to every person – there is no set formula. Overall, participants defined their work-life balance in terms of the quality of the balance, the structuring of time, outputs required, flexibility, personal values and / or lifestyle.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Aspects that impact on work-life balance

In sharing their experiences, the following factors were highlighted by the participants as impacting work-life balance:

- Diffusing of work-life balance boundaries due to seniority of role in the organisation;
- Shift work;
- Work context and organisational culture;
- Understanding and support from work colleagues and management;
- Attitude to work;
- The changing role of women; and
- Having a family, versus being single.

The above factors are discussed below.

4.3.2.1 Diffusing of work-life balance boundaries due to seniority of role in the organisation

Both male and female participants agreed that the higher up the corporate ladder you go, the greater the challenge of balancing work and family life. The two roles tend to overlap, there is less balance, and there seems to be more of a spill-over from work into home. The understanding would be that when they leave work to go home it should be “their” time, but things happen that require them to be able to log onto their system, report back and continue with work when they get home, to make sure deadlines are met.

P7: My view is that when you grow in the corporate industry, and when your responsibilities grow, it actually affects one another. Whether you are prepared for it or not. Your responsibilities become more and more. So it does affect one another. When I go home and there is things that happen, that requires me to be able to log into the system and report back to work, or work from home ... I have to be doing that.

P9: Unfortunately as we grow up the ladder, that does seep into your home life. So if you want to go up the ladder, you need to expect and also accept the fact that there might be one or two disruptions.

P10: My personal view would be the higher up a level you go, the less of a balance you have because when you are just a normal worker, you are able to just walk out and forget about what is happening at work. The minute you go into any sort of management role that it thrown out the window.

Another reality for those in a more senior position, is that weekends and holidays are not always for family alone.

4.3.2.2 Shift work

Research participants who work shifts felt they spend more time at work, than at home, which tends to make it difficult to maintain a balance. A female research participant explained that it is difficult for her to balance her work and home life, because she is a single parent who has to work shifts. Because her shifts change weekly, it is difficult for her to plan accordingly.

P10: Well, the main thing would be that I do not have time to help my daughter with her home work, with her school work because by the time I get home, she is tired. I cannot do it in the morning because when I come to work then she is sleeping, so it tends to really affect me badly, really badly. I try to move my shifts around so that I can be there when I need to be there.

On the other hand, one of the male participants expressed his appreciation for shifts, because his energy levels are higher in the evenings.

P1: I am high energy in the evenings as a person, you know, give me something important to do in the morning, and I am going to struggle with it and my energy grows as the day goes by. It peaks in the evenings. I actually appreciate the shift thing, but some people will say well they struggle with it, but I am saying that is actually fine.

4.3.2.3 Work context and organisational culture

Participants identified factors such as the work environment, the dynamics of the customer care environment (“ever changing, unpredictable and fast moving”), having to do more work for less (“multi-skilling”), long hours, and poor planning as some of the factors which influence an individual’s ability to maintain a balance, both positively and negatively.

P1: I will never look for a routine environment, you know, so if it is challenging, that is the drive that keeps me interested, keeps you on high alert.

P2: *In some instances I would find myself working 18 hours a day. And you just have to do it. Sometimes my day would start at six in the morning and then would end up at about eleven at night and it is something that has to be done. You know, I am not saying it happens every day, but when it happens, it happens and yes, I have experienced that in more cases than just once.*

P3: *The industry that we work in, it is unpredictable more often than not.*

P7: *I think it goes with planning and prioritising. The cell phone industry is fast growing and things changes rapidly.*

P10: *I would say poor planning, because if everything was planned properly in the beginning then we would have that because you would actually be able to plan your life around your work life, which is not possible because our hours, our shifts are changing now every week or so, so you cannot plan a week, is it just little time. The customer care environment changes every day. We are supposed to be able to be working 24 hours a day, constantly, so it is the environment.*

Female participants felt that it is important to be happy at work. They stated that the way a company treats you, as an individual, will affect the quality of your productivity.

P6: *The way a company treats you makes a big difference to your commitment and this will in turn weigh on the quality of your work. If they feel they are coming to work and there is a friendship and there is an understanding, there is respect.*

Furthermore, participants felt that the relationship an individual has with his direct reports, colleagues and manager also has an influence on his ability to maintain a balance.

4.3.2.4 Understanding and support from work colleagues and management

Participants felt that having an understanding and supportive manager is important. They stated that you need to be able to communicate with your manager about your personal situation, to ensure an understanding, and also to provide you with the necessary leeway when a personal crisis arises.

One male participant considered himself fortunate to be in a particular team, which is very supportive. Also, individuals can rely on one another to cover for them when they are faced with a personal crisis.

P3: *I will speak to my boss about it. He would be understanding and will give me leeway to attend to my problem and probably some advice. From a work perspective, the guys, they are pretty demanding, pretty tough sometimes, but they also understand family time is family time, and especially in my job, I think my boss allowed us to be very flexible. I have co-operation from my colleagues. I have co-operation from my boss and I can speak to my colleagues and without hesitation the guys will cover, and it works that same way with them as well I am fortunate to be in the team that I am in right now. The guys are very supportive and I can rely on the team.*

Another male participant spoke of the organisation being responsible for encouraging work-life balance. Furthermore, he felt that direct reports should understand him, as a person.

P1: *Work-life balance should come from the organisation that you are in. It should not be conflicting to the sense, like we would like you to have a nice work-life balance, but we expect you to take control. I think, you know, it is based on the relationship that you have with your direct reports, in terms of if they understand where you are in your personal life in terms of what drives you and what gets you going and what relaxes you and sort of gets you re-energised. The organisation must support that, you know must encourage that.*

It appears that for these participants work-life balance is highly dependent on the relationships they have at work. Some female participants shared examples of their manager not being supportive or understanding of their personal circumstances. These participants did, however, indicate that they would be meeting with their respective managers to discuss their concerns.

4.3.2.5 Attitude to work

Two of the single female participants spoke of an individual's attitude to work. For them it came down to the way you perceive your work, and having a passion for what you do.

P8: *If I could, I would spend more time at work than at home, it is not the workload, it is you know, loving and having an impression of what you are doing. I always say I would rather do something that I am rewarded for. You know, you get recognition at work. I love my job, I have passion.*

P7: *I would continue with my job when I get home, you know finalising what I need to finalise or making sure that whatever target data, or the deadlines I had to make on my deadlines. So the other would definitely affect the other one. So socially and personally it gets affected by the work, but I think it all depends on an individual how you take it. If you are passionate about your work, you will give more and you will be willing to do it, without any problem.*

Finally, female participants felt they would come to work over weekends, if asked, because they would not have been asked to do so if the office did not need them.

4.3.2.6 The changing role of women

Female participants acknowledged the changing role of women in South Africa today.

P9: *In the olden days, especially in the non-white culture, you used to find that the women would not work. Things have changed a lot. I think it is actually a necessity for a woman to assist her husband. I always say I kind of substantiate my husband's salary. You know, yes that man is the breadwinner, but in this day and age, the woman has to work and you will find that in the non-white culture, more and more of us are actually out there working. The younger generation, you find very few at home. For other people, sometimes the woman is actually the breadwinner, because it is in certain cases easier for a woman to get a job in this day and age, than what it is for the man.*

P6: *I think that in today's South Africa I think with the cost of living and stuff, it is very difficult to have one parent working especially in a family, if you want to educate your kids and stuff like that.*

4.3.2.7 Having a family versus being single

Some felt that being single and not having children helps to balance work and home life, and they expressed contentment with their work-life balance. Furthermore, they felt they currently had no time constraints, and would spend more time at work if they could.

P5: *Some people who really do not have work-life balance and they have kids and things like that and it does get hard. So I think I am sitting in a better position now that I do not really have all those responsibilities yet. But I do believe when I do, that work-life balance is going to be so much more important.*

P8: *Sometimes I don't wish to go home, I feel like, oh, there is nothing to rush home to, no responsibilities. Somebody would ask me, why do you stay until so late? I say there is no life at home, because I just go home and I do things my way.*

To conclude, participants in general were passionate about their work and dedicated to what they do. Male participants did not mind putting in long hours when such focus was required, as long as they were able to see the end results, and had an opportunity to “catch up” or re-energise.

Most participants experienced their current manager as being supportive and understanding. Finally, participants felt that work-life balance should be part of the organisational culture.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Balancing techniques

Participants shared examples of how they attain a balance between their work and home life. The following techniques were identified:

- Spend free time with family;
- Establish rules;
- Prioritise roles;
- Ensure family understand your role(s);
- Put support structures in place;
- Manage people’s expectations of you at work; and
- Find an outlet for pressure.

Each technique is discussed in more detail below.

4.3.3.1 Spend free time with family

Participants spoke of taking as much time off work as possible, to spend with their family.

P3: *I try to go out and take them out as often as possible because I do not get home the conventional time as normal parents, I usually stay late at work, and ja, so as much time as much free time as possible that I have I will try spend with them and play and take them out.*

Furthermore, participants with children spoke of taking leave during the school holidays, to spend time with their children.

4.3.3.2 Establish rules

One male participant shared that he and his wife have a rule about not watching television during certain days of the week. Instead, they have “couch time”, i.e. time to chat and catch up on the events of their individual days at work, and to offer each other advice on ways to deal with work-related problems.

P4: *The TV is only on from Friday, Saturday and Sunday, which is minimal. So we do not watch TV because we feel TV robs us of our time. We are always complaining that there is not enough time in the day, yet you come there and you can sit and hour goes so quickly, just watching a silly programme. We normally sit, we have learnt that from the Pastor, we call it couch time, where we sit and just maybe pour a cup of tea and just catch up on what happened in the day.*

The same male participant shared that he and his wife are very conscious about “robbing” each other of quality time, therefore they consult each other before making a decision to do something or go somewhere.

P4: *One has to be consciously aware of it, because if you are not consciously aware, that is when it will unknowingly creep up and before you know it, it is affecting your home life, and like my wife and I, we normally set goals for ourselves in terms of our church life, our health, gym and stuff like that and we try to stick to it. You might think that you are spending family time, but then you are robbing your wife of quality time. So we are very cautious on that, and we realise like you know, before I make a decision, I will consult with her.*

In general, participants are prepared to take work home with them, as long as it happens on rare occasions.

4.3.3.3 Prioritise roles

The results suggest that research participants who were able to prioritise and separate their various roles experienced a greater balance between their working and private lives, regardless of the number of roles.

Furthermore, participants with significant roles or interests outside of work were able to separate roles more easily than those who did not have significant roles or interests outside of work. They recognised the importance of spending quality time with their family and doing things as a family, like cooking together, having a meal together, praying together, and also consulting each other when making important life decisions.

Female participants with responsibilities at home explained that it is important to have balance, that is, when you are at work you must give all your attention to your work, but when you are home, then home life becomes extremely important. Furthermore, female participants felt that your children's upbringing and your relationship with others depends on how you live your life at home.

P9: *I do believe that you must have a balance. For me, when you are at work, you give 100 percent towards your job. When you are at home, family life for me is extremely important, extremely. I think that your whole outcome, your children's upbringing, your relationship, even with other people, not only with the people in your house, depends a lot on how you live your life at home. So for me, when I am at home, I am kind of the real mother figure.*

Female participants agreed that when they get home their family responsibilities and chores take priority. They feel that as a mother, you need to be the mother figure at home, that is, you need to make sure your children are fed, homework is done, and your husband is taken care of and comfortable. Once all of these things have been seen to, they focus on work – if they have brought work home. The opposite also happens for them when at work, that is, when they are at work, work becomes their priority.

P7: *So it is about prioritising also but when you also get home, you need to prioritise and say, this is the family time, I have to do the family responsibilities and chores first and then get to the work thing, so it is a question of just mingling around responsibilities when you get to the other side. For example, when I get home it is homework time and reading time for my daughter. I would actually give that priority and then when I finish with her, then I can focus on the work, and when I get to work, this is now work time, I forget about family and focus on the work.*

Male participants focus on what is more important at the time.

P2: *Reasonably, I cannot give 100 per cent to my work. I would love to do this. If you are a family man, you cannot do that, you need to have a split some where in-between. Obviously the one would overlap with the other and you know, when you start feeling the pressure coming from work, then you learn to focus more on work, and vice versa as well.*

P3: *I don't have a set formula that I am using. I just play it by what is more pressing or what is more urgent at the point in time and prioritise from there. Work is not the most important, family is obviously more important to me, but work is priority. So you have to look at it with that hat on.*

The need to prioritise roles appears to be influenced by individual participants' values and goals, and the varying importance they place on work and family roles.

Furthermore, female participants felt that it is important to be happy at work and at home.

P6: *I need to be happy at work. I need to be growing in a position. I need to be adding value.*

P7: *The most important thing is that you are happy, you become more productive but now if you are just not happy, it becomes difficult and you cannot deliver properly and it makes your entire life miserable.*

All participants agreed that you should never allow personal experiences to interfere with work, and you should never let work infringe on your home life.

P9: *I do not think there is anything worse than your home life being upset, because if your home life is upset, nothing else works for you. You can be the greatest person in your career, you can be the best most educated, most learned, most well organised person at work but if you are not okay at home, believe me you are not going to perform the way you want to perform at work or the way you can perform.*

Finally, participants agreed that both work and family need to understand the importance of the role you play in the family, and the importance of the role you play at work.

4.3.3.4 Ensure family understand your role(s)

Male participants felt that it is important to sit down with family and let them understand both the role you play within the family, and the role you play at work.

P2: *It is important that I also sit down with my family and let them understand the role that I play within the family and the role that business is expecting of me, so they have an understanding. Fortunately, and thank God for this, I have a very understanding wife in that she understands the business that I am in. She would sometimes also bring in the fact that you know, don't forget about the family, don't forget the kids.*

P3: *You need to get both parties on both sides, whether it is work or family to understand the importance of the other side. I think my family they do understand, although it can be tough.*

Most participants identified their spouse as being very helpful and supportive of their work commitments. One female participant spoke of her sister as being her support.

P7: *My sister has been very supportive and very helpful. When I am, at work and I have got a predicament, I would call her and she will just say, relax, she understands me and she would just put me in a position where I could be more logical and think straight. She is very supportive when it goes to the home side, when I have like a commitment that requires me to be at work, I would actually ask her to cover for me. She is very supportive in that she doesn't always see her time as her own time, she shares her time with me. So with regards to dedication she has been there.*

All participants considered it important to approach their family for advice. They explained how they leverage off their spouses for advice on matters at work, and consult with their family when feeling under pressure at work, or before making important life decisions.

P4: *I would normally talk to my wife about is, if I am having a difficult employee, I discussed it with my wife and I would ask her for advice as well, but I mean, I always seem to seek advice from my wife.*

Evidence of significant life-to-work interference was not apparent, but scenarios of supportive home lives and families were portrayed.

4.3.3.5 Put support structures in place

All participants identified their family support structures (mother, siblings, grandparents, in-laws) as being helpful and supportive with regards to work emergencies. Participants spoke of “maxing out” these resources.

P3: *I will have a similar support structure in place at home, but not only with my immediate family, but with my second family, like for instance my mother, or fiancé's mother or my brother or my sister. I use them, sometimes even max them out.*

P10: *My mother is there when I am gone to work. She is there at night when I am at work. If I need to go somewhere or whatever, she is always there. And I do not think I would be able to get through all this if it was not through her.*

Finally, when furthering their studies, all participants shared similar experiences in that their families stood by them and shared in the household responsibilities, so as to give them the necessary time to focus on their studies.

4.3.3.6 Manage people's expectations of you at work

Other individual coping techniques that participants were aware of, but some had difficulty putting into practice, included managing other people's expectations of you at work.

P1: *Start managing people's expectations of you, more specifically work. It is about focusing on the two or three things that matter most, and then obviously the staff understanding that they have been empowered to deal with a lot of other things, and if they know the times when you are best available to support them, they will get used to that.*

Finally, one participant made an interesting comment about not setting a precedent when starting a new position, because people tend to take advantage of the situation and you tend to become the "yes" man.

4.3.3.7 Find an outlet for pressure

Some of the male participants spoke of needing outlets for stress and pressure, for example, going to the gym, exercising, going to the movies, going on a "date" with their spouse or partner, and going to church.

P3: *Exercising seems to take pressure off. Like I said, if it is too heavy on both sides, you need another outlet, and I use other outlets, going to movies, I*

used to go to nightclubs, still sometimes want to go, but there is no time for that, and then, ja, I go to gym or jog.

P4: *My wife and I normally set goals for ourselves where, at the beginning of the year we open up a spreadsheet and then we will make different tabs, one for church life, one for our health, you know in terms of our gym and stuff like that, and another one for our eating, so we have different tabs and we try to stick to it.*

Finally, participants acknowledged that work-life balance is something they are consciously aware of, and need to work on, on a daily basis.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Participants all agreed that the telecommunications industry is changing rapidly. You have to move with the times, and you have to be proactive and flexible at the same time. When you are at work, you have to focus and push to achieve. Similarly, when you are at home, you need to attend to your personal and family matters.

Furthermore, participants felt that their work-life is currently manageable; however, the level of balance experienced is variable and is influenced by specific events and occurrences such as tight deadlines, shift rosters and work demands. The key message from the participants is that they are managing to achieve a balance. However, it is not always ideal and there are limits as to how much role conflict they can tolerate.

In concluding this chapter, the following deductions can be made: work-life balance seems to be an individual concept that varies over time and in different situations. Work-life balance is significantly impacted by complex social and workplace issues, such as parental responsibilities, lifestyle, support structures, communication and understanding, values, aspirations, leadership and organisational culture. Finally, in achieving work-life balance people utilise a variety of unique balancing techniques.

In **Chapter 5**, which follows, I broach the above themes in relation to the literature discussed in **Chapter 2**.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Henning (2004) explained that the literature review comes in handy when you explain your data. In the discussion you have to show the relevance of your findings in relation to the existing body of literature. I now discuss my findings from **Chapter 4** in relation to the existing body of knowledge included in **Chapter 2**.

As explained in Chapter 1, being a white female, I was interested in exploring how other race groups experienced work-life balance. Furthermore, having had exposure to some of the work-life balance issues of black South African employees (employed in a customer care environment), I wanted to explore this further. The data gathered from the individuals' subjective experiences of work-life balance are subsequently discussed in terms of the aim of this study, namely to explore the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men in the customer care environment. In order to facilitate the illumination of participants' social construction, their experiences and views will also be related to existing empirical findings and relevant abstract theoretical concepts.

Table 5.1 below provides a summary of the main themes and their sub-themes.

TABLE 5.1: SUMMARY OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Theme 1: The unique work-life balance experience	Theme 2: Aspects that impact work-life balance	Theme 3: Balancing techniques
Quality versus quantity	Diffusing of work-life balance boundaries due to seniority of role in the organisation	Spend free time with family
Structuring time between work, family & self	Shift work	Establish rules
Work-life balance should be outcomes based, rather than have rigid time boundaries	Organisational environment	Prioritise roles
Flexible work hours	Understanding & support from work colleagues and management	Ensure family understand your role(s)

Unique views	Attitude to work	Put support structures in place
	The changing role of women	Manage people's expectation of you at work
	Having a family, versus being single	Find an outlet for pressure

5.2 THE UNIQUE WORK-LIFE BALANCE EXPERIENCE

The aim of this study was to explore the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men employed in a customer care environment. According to participants' responses (in the current study) different experiences of work-life balance exist, and it is clear that what represents work-life balance to one person is not necessarily applicable to another. This raises the question of whether it is possible to formulate an all-encompassing definition of work-life balance, which is applicable to all people (all cultures) in all situations.

Work-life balance seems to be a highly subjective phenomenon, as it has different meanings for different individuals and varies over time and in different situations. This supports the study undertaken by Whitehead and Kotze (2003), who found that different participants define work-life balance differently, and that work-life balance is a personal experience. Further support for the uniqueness of the experience of work-life balance can be deduced from the responses stating that work-life balance varies for individuals over time and in different situations.

De Villiers and Kotze (2003) came to the same conclusion, however, their study showed that participants agreed that work-life balance entails three characteristics, namely: it creates the opportunity to control one's own time, it is an opportunity to spend time at work and non-work activities, and it gives equal importance to all life roles. In the current study, participants also spoke of allocating equal time to their work and home roles.

The majority of participants described their experiences of work-life balance in terms of having the available time and resources to fulfil various roles, which suggests that,

for those who have a problem with work-life balance, time-based role conflict was the predominant underlying conflict (Carlson, Kacmar & Stepina, 1995; Frone et al., 1997; Eagle et al., 1998; Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Male participants felt that work should never be more important than family, however, their work was seen as taking priority in their lives. In a study undertaken by Rost and Mostert (2007) their results may suggest proneness to priorities work over family matters, resulting in reduced efforts at home; and that home activities are deemed more favourable than work activities. It could also be that the time to recover and relax is more readily available in the home domain because energy is re-charged rather than depleted at home.

Female participants felt that work-life balance is about attaining personal growth, being happy, and adding value in what you do. Beutell and Brenner (1986) studied gender differences in work values, and found that values associated with security, prestige, advancement and challenge are associated with men, whereas values related to the work environment, learning and development, independence, cultural and esthetic interests and making a social contribution through work are associated with women. Moreover, significant differences in values remained when comparisons were made between men and women with similar life orientations – in other words, family first priority and career first priority.

Furthermore, male participants shared their experiences of times when they had to make sacrifices, i.e. not spending time with their family during important times of the year, due to work commitments. They explained that they did so to provide their family with a better life, and for the sake of financial security. Spykerman (1997) found that when financial needs force an individual to relinquish traditional roles and re-prioritise his values, a worker is likely to become acutely aware of the need to keep interference (resulting from family responsibilities) at a minimum, since for the majority having a job means survival.

Numerous personality traits have been investigated as potential determinants of employees' quality of work life. Among the most commonly studied traits are work orientation, internal locus of control, the need for achievement and growth (Loscocco

& Roschelle, 1991). Female participants viewed their work-life balance as contributing to their personal growth. This supports Whitehead and Kotze's (2003) findings, where their sample of professional South African women viewed work-life balance as a useful tool for achieving personal growth.

In the current study, male participants with children all expressed the point of view that work is essential to maintain a particular lifestyle, and to provide their family with a good life. The number of children is said to be a good predictor of family-to-work conflict (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) found that mothers with young children (five and younger) obtained better work performance ratings than women with older children. Grzywacz et al. (2002) and Loscocco (1990) speculate that women work harder to protect their source of income, as a result of their being aware of the financial contribution they make, and suggest that this argument would have greater support if women's motivations for working were also known.

Some participants shared examples of work having a negative impact on their family. One male participant divulged that he had started to feel like a stranger in his own home, which almost led to his family breaking up. This result suggests that a degree of work-life conflict is tolerated until the sacrifices outweigh the returns on investment, and that the participants became aware of this once their family or relationships had been impacted (Loscocco, 1999).

To conclude, participants supported the notion that work-life balance is individualistic and has no set formula. It is, therefore, important to be constantly aware of your experience of balance.

5.3 ASPECTS THAT IMPACT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Patel et al. (2006) found that family-work conflict scores differed by work category, with the highest conflict scores being recorded by supervisors, then cashiers, and finally packers (with the lowest scores). Significant differences were found between till packers and both cashiers and supervisors. The greater responsibilities and

demands at the workplace may be reflected in these senior workers – who experience their family demands as affecting their work commitments. Finally, Patel et al. (2006) observed that supervisors (who were more senior and possibly more secure in their jobs than the lower category workers) may also have felt safer to report higher family-to-work conflict, rather than minimising it (as the lower category of workers did, who presumably felt less secure in their jobs).

In the current study, no evidence was found of family-to-work conflict. Participants in more senior positions did, however, report more work-to-family conflict, due to the diffusing of work-life balance boundaries as individuals move up the corporate ladder.

The research participants varied in terms of their level of seniority within the organisation, and in respect of family obligations and family structure. It was, however, found that despite the varying factors, all participants attested to the importance of work-life balance in their lives. This supports the findings of Papalexandris and Kramar (1997), who noted that this concern is not limited to a specific group of employees, because research in industrialised countries has shown that employees across different organisational levels and with different family structures are concerned with achieving a better balance between working life, family obligations, leisure, and socialising.

This study was conducted in a customer care environment, which is characterised by shift work. In a study by Montgomery et al. (2005), shift workers tended to talk more about home when asked about work, relative to their non-shift-work colleagues. Such a result may indicate that shift workers are more prone to interference, and is in agreement with studies that have found shift work to be negative, and to place workers at higher risk of physical and mental problems (Askerstedt, 1990, Jacobs, Mostert & Pienaar, 2008; Sekwena, Mostert & Wentzel, 2007). Similarly, in this present study it was found that individuals who work shifts view shift work in a negative light, and see it as an obstacle to attaining work-life balance. In their study of antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict, Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) also substantiated this finding by reporting that shift work created difficulties in dealing with family matters.

Participants who work shifts spoke of wanting to be able to practise flexibility with shifts (i.e. rotating shifts) – particularly those with family responsibilities outside of work (See Sekwena et al., 2007). Demerouti, Geruts, Bakker and Euwema (2004) reported that rotating shifts had different effects on the dependent measures, compared to working fixed shifts. Working in a fixed non-day shift (including weekends) was related to the experience of more work-to-home conflict than having fixed day work or rotating shifts (with or without weekends included) (Demerouti et al., 2004). Furthermore, employees with rotating shifts (including weekends) showed greater negativity towards their jobs than employees who worked fixed shifts (with or without the weekend included) (Demerouti et al., 2004).

The study confirmed that an organisational culture which supports work-life balance is important, as it ensures that employees are happy, committed and keen to perform (see Koekemoer & Mostert, 2006). Bailyn and Harrington (2004) concluded that by bringing organisational task needs and employees' family needs together, work redesign begins to challenge deeply ingrained beliefs about work, family, and gender roles. In doing so, it removes some of the cultural blockage to work-family integration and helps define a work environment that is both effective and conducive to working families.

Cohen (1997) found that employees who struggle with balancing their work and family responsibilities may benefit from an informal family-friendly organisational climate more than from formal family-friendly policies. Companies should also create a company culture in which employees who experience work-home interference will feel entitled to use the facilities that are available.

Kossek et al. (1999) found that employees who define how their role fits with their organisational context, tend to experience work-family balance. Similarly, participants in the current study felt that their work context (customer care) has an impact on their ability to attain work-life balance. They identified poor planning, constant changes, and having to do more for less, as having a negative impact on their work-life balance.

In an overview of employee stress and well-being in call centres, Holman (2003) identified the following aspects as having strong positive effects on employee well-being:

- High control over work methods and procedures, and what is said to the customer;
- A sufficient degree of variety;
- A performance management system that is aimed at the development of individuals and is not perceived as too rigid or severe;
- A supportive team leader; and
- Supportive human resource practices.

If these aspects are not attended to, it can have a variety of negative consequences, including increased absence and turnover rates; increased staffing, recruitment and training costs; decreased quality of customer service; increased errors; lower first-time call resolutions, and more unnecessary customer calls.

Most participants experienced their current manager as being supportive and understanding. Fu and Shaffer (2001) found that having a supervisor's social support reduced strain and behaviour-based work-to-family conflict. The results also suggest that managerial support for individuals and their needs influences work-life balance (see Sekwena et al., 2007).

In a study conducted on nurses working in a nursing environment, time demands, pressure, lack of autonomy, role clarity and colleague support were found as the main job characteristics that predict negative work-home interference (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2006; Mostert & Oosthuizen, 2006). Lack of resources (having no input in the planning of work activities, unclear expectations about role and duties, insufficient support from colleagues, inadequate salary and no possibilities for financial advancement) seem to contribute to both exhaustion and mental distance, meaning that nurses become emotionally drained and less enthusiastic about their work and patients (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2006). This finding was further supported by a study done in the South African police service which found that a demanding work environment, combined with a lack of resources leads to high exhaustion, time based work-family conflict and strain-based work-family conflict (Mostert, 2008).

Batt and Valcour (2003) noted that a supervisor's support for an employee's attempts at attaining life balance is the most important component of work-life support. This was confirmed by Hauptfleisch and Uys (2006), who conducted a study on experiences of work in a customer care environment. They found that participants perceived team members as a support system; that constant changes in the work environment lead to a high degree of uncertainty amongst employees; that management practices result in perceived distance between customer care employees and higher management levels; and, finally, that an experience of depersonalisation often occurs when customer care employees deal with customers (Hauptfleisch & Uys, 2006).

Female participants spoke of an individual's attitude to his work. They were willing to work longer hours, if required, because of their passion for their work. Somers and Birnbaum's (1998) finding that career commitment was positively related to job performance in their sample (87 per cent of which were women) of hospital employees, provides support for this statement.

Furthermore, one female participant envisaged spending more time at the office (if she could), because she is rewarded and recognised for her contributions at work. In a recent study of accountants, Lewis, Smithson, Cooper and Dyer (2002) proposed that the dominance of work over other activities is often seen as a life choice, particularly amongst men, where intense work involvement may be linked to professional identity. Patel et al. (2006) found that approximately two-thirds of the sample in their study indicated the importance of paid work over housework, with about the same number choosing to continue working, given a choice.

Frone et al. (1992) averred that work-family conflict is more prevalent than family-work conflict, suggesting that family boundaries are more permeable to work demands than work boundaries are to family demands. Frone et al. (1992) and Eagle et al. (1997) found no evidence of gender difference in the relative permeability of work and family boundaries – something which seems to hold true to some degree in the current study.

Regarding the direction of role interference, there is no doubt that in the case of this specific group, there was work-to-life interference. Participants had to spend so much time on their work roles, that it affected their family roles. Consequently, those participants with young children experienced the overload more intensely.

Overall, this research supports Fu and Shaffer's (2001) findings, namely that pressures from the work role have the strongest effects on work-life balance. This is confirmed by previous research indicating that work-life balance issues are related to life-cycle stages, and are more acute for parents of younger children (Higgins, Duxbury & Lee, 1994; Lambert, 1993). Eagle et al. (1998) found that respondents with children reported significantly greater time-based family-work conflict, than respondents without children. Marais and Mostert (2008) found in their study that participants with children experienced high levels of positive home-work interaction than those without children.

Higgins et al. (1994) observed that working women with young children experience more conflict between both domains, in both directions, compared to working women with older children, and working men respectively. In addition, Higgins et al. (1994) reported that the experience of work-family conflict was significantly lower for women with high school children, than for women with younger children. For men, the experience of work-family conflict was only slightly lower for those with high school children than for men with younger children. In the current study, participants with older children did not experience family-to-work conflict, and found it easier to balance their time between work and home.

Casale and Posel (2002) contended that unlike other countries, where women are drawn into the labour market because of a demand for female labour, in South Africa women are forced to join the workforce due to sheer economic need. Participants feel that in South Africa today the cost of living makes it difficult to have only one parent working – especially if you want to provide your children with a good education. A female participant highlighted this fact when she reflected on the past, particularly in the non-white cultures, where women did not work, as a rule. It has now become a necessity for women to work, and assist their husbands by supplementing the family's income. Furthermore, women in non-white cultures have

joined the workforce, and in some instances they are actually the breadwinners, because in certain cases it is actually easier for a woman to secure employment.

This is supported by Patel et al. (2006), who found that women's financial contributions increasingly represent an integral (if not sole) source of income for many families. Moreover, their finding that more than half the sample did not think they would be better mothers if they stayed at home, acknowledges the growing number of women who resist the traditional roles foisted on them by society, and no longer define their identities purely in terms of these roles.

Loscocco's (1997) qualitative interviews with self-employed men and women indicated that they often spoke about breadwinning and nurturing in the same breath. This suggests that the good provider and good mother roles that were traditionally used to distinguish between fathers and mothers need to be re-examined, since a blurring of the two identities seems to be occurring.

This speaks to the need to recognise the growing involvement of women in the workplace as more than just a hobby or temporary distraction from their "more important" roles in the home. It may also mean that the work role serves to enhance their identities, forcing a re-examination of the conflict hypothesis and lending support to the critique around role salience. It also recognises the need to remove the burden of minimising the spill-over effect from family to work as far as women are concerned, and to make it a concern for all stakeholders involved.

In summary, the results of the individual participants' construction of work-life balance indicate that for the majority (irrespective of their gender or race) the direction of the largest interference is from work to home roles (Frone et al., 1992; Eagle et al., 1998).

5.4 BALANCING TECHNIQUES

Participants indicated that they use a combination of coping strategies. They identified the need for planning, the implementation of necessary support structures,

and the communication of role needs so as to gain the understanding of others, and to manage their expectations. Brink and De la Rey (2000) suggested similar coping strategies, such as planning and proactive problem solving, including the proactive identification of support-related needs, and the implementation of the necessary support structures.

Male participants spoke of focusing on what is most important to them at the time – they also felt that they would decide where they want to be, and what is most important to them. Furthermore, they stressed that when they start feeling work-related pressure, they tend to focus more on work. The inverse is also true. Greenhaus and Powell (2003) concluded that when family pressures are stronger than work pressures, most individuals participate in the family activity, regardless of the salience they attach to the two roles. It is only when work pressures are stronger than family pressures that role salience has a substantial influence on the selection of an activity.

Female participants spoke of prioritising when at home, and attending to their household responsibilities first (see Jacobs et al., 2008). Marks and MacDermid (1996) contested that work-family balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles – an inter-role phenomenon. Marks and MacDermid (1996) made it clear that individuals can and should demonstrate equally positive commitment to different life roles.

Furthermore, female participants felt that as a mother you need to be the mother-figure at home (Esterberg, 2002; Loscocco, 1997; Lupton & Schmeid, 2002; Patel et al., 2006; Spurlock, 1995). When speaking about the household, the female participants took responsibility for ensuring that household duties are performed, and did not mention their partner or spouse assisting them with such responsibilities. Burke (2001) found that women experience the highest levels of conflict between work and family, since women are still expected to perform the bulk of family and household tasks and responsibilities. Rosebaum and Cohen (1999) noted that women who receive emotional support from their husbands report lower levels of depression than those receiving less support. Furthermore, women who have little

spousal support and the expectation to be the primary childcare provider, report the highest levels of anxiety (see Sekwena et al., 2007).

In general, male participants do not mind putting in long hours when such focus is required – as long as they are able to envisage the end results, and have an opportunity to “catch up” or re-energise. Female participants, on the other hand, spoke of prioritising their responsibilities when at work and at home (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Jacobs et al., 2008; Welch & Welch, 2005). They do not mind taking work home, but will first see to their household responsibilities before attending to work.

Fu and Shaffer (2001) found that domestic and spousal social support mitigate the experience of family-to-work interference, while supervisor and co-worker social support impact work-to-family interference. This is further supported by the current study, as life-to-work interference was not apparent and scenarios of supportive home lives and families were portrayed. Supporting research indicated that the various types of support received or offered by spouse or partner or family members (emotional, social, instrumental and financial) are associated with less work-life conflict and an increase in job satisfaction (Adams, King & King, 1996; Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O’Neil & Payne, 1989; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; MacEwen & Barling, 1994; Voyandoff, 1989)

The existence and extent of support structures were instrumental in participants in the current study experiencing work-life balance (see Jacobs et al., 2008; Sekwena et al., 2007). Examples of support structures include spouses, grandparents, parents, cousins and siblings. Edwards and Rothbard (2000) proposed that work-family linkages may operate differently for different types of work, and different family structures. For instance, work-family segmentation is perhaps easier when work involves extensive travel, but is more difficult for family-run businesses. Likewise, work-family conflict may be manageable for a married working parent with a supportive extended family, but overwhelming for a single working parent with no extended family (Robles, 1997). Thus, differences in work and family arrangements should be considered when developing comprehensive models of the work-family interface.

Finally, in the current study female participants did not speak of “me” time. Male participants, however, spoke of finding time to re-energise and do things like exercising or socialising (see Jacobs et al., 2008, Sekwena et al., 2007). According to Haworth and Lewis (2005), gender plays a key role in patterns of work and leisure, and the impacts of modern ways of working are often different for men and women. Many studies have shown that even when both partners are working, women still make a significantly greater contribution to domestic tasks, and there is a key difference between men’s ability to preserve personal leisure time, and the much more limited capacity of women to do so (Haworth & Lewis, 2005).

In summary, it appears that boundaries between work and non-work are becoming clouded and may be crowding out time and energy for personal life and leisure. It is, therefore, important to recognise the complex interplay between social norms, the attribution of choice, and the perception of satisfaction and enjoyment.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

From the three main themes discussed above, relating to the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men employed in a customer care environment, it is clear that the dilemma of work-life balance is a unique and individual concept that varies over time and in different situations. Moreover, it is a concept that is impacted by complex social and workplace factors. Finally, to achieve work-life balance requires a variety of balancing strategies.

In **Chapter 6** I conclude by sharing some limitations to my study, and also provide a number of recommendations to encourage further scientific research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I first provide a summary of the findings presented in **Chapter 4** (later discussed in **Chapter 5**). I then underscore some shortcomings of the research, before finally concluding the chapter by identifying some pertinent areas which, I believe, require further attention from social scientists.

6.2 SUMMARY

I contextualised the study in **Chapter 1** by presenting my rationale for undertaking it, formulating the research problem to be studied, and indicating the anticipated value of the study. Having explored various literature sources, I could not trace sufficient research on the construct of work-life balance in the South African context, with particular reference to cultural differences. I decided to launch the present study in an attempt to explore this phenomenon. Therefore, I set out to explore the construction of work-life balance by a small group of black women and men employed in a customer care environment. I believed that by undertaking this study I would be able to shed some light on local black women and men's construction of work-life balance, and the challenges it poses to them. Further, I was convinced that applying an inductive, qualitative methodology (required for an in-depth exploration of the social world of these black women and men) would contribute to local methodology, since it would illustrate how a qualitative study on the construction of work-life balance could be executed in the South African context.

In **Chapter 3** I reflected on quality criteria used to assess qualitative research. The shortcomings of the study outlined later in this **Chapter 6** have been assessed based on the quality criteria proposed in **Chapter 3**.

The actual execution of the research is described in **Chapter 3** in the form of a natural chronological account of the study. This provides adequate information to

assist the reader in establishing the credibility of the study. I am convinced that within the context of the purpose of the research and the various practical constraints, I managed to select a group of black women and men who represented the customer care environment, and had established views and experiences regarding work-life balance.

Having opted for a particular application of the grounded theory approach, and in keeping within the requirements of qualitative research (to provide sufficient information to establish the credibility of the study), and at the same time giving the participants a voice, I conveyed the data, the findings, and the inferences I made according to the three analytical steps of grounded theory, namely open, axial, and selective coding. 48 themes categorised into three main themes resulted from the data analysis. These are presented in **Chapter 4** and thoroughly and critically discussed in **Chapter 5**.

6.3 ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF THE STUDY

Is the study useful and are its findings sound? While at times I felt frustrated with the level of uncertainty I experienced during the grounded theory phase, and was anxious as to what themes might emerge from the data, I gained valuable insight into the realities of these women and men. Their experiences and views on the topic certainly gave me a clearer understanding of my own reality as a newly married, career-oriented white South African female.

As far as the soundness of the study is concerned, I believe it is a quality contribution. Obviously I cannot provide a comprehensive account of how the study meets the appropriate criteria here. Therefore, the following very brief outline will suffice. I ensured that the reliability and validity of the study were enhanced through the digital recording of all interviews, and through transcribing each interview in its entirety.

According to Babbie (2001), reliability is achieved when a particular technique is applied repeatedly to the same object, and the same results are obtained each time.

In the present context, reliability does not refer to the verification of research findings through the replication of the study, but rather through the conscious revelation of the decisions and procedures followed during its various stages (Craffert, 2001). Therefore, the procedures followed in obtaining the data, the transcription of interviews, and the analysis and interpretation of the data are explained. Furthermore, participants' verbatim comments are provided as motivation for my decisions and interpretations.

"Validity" refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under investigation (Babbie, 2001; Silverman, 2000). According to Henning (2004), to validate is to check for bias, for neglect, for lack of precision; to question all procedures and decisions critically; to theorise; and to discuss and share research actions with peers as critical in-process reviewers.

Tesch (1990) argued that no two researchers produce the same result, even if faced with exactly the same tasks – their differences in philosophical stances and individual styles will lead each to perceive and present the phenomenon in his own way. Similarly, I feel that the way I presented the phenomenon which I chose to study is a reflection of my individual style.

The validity of a research study, therefore, involves the researcher's own theories, preconceptions or valuation of the research process. As this will never be completely eliminated from any study, I therefore regularly studied all notes and memoranda, and analysed data without using specialised knowledge of the literature. During the analysis process a period was set aside in which data were arranged and interpreted, without making use of specialised knowledge of the literature. In doing so, I ultimately let the participants' experiences and feelings guide the research – the hallmark of grounded theory studies is that the researcher derives categories directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts or hypotheses (Charmaz, 1995), which could contribute to greater validity in the research study.

I am convinced that I properly applied all the strategies which are generally regarded as important when it comes to judging a qualitative study. More particularly, both the

research participants and my colleagues found my discussions of the research and my interpretation of the findings credible.

Silverman (2000) explained that a good researcher goes back to the participants with the tentative results, and refines the findings in the light of the participants' reactions. Henning (2004) contested that it is possible to involve research participants at all levels of the research. Participants may not necessarily come up with the same main themes as the researcher, because they theorise from different positions and knowledge bases, but they will prompt the researcher to continue to question himself and to include the participants' views at a type of meta-level analysis (Henning, 2004). After the data had been analysed I engaged in member validation, which allowed all the participants the opportunity to reflect on their personal contributions and on my interpretations of the data. In addition, women and men who did not fit the profile exactly, were asked to comment on the study and its findings.

Most of the people who were included in the member validation agreed with all the themes I had identified. I also offered a draft of the dissertation to my supervisor, who recently completed a PhD thesis using a modernist qualitative methodology. She provided valuable ideas, which I incorporated. Moreover, I exercised strict personal discipline by examining my own biases at each stage of the research process, particularly since I have similar socio-demographics to some of the research participants, which may have influenced the way in which I executed the research.

According to Bryman (2004), "reflexivity" is a term used in research methodology to refer to reflectiveness among social researchers about the implications for the knowledge of the social world they generate by their methods, values, biases, decisions. Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining "outside of" one's subject matter while conducting the research (see Bryman, 2004). I engaged in some personal reflexivity which involved reflecting upon the ways in which my own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, wider aims in life and social identities shaped the

research. It also involved thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed me as a person.

Lastly, I managed to offer a thick description, that is, a rich account of the views of this particular group of black women and men, and consequently indicated the extent of transferability of this study to other milieus. "Transferability" refers to replacing the notion of external validity, and is closely related to theory-based generalisability – here the researcher considers any theoretical constructs from the study which may be applied to similar settings elsewhere (Daymon & Holloway, 2000). Consistent with this, Maxwell (1992) defined generalisability in qualitative research as the extent to which a researcher can generalise the account of a particular situation or population to other individuals, times, settings, or context. Maxwell (1992) differentiated internal generalisability from external generalisability: the former referring to the generalisability of a conclusion within a setting or group studied, and the latter relating to generalisability beyond the group, setting, time, or context. According to Maxwell (1992) internal generalisability is typically more important to qualitative researchers than is external generalisability. In the current study, internal generalisability was more applicable.

With regards to data saturation, Sandelowski (1995) noted that sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation. At the same time, the sample should not be too large that it is difficult to undertake a deep, case-orientated analysis. In the current study, I feel that the information gathered from the sample size chosen was comprehensive in terms of obtaining an answer to the research question.

In summary, to the best of my ability, my role in the research process was to interact with the research participants in a natural, unobtrusive and non-threatening manner. This allowed me to gather rich data from the participants so that I could add knowledge to the field of the work-family domain, and not pass judgement on them.

6.4 LIMITATIONS

A number of limitations and subsequent recommendations for further research have been identified in the context of this study. The next section highlights these limitations.

Franks et al. (2006) concluded that the sample they used in their study was restricted to a specific working environment, and that the profile of the participants differed in terms of age, social class, race, educational level, number of years of work experience, and marital status. Their study, therefore, had certain shortcomings, for example, its findings could not be applied to other black women and men of different demographics. The same limitation can be true for this study, as it was also restricted to a specific working environment (customer care) and the participants differed in terms of age, race, marital status, and years of work experience. In addition, the majority of the research participants had close ties with their families – the results may have proved different, has this not been the case.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) recommended that the researcher discuss his role in the setting, and consider how this may affect participants' willingness to engage in thoughtful reflection. This will help provide evidence that the researcher knows enough about the setting and the people, their routines and their environments, to anticipate how he will fit in. Researchers benefit from carefully thinking through their roles, because most participants detect and reject insincere, inauthentic people. I interviewed participants within the work setting. It is, however, possible that interviews conducted outside of the work setting may have produced different results in terms of thinking about work-life balance. Furthermore, my being a white female may have influenced the black male and female participants in their responses to my questions.

Being personally employed within the same environment as the participants could have impacted their willingness to share personal information with me, for fear of a breach of confidentiality, notwithstanding the fact that each participant signed consent and confidentiality forms prior to being interviewed.

The sample group was also limited to ten participants, all of whom were employed within one department (customer care) of a particular organisation, and limited to one region, therefore results could not be generalised to all customer care environments, other departments, other organisations, or other regions, however, in line with internal generalisability, the results could be generalised within the setting and group being studied.

Since the meanings attached to many work-family experiences often reflect specific cultural understandings, it would be a mistake for researchers to assume that a study conducted in one region of the world could be easily replicated in a different region (De Villiers & Kotze, 2003).

Furthermore, although a broad spectrum of occupational types and levels was represented in the sample, the generalisability of the results of the present study is limited to the extent that the occupations and organisational levels of the host organisation are not similar in composition to those existing within other organisations.

Grounded theory was used as the method for interpreting and understanding the data. Henning (2004) argued that this method focuses strongly on the empirical reality, and does not give sufficient attention to the discursive complexities of the data emanating from this reality.

Triangulation is a valuable research strategy. Reliability and validity could further have been enhanced with the aid of triangulation, where the object of research is studied using several different research methods to test the same finding (Babbie, 2001).

The language people use to describe a domain of their life is critical to the way in which they construct meaning. Content analysis could also have been used, whereby those sentences relating to work and home could have been analysed to provide a measure of how frequently participants talked about their home life when asked about work, and vice versa. Systematic text analysis allows you to uncover

the meanings people attribute to the ideas of work and home (Montgomery et al., 2005).

A further limitation of this study is that it examines work-life balance at a particular point in time, despite indications that the phenomenon of work-life balance is a constantly changing social process.

The fact that the participants are all employed in the same organisation could also have impacted the study, in so far as some of the employees could have left the organisation while the research study was underway. This did, however, not happen.

Despite the limitations of the present study, I believe I have begun to address important and neglected issues regarding work-family balance. For me, mutual understanding is at the core of embracing diversity, as it enables humans to live and work together.

This research has given me more insight into the experiences of the “work” and “personal” lives of black women and men. However, considerably more research is needed to gain additional insight into the meaning and consequences of work-life balance among different race and gender groups.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the family role has traditionally been seen as being central to women, research on working mothers has tended to focus on the impact of work on family, as more women take on the worker role (Simon, Kummerling & Hasselhorn, 2004; Theunissen et al., 2003; Wallis & Price, 2003). Frye and Breaugh (2004) pointed out that this trend has resulted in a better understanding of work-family conflict, than family-work conflict. In addition, most studies (Brink & De la Rey, 2001; Grzywacz et al., 2002; Theunissen et al., 2003) have been conducted on professional women or women in high-level positions, and have tended to neglect women in lower-paid positions.

Research in the domain of work and family can benefit from gaining knowledge and insight into the views of different types of women and men in different career and life stages, on how they view and plan to integrate their multiple life roles. This includes exploring the views of young women and men from different age groups, races and social classes, as well as older, career-oriented women and men who are married and/or have children. Countries can vary significantly with regard to cultural norms and values, gender role ideology, and public policy regarding work-family issues, therefore, comparative studies would be very helpful in assessing the effect of culture on work-life balance.

Although these results cannot be generalised to all customer care environments, either in South Africa or any other country, the results proved meaningful for this study. It is recommended that further studies include more than one type of customer care environment (delivering different types of services), which would prove useful for application in a South African context. Further research replicating the present study, using samples obtained from different organisations and across regions, will also help to improve the generalisability of the findings.

Moreover, research that examines the consequences of balance on personal and work outcomes should ideally use longitudinal designs. Longitudinal studies would add significant insight to understanding individuals' subjective experiences of work-life balance over time. Greenhaus et al. (2003) proposed further research to understand whether, when, and why satisfaction balance affects individual well-being. Longitudinal research is especially important in the study of work-family balance, because individuals may alternate their emphases on work and family activities in the short term, in order to achieve balance in the long term (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2006).

One of the strong traditions associated with human ecology is the life course perspective. A particular strength of this perspective is that it raises questions about viewing work-family experiences as discreet incidents which are experienced by individuals alone. However, the assumptions of the life course perspective introduce significant measurement challenges to the researcher. For example, the fundamental assumptions of this perspective suggest that researchers should design studies that

gather data over time, from individuals as well as families, and also that they collect information about the social contexts which might affect families' lives, both before and during the period when data are gathered from such individuals and families (Pitt-Catsouphe & Christensen, 2004).

It is further recommended that this study be replicated using multi-methods, including quantitative methods, over different and larger subject groups in corporate South Africa.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This study suggests that work-life balance is a unique experience for these black women and men employed within a customer care environment, and that it varies over time and in different situations. What suits one person does not necessarily suit another. This is in support of a recent study by Whitehead and Kotze (2003), who concluded that work-life balance appears to be a cyclical life process involving not one ultimate experience, but a number of individual experiences unfolding over time – something the authors coined “life-balance moments”. In other words, work-life balance is a process of ever-changing experiences over time and at different life stages.

Furthermore, the current study makes it clear that the dilemma of work-life balance is not unique to any particular race group or gender. Not only is it an individual concept that varies over time and in different situations, but the underlying conflict experienced pertains to role overload and role interference. It is significantly impacted by complex social and workplace issues, such as single parenting, values, aspirations, change management, leadership, roles, accountability, and organisational culture. Finally, the current research also concludes that in an attempt to achieve work-life balance, these black women and men engage in a variety of balancing techniques.

Assigning value to time is a process of social construction, interplaying between situational and structural factors which vary across time and place (Lewis & Cooper,

1995). According to Lewis and Cooper (1995), organisations value men's time more than women's time. These values reflect cultural ideologies, values and beliefs; they influence the sexual division of labour, and the assumed rights of employers to demand excess time which would otherwise be devoted to family, community, or leisure activities. The long hours of work expected in many organisations – especially at higher levels – together with the poor conditions attached to part-time work and rising unemployment create a situation in which some individuals work too long hours and are unable to make time for family, while others have too little work and offer their families little security.

Recognising the unity of women and men's work and personal lives is an important strategic adaptation for any organisation. If an individual's desired goal for balancing work and non-work roles is achieved, he will most likely be a productive employee who experiences less stress, as well as better job satisfaction and quality of life. Hacker and Doolen (2003) concluded that human resource managers and organisational leaders alike must find their own answer to what their life purpose is, and then lead or coach others to find their purpose. Instead of losing valuable employees and having to develop new talent, industrial psychologists should help organisations identify the role conflicts facing female and male employees, so that they can find a balance between the individual and the organisation, and benefit both parties.

Organisations should be able to clarify what options are available to young working women, so that these women can realistically plan for their future (Franks et al., 2006). Desired options could include some of the strategies suggested by the research participants, such as rotating shifts and flexible work hours. Another example is job sharing, which is an effective way of cutting down working hours for employees while still enabling them to complete tasks efficiently, to the benefit of the organisation. Furthermore, on-site childcare facilities could be offered, so that working hours need not decrease. In addition to providing support for familial roles, organisations should help individuals integrate their various other life roles in the workplace, for example, by offering on-site gym facilities, organisations could facilitate time management, that is, minimise the time spent commuting to and from the gym – that will help employees to integrate a recreational role into their lives.

Each of us has to ensure that our work-life balance plan fulfils our dreams and passions. Work-life balance is not a decision you make alone – you have to confront how your choices affect a myriad of other people. If you do not fulfil your own joy with your work-life balance plan, all the balance in the world will be fruitless.

I truly hope that the insights gained and recommendations made in this study will help women and men of all ages understand and appreciate the different life roles in which they engage, and assist them in finding a balance between these life roles, which it unquestionably did for me.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that much research has been done in the field of work and family life. In light of all the above findings and recommendations, I hold the humble belief that this study has contributed to helping the scientific community understand and appreciate the social construction of this particular sample's real life roles. I feel that this study has, more specifically, contributed qualitative insights by articulating that experiences of work-life balance are not unique to certain cultures, but that work-life balance is a unique experience for an individual which varies over time and in certain life situations or personal circumstances. I therefore feel that a need has been created to further investigate how different race groups in this diverse nation of ours construct their life roles, thereby aiming to create a nationwide quality of life.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

MASTER'S DISSERTATION – SONIA VEIGA INTERVIEW GUIDE – EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONGST BLACK WOMEN AND MEN IN A CUSTOMER CARE ENVIRONMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWER

Interview preparation

1. Familiarise yourself with the interview questions.
2. Decide on the format of the interview prior to the interview.
3. Get each participant to complete the biographical questionnaire prior to the interview.
4. Describe the interview process which will include:
 - a. Signing of a consent form prior to the interview commencing.
 - b. Completed biographical information. Explain to the participant that this information is purely used for research purposes and that his individual identity will be protected.
 - c. Inform the participant that his privacy and sensitivity will be protected.
5. Explain to the participant that that study is of a qualitative nature.
6. Explain to the participant that the format of the interview is a semi-structured interview to allow for free and flexible discussion.
7. Explain to the participant that your role as the interviewer is to facilitate the discussion and probe the participants' experience, rather than to provide him with your opinion.
8. Explain to the participant that there is no right or wrong answer, and he is welcome to ask questions at anytime during the interview should he need to clarify something.
9. Indicate to the participant that you will be recording the session with a digital recorder, after which the recording will be transcribed by an external transcription services company.
10. Indicate to the participant that you will be taking notes.

Guidelines during the interview

1. Create a comfortable environment.
2. Introduce yourself and state your position.
3. Explain the purpose/aim of the interview, which is to explore the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men in a customer care environment.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Opening:

1. Tell me a bit about yourself in terms of:
 - a. Where you come from
 - b. Your work
 - c. Your family.
2. How would you describe work-life balance?
3. Tell me about your views on work-life balance.
4. Tell me about your experiences of work-life balance.

Intermediate:

1. Tell me how you go about integrating your work-life with your personal-life. What do you do? What problems do you encounter? Tell me about the source of these problems.
2. Who has been the most helpful to you during this time? How has he been helpful?

Ending:

1. After having these experiences, what would you do differently in balancing your work and personal life in the future? How?
2. Is there anything you would like to ask me? Anything else you would like to add?

Closing the interview:

1. Make sure that all questions have been asked and answered.
2. On completion of the interview, explain to the participant that what he has shared in the session will be transcribed and analysed as part of a master's dissertation.
3. Explain to the participant that the master's dissertation will be handed in to an independent examination board, as selected by the University of South Africa, for examination. A copy of the final dissertation will be made available to the participant, electronically, upon request.
4. Explain to the participant that due to the theme of the research topic, anonymity cannot be guaranteed; however, information shared will be treated with the utmost discretion.
5. Close the interview session by thanking the participant for his time and participation.
6. Confirm the undertaking to be available for queries regarding the research and the specific data.
7. Confirm with the participant if you may contact him to clarify information, if necessary.

Note: The participant was handed the biographical questionnaire to complete prior to the interview.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This agreement serves to confirm that the research participant mentioned below gave his/her consent to participate in a qualitative study regarding the construction of work-life balance amongst black women and men in a customer care environment. The research participant agrees to provide the researcher with his/her experiences and views on the area of research to the best of his/her ability.

The undersigned participant understands the purpose and nature of the study and understands that his/her participation is voluntary and that he/she may stop the interview/compiling solicited written documentation at any time. The participant further grants permission for the data collected to be used in fulfilment of part of the requirements for the degree Masters in Commerce, including a report to be submitted for marks at the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, UNISA, as well as any future publication(s).

The data collected will be used for research purposes only. The researcher undertakes neither to disclose the identity of any participants, nor the origin of any statements made by any of them. However, the undersigned participant understands that in terms of the ideals of the methodology of the study, that the researcher is obliged to make verbatim statements from the recorded and transcribed interviews and/or excerpts from solicited written documents and/or any other material in order to illustrate the worlds of the research participants and their perspective in the research report.

The participant grants permission for the audio recording and that the researcher may make notes of his/her views and experiences.

The participant undertakes to give a true representation of his/her perspective and/or his/her experiences.

I, _____, the undersigned participant, agree to meet at mutually agreeable times and duration(s) or other means of communications (e.g. by e-mail) as reasonably necessary to enable the researcher, Sonia Veiga, to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon researched. I further acknowledge that I received a copy of this agreement and that I may contact any one of the undermentioned if I have any subsequent queries.

Research participant: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher: Sonia Veiga
Signature: _____
Telephone number: 0116348522 or 0825629934
E-mail address: sonia.veiga@vodacom.co.za
Date: _____

Research promoter: HA Barnard
Signature: _____
Telephone number: 0823752696
E-mail address: barnaha@unisa.ac.za
Date: _____