SELF-DIRECTED WORK TEAMS IN A POST-APARTHEID GOLD MINE

*Perspectives from the Rockface*

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Increasing international competition requires companies to empower and develop the skills of workers at the lower levels. This paper will show how implementing change from below through self-directed teamwork enhances the understanding of the changing nature of work and the relationship between work and training. The case study of Africa Gold Mine\(^1\) illustrates the South African gold mining industry’s attempt to create a twenty-first century workforce through Self-directed Work Team (SDWT) training conducted within the mine. However, underground participatory research reveals that in the workplace, organisational constraints hinder the effective implementation of SDWT training. In order to cope with these organisational constraints and inefficiencies, workers resort to *planisa*; ‘they make a plan’. In other words, they ‘get on and get by’ underground through improvising and out of the team’s self-initiated action. This paper argues that *planisa* is part of the existing occupational culture of miners and is an embryonic form of teamwork. Any strategy to increase productivity, improve work practices and workplace relations must draw on these day-to-day lived experiences of mineworkers at the rockface.

In the early 1990s, South Africa experienced economic, social and political transformation. This brought significant changes to a country previously plagued by apartheid. The challenge, however, was the reconstruction of the post-apartheid economy insofar as the development of human capital and the improvement of the country’s competitiveness in the global marketplace are concerned.

The fast-moving, ever-changing global marketplace calls for a new work order. This is to argue that the era of globalisation requires a flexible, multi-skilled,

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\(^1\) A pseudonym of one of the world’s deepest gold mines operating in South Africa. Africa Gold Mine lies on the West Wits Line, close to Carletonville in Gauteng province, about 70 kilometres south-west from Johannesburg.
knowledgeable, interchangeable and adaptable workforce not only at the macro level (management) but also at the micro level (on the shop floor). Restructuring work through value-based organizing philosophies and working practices such as teamwork and total quality management (TQM) gives organisations a competitive advantage in the volatile global marketplace (Barker 1999; Clegg 1990; Gee et al. 1996; Hodson 1998, 2001; Holman et al. 2005; Kraak 1996; Lawler 1986; Lloyd 1994; Maller 1992; Mathews 1989; McNamara 1994; Rees 2000; RSA Organised Labour 2000; Standing et al. 1996; Sturdy et al. 1992; Wilson et al. 1994; Webster 1999; Webster & von Holdt 2005). Realising this, the South African gold mining industry deemed it necessary to relinquish the old, traditional and obsolete and to adopt new and innovative forms of work that focus on participative schemes such as self-directed teamwork.

As Bobby Godsell, Chief Executive Officer of AngloGold-Ashanti, argued with regard to the transformation of the labour process in an industry faced by the challenge of international competition:

work structures have remained remarkably unchanged for many decades because of static technology, the impact of apartheid, and the previously closed nature – in times past – of the South African economy. We now face the transition from a Taylor-type of work structure or Fordism, as it is called in sociology of work terms, to models more appropriate for an information-driven society (Godsell 1998 cited in Webster et al. 1999:14).

The transition from Taylor-type models of work structures to models more appropriate to an information-driven society confirms what Bobby Godsell later said, that:

in the struggle between ego and rationality, rationality would prevail (Business Day, 2 May 2001).

This is exactly what happened as the gold mining industry relinquished the racial and crude forms of organising work.

This paper examines an attempt to develop a `new mineworker’ for a new workplace regime in a post-apartheid South African gold mine. AngloGold-Ashanti’s Greenfield
mine is one of the largest gold mines in South Africa and gold is mined at depths of nearly four kilometres below the surface.

The legacy of the despotic labour regime created a culture of resistance to change (Moodie & Ndatshe 1994; von Holdt 2000; Webster 1999). Consequently, the effectiveness of training was extremely low, particularly with regard to individual appraisal, team development and managerial skills. The poor quality of training was attributed to a change process that was not integrated with the strategic plan of the mine. To break with its despotic apartheid workplace regime, the mine instituted New Era Crew Training (NECT) as the catalyst for creating twenty-first century miners. This training, it was hoped, would result in self-directed work teams² (SDWT).

The paper suggests that there are two ways of thinking about the relationship between work and training. The first approach takes as its starting point the training needed to create a new worker for a putative new workplace. This is described as the New Worker model. The second approach starts from the actual workplace and elaborates pre-existing skills and knowledge. This is described as the Planisa model.

This planisa vision of training is based on the recognition and elaboration of tacit skills and the systematic articulation of the miners’ occupational culture.³ The assumption is that the trainee is endowed with a highly developed occupational culture, physically seasoned and embodies the experience of tacit skills and practical knowledge of mining. Importantly, the training is primarily interactive, negotiated and drawn from the practical experience of the trainee. This is described as the ‘view from below’.

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² SDWT is “group of employees who are organised around a specific process, a product or service, or a group of customers. To varying degrees, they are team members who work together to improve their processes, handle day-to-day problems, and plan and control their work. They are responsible not only for getting the work done but for sharing in the management of the team itself. Usually, SDWT, are intact work groups of people who work together on a daily basis” (Wilson et al. 1994:26).

³ Occupational culture is “beliefs and practices that workers have developed as appropriate ways of life to meet the demands of their particular occupations … largely made up of tacitly agreed upon norms and values … not only to consciously proclaimed beliefs, but rather to implicit assumptions and practices so well accepted that they have become part of the taken-for-granted common sense of everyday work life” (Webster et al. 1999:12-3).
The *New Worker* model, on the other hand, is the ‘view from above’. The vision here is of training for a new globally defined workplace based on self-directed work teams. The implementation of new information technologies, such as palm top computers, is central to this vision. The trainee is ideally a willing ‘empty vessel’, speaks English and has a high school education. The assumption is that the trainee is unencumbered by past ‘rule of thumb’ experience and is capable of learning new techniques of mining. The training is primarily top-down, a unidirectional process of knowledge transmission.

Ideally, the *New Worker* model intends to create a fundamentally new workplace that breaks with the past and sweeps away the structures and psychology of apartheid by implementing a new modern set of processes and procedures in line with current global forms of work. Training is the primary element in this model.

At present, what is happening is that training is for the imaginary workplace of the twenty-first century with multi-skilling, continuous learning, and the employment of the imaginary worker who is shorn of the past, well-educated and ready and willing to tackle the problems of the flexible workplace. While training is being designed for the new worker, however, research reveals that the work environment has not changed correspondingly. The training consequently leads to frustration when workers are brought back to the old workplace (see Holman *et al.* 2005).

The specificity of ultra-deep mining – depth, heat, the possibility of rock falls and seismic events – represents a unique, artificially created, total work environment. Workers learn to deal with the complex of uncertainties that characterise this environment and it is out of this scenario that their occupational culture is born. Workers are required to ‘read’ and anticipate changing conditions in the immediate geological environment, to work safely in order to survive, while at the same time responding to production demands.

Under these conditions, workers continue to face blockages that impinge upon their day-to-day work life. The combination of factors forces improvisation, hence they
'make a plan' (*planisa*), either as a result of an instruction or out of the teams’ self-initiated action.

The paper concludes by arguing that any training designed to develop a new miner and the new workplace must be based on the recognition and elaboration of these tacit skills and the systematic articulation of the existing occupational culture of both mineworkers and mine management in the contemporary South African gold mining workplace. In other words, the occupational culture of mineworkers must be conceptualised along with the occupational culture of mine management.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology that was used to conduct this study was qualitative in nature. To fully immerse myself in the working lives of the men, I adopted the research methodology of workplace/organizational ethnography\(^4\) using the research technique of participant observation. I partially worked with underground work teams and participated in the tasks they performed.\(^5\) In the hostel, I shared a room with ‘the observed’ and ate with them at the hostel’s communal kitchen. On certain afternoons and during weekends, I played football with the informants. I spent time with them in the pub drinking a soft drink or beer, playing pool and watching television. Given the diversity of the culture of the workforce, as researcher, I interacted and communicated with the informants in their choice of seven languages, namely English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Xitsonga, and the workplace lingua franca, Fanakalo. All this facilitated a dialogue and strengthened the rapport between the researcher and the informants.

Above ground, the role of observer-as-participant was used to conduct in-depth interviews in the form of conversations with the training officers, human resources managers and representatives of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

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\(^4\) Workplace ethnography “consists of direct observation and analysis of the events, personalities, activities and processes in the workplace. Anthropologists also participate, more or less actively, in the workplace activities and processes” (Pant & Alberti 1997:15).

Information on production results was obtained from management. However, my contact with these informants was very brief and formal. Much of the time was spent underground with the underground work teams.

I also spent time in the Training and Development Centre where training is given to workers. I went through a normal induction process. I was issued with a certificate of competency for the detection of underground flammable gas and knowledge of fire prevention. Fifty days were spent on underground work shift with the work teams.

Three work teams working at different levels were studied over a period of two months. Teams, their constitution and strength varied greatly. A development-end team would comprise anything from six to eight members while a full-strength stoping team might comprise ten to fifteen members plus a team leader. Each team member performed the tasks of barring, drilling, backfilling, support (with timber or cement packs and pressurised elongates with headboards), and sweeping, whether formally trained or not.

Data from conversations and in-depth interviews, both underground and on the surface, were jotted down immediately in diaries, culminating in field notes. This produced in-depth description that places the perspectives of underground work teams at its heart and reflects the richness and complexity of their social world.

**PART ONE: SELF-DIRECTED WORK TEAM TRAINING AT AFRICA GOLD MINE**

The mine has 94 panels – groups of men working at a rockface – working in different sections – Upper Carbon Leader, Lower Carbon Leader (that is, the Decline) and TV-Shaft. Each panel attended SDWT training for five days. The sessions were conducted in Fanakalo by a training officer with extensive experience in mining. Teams were encouraged to participate in discussions pertaining to teamwork, communication and problem-solving:

**Day One**

On the first day of training, organisational and corporate culture and the overall company vision of the gold mining business were introduced. The vision of the mine
– ‘to be the safest, lowest cash cost underground producer of gold in the world’ – was illustrated by means of charts, photographs and practical examples such as games like volley ball, football and so on. These illustrations were geared to alerting the crews about issues important to the enterprise. The emphasis was on workplace change; as the Training Officer said:

We need to change if we want to survive, we must adapt to change. For example, the dinosaurs are extinct because they did not want to change.

The team training motto – Together, Everyone Achieves More (TEAM) – was advanced. This slogan was put into practice later in the afternoon with men participating in a series of practical team-building exercises on the specially constructed obstacle course. Men who could communicate and who planned effectively achieved the task, demonstrating evident pleasure and satisfaction at having succeeded as a team.

**Day Two**

The fluctuating character of the gold price was brought to the attention of the crews. The theme of the day was team-building and team selection by means of videos of recent football games by the national team. The morning’s activities were dominated by problem solving in a group, the effectiveness of good communication channels, the importance of motivation, and styles of leadership. The teams also selected their own names, spokesmen and safety representatives for themselves. In addition to the fact that most of the crew names were African, there were some other commonalities. They all stressed values of teamwork such as respect, responsibility, pride, strength, loyalty and commitment – for example, Tigers, Lions and United, to name just a few. Workers were expected to abide by their names at the workplace. The Training Officer said:

Teams must take responsibility of managing the team because they are Self-Directed Work Teams.

This approach signals a cultural-shift in the organisation of work in South African gold mines towards organising work on the basis of African shop floor culture. The
teams went out to play football and volley ball, both for light relief and to consolidate the classroom lessons practically.

**Day Three**

The crews were alerted to the gold price for the day, and were encouraged to watch and listen to news on television and radio. The previous day’s lessons were summarised, the trainer carefully monitoring the gradual growing cohesion of the group. Safety was the day’s theme, explicitly expressed and stressed through safety campaigns, seven golden rules, mid-shift barring, and personal protective equipment, and starkly driven home by a number of horrific photographic visuals. A detailed discussion on mine and work standards, safety statistics and related matters was presented. The day concluded with a discussion on factors preventing teams from achieving a safe blast every day, and on how mine captains and shift overseers could address the concerns of the crews.

**Day Four**

The gold price for the day was reviewed. Stope measuring was the theme of the day. A brief document outlining how the stope and development-end bonus structure was calculated was distributed and discussed. The calculation of the bonus takes into account panel length, face advance, number of dayshift and nightshift workers on the panel and number of ancillary workers servicing the panel, quality of sweepings, distance from the rockface, calls achieved and accidents in the team. Time spent on activities was brought to the attention of the crews. An activity control board and chart were used to illustrate what a process is and how long it takes to turn an input into an output. Workers were encouraged to complete planning on time and to take ownership of their work activities. Matters around face preparation, sweeping, travelling time, workplace procedure, support, drilling, charging up, connecting up, end of shift procedure, travel to the shaft and personal protective equipment were noted. The last item refers to the time spent preparing for an underground shift in terms of clothes required – helmet, boots, lamp, and so on.
Day Five

The gold price was discussed as usual. The morning was devoted to general discussions around nightshift preparations, gully controls, safe quality blast, and standards – entry examination, face preparation, tipping out, marking off, drilling, charging up, connecting up, cleaning and barring. The Training Officer said:

Bad drilling, bad charging, and bad blasting have a negative impact on the bonus.

Mining is not difficult but we must get smarter on how we do it. How to do it?

Planning, organisation – work as teams. Technology will come after.

The crews were also made aware of the shifts’ means of communication – communication book, token system, communication board – and special areas that inform the teams about the day’s underground working conditions, particularly those pertaining to the stopeface where production takes place. Where necessary, the crews visited the training mock-up to apply their lessons. The National Anthem was sung, contributing to the building of unity, team spirit and commitment. Human resources managers from the section attended the ‘passing out parade’ and the mini-party that followed at lunchtime. The training staff honoured the crews with certificates for having successfully attended and completed the course.

In summary, the five-day SDWT training programme incorporated and recognised the skills and experience of the men within the ambit of creating new kinds of mineworkers. This is new type of training that is interactive and works from below. The crews seemed invigorated and flattered at the end of the week’s training for having grasped what was alien to them before – that is, the organisational and corporate culture – and were ready to transfer and apply the new work culture of motivated and committed miners to the shop floor. My field notes record the following:

People are our most important asset. Our objectives can only be achieved through people. Everybody must work together as a team. Workers can achieve more – can earn more – we must help them with material because they want it (Training Officer).
ASSESSMENT OF THE TRAINING

Positive aspects

Training brought workers together from different shifts in a face-to-face situation enabling issues and problems to be discussed by those actually involved. For example, two men operating the same winch underground met for the first time. This clearly is the most efficient way of breaking down the ‘culture of blame’ between dayshift and nightshift. Mechanisms to ensure regular contact between these two shifts need to be found, as men from two shifts are effectively members of the same team.

Despite the commitment by management to ensure an English-speaking workforce by 2003, conducting training in English is presently not feasible. All training sessions were conducted in Fanakalo, with smatterings of other languages being used. This allowed trainees to display a considerable capacity for verbal reasoning and creative expression when they conversed with the trainers. The use of Fanakalo consequently remains inevitable. Even men who are competent in English speak Fanakalo underground, the means of communication deeply embedded in the culture of all underground workers. It can be heard even around restaurant tables in well-heeled Johannesburg establishments, signalling a group of mining men out together.

Training sessions permitted engagement with and discussion of real issues to take place, illustrated by concrete use of practical, real work examples. This aspect needs to assume a central role in training programmes. Training revealed to workers an integrated conception of work. Tracing the movement of broken rock from the workplace with which they were familiar, along their haulages into the tip, down the ore-passes, along and into the next tip and so on, all the way to surface, proved a real eye-opener for trainees. One worker commented:

Since we went to training, we discuss things together and know a lot about production.

Training seemed to have increased production results of sections 323 and 325 substantially. According to a mining report:
within a period of nine months, sections 323 and 325 had increased their production results from 3 700 square meters … to 6 025 square meters.

Most crews in these sections have been given training during the research process. These increases were attributed to teamwork, problem solving, attitudinal change, communication skills and business skills on the part of workforce.

Negative aspects

Separation of workers and supervisors (low-level and mid-level managers) was identified in some training programmes. In some cases, (white) supervisory resistance occurred where attendance was optional. A directive would have been more appropriate; initiating changes to an entrenched culture requires strength of purpose rather than a *laissez faire* approach. When a research presentation brought this to the attention of the mine manager, he indicated that trainers ought to have made use of the authority of his offices.

The social distance between trainers and trainees remains a function of South Africa’s apartheid past. While the trainers are well-meaning and liberal-minded, their lack of direct knowledge of the deeper aspects of the occupational culture of black mineworkers remains an impediment to maximising the learning situation. The active participation of trainees is a perennial pedagogical problem and not unique to one industry or institution. The lack of sufficiently broad participation was noted and requires specialist attention.

What then remains for the reader is to grasp the manner in which the SDWT training is felt at the rockface. This is discussed below.

**PART TWO: THE GOLD MINING WORKPLACE**

This section deals with the implementation of the training programme, and to what extent it creates worker identities and work practices for the new work paradigm in a
post-apartheid gold mine. The section tries to understand the workplace less in terms of its transformation and more in terms of the constraints within which mining today operates, and thus identifies the obstacles to its transformation. Even where workers were keen to implement their new-found discovery of a different way of organising work, research shows that they were often prevented from effectively doing so. The following constraints were identified:

**Shortages of materials**

Team members and shift bosses believed that the primary problem faced underground had to do with the systematic shortage of materials, especially support materials. One worker said:

> We do not get enough material – sometimes there are delays in the delivery of materials. We do get material but it is not enough, we always fight for material or borrow from one another.

A lack of supplies can lead to theft of materials underground, resulting in unsafe practices and non-adherence to standards. The potential benefits of training are eroded and frustration results.

**Breakdown of machinery**

Recently installed fans, pumps and winches often required almost immediate replacement leading to shorter face advance, the unnecessary expenditure of effort, increased frustration and erosion of morale. One shift boss said:

> Things are just not easy to do properly where the mono-winch is out of order for seven months and where there are only few locos to transport people. But you still regard these problems as temporary. This bottlenecks the ideas of training.

**Decentralisation of the budget**

Workers face the consequences of the practice of *planisa* at higher levels within the
organisation. While this, strictly speaking, fell outside the ambit of this research project and was not examined in detail, the following points were indicative of broader application of the basic argument presented in this paper.

In order to secure bonuses, mine overseers must deliver their specified targets under budget. They do this while struggling against the costing department which attempts to ensure that work is performed within the budget allocated. Supervisors are consequently reluctant to apply for extensions to their budgets. Where workers sense dangerous or hazardous conditions and require additional materials, especially support materials, the normal stresses of dealing with a hostile environment are compounded by having to plead for equipment to make a working area operationally safe.

Supervisors are under their own pressures. The costing department systematically only pays 85 per cent of budget, thereby squeezing supervisors to make do with less materials and equipment than they in fact need. Workers at the rockface bear the brunt of attempts at controlling the budget under conditions of the fluctuating gold price and a weakened Rand as management attempts to stay in business. Attempts by shift bosses and mine overseers to get the job done were found to be in conflict with the costing department’s concern to cut costs and ensure the profitability of the mine.

**Imposition of standards**

Mine standards, rules and procedures have developed from both engineering specifications and designs as well as how these have been modified by past experience. Adherence to these standards often conflicts with the responses workers have to make in uncertain conditions as they manage their work to achieve production targets. Risk taking becomes inevitable under these conditions of multiple constraints. Workers are then blamed if injuries occur, as formal rules may have been breached in order to get the job done. The power to refuse to work under dangerous conditions has not yet been institutionalised. In this sense, the despotic workplace regime of the past negatively intrudes on current attempts to introduce a new work culture of autonomous work teams and occupational practices. The ‘culture of blame’ persists, as infringements of rules and regulations are met with institutionally sanctioned
CONCLUSION: AN ALTERNATIVE VISION OF TRAINING AND WORKPLACE CHANGE

Drawing from the responses of underground mineworkers to the mine’s SDWT training, it is clear that the crews exhibited a sense of renewed vigour in the tasks they do. The culture of *planisa* that workers adopt in situations of organisational constraints shows the eagerness and commitment of mineworkers not only in organising production but also in counteracting the malfunctioning of work organisation in *subtle* and *tacit* ways.

*Planisa* is the Fanakalo injunction, entreating miners to deploy their skills and ingenuity to tackle the day-to-day problems posed by the endemic uncertainties and organisational dysfunctions of mining.

*Planisa* involves creative, self-organised improvisation and initiative, on an individual and collective basis, often circumventing standard work rules. As such, it is a double-edged sword. Management not only recognizes *planisa*, but also consistently orders workers to *planisa*. In effect, workers are instructed to create their counter-plans to get things done. This occurs particularly in circumstances of organisational dysfunction such as lack of supplies and in the event of unforeseen accidents. The informal rules and norms of mining constitute the central organising principle of the workplace without which mining could not take place. While a *sine qua non* of mining practice, the challenge is to harness the capacities of miners to exercise these occupationally learned skills while eliminating the unsafe aspect. This is where the occupational, tacit skill, experiential and practical knowledge of mining becomes significant.

*Planisa* only works if workers possess a rich occupational culture and deploy well-developed tacit skills. Mineworkers consistently claim that mining is easy, but that it is not easy to get it right. This claim points to the continuous need to be able to take penalties.
the uncertainties endemic in mining constantly into consideration and to find ways of dealing efficiently with them.

What the ‘perspective from below’, the Planisa model, suggests is that training needs to take its cue more directly from workers’ experience and knowledge of the mining workplace and to develop its practical curriculum in far more systematic along such lines. In essence, the analysis recognises the creative thinking in the implementation of the New Worker model and that it has been partly developed out of the experience of mineworkers, but suggests that these elements be prioritised and be established as foundational to the training curriculum. Planisa is an embryonic form of teamwork that is at the core of the work culture of miners. Any strategy to increase the productivity of mineworkers must draw on these experiences. However, it should be noted that planisa disperses responsibility, accountability and conflict from management to the work teams in the event of injuries and accidents. To put it succinctly, the policy of planisa harmonises and integrates the interests of management and workers only if it does not result in injuries and accidents.

A new approach to training needs to reconceptualise skill formation (see Billett 2001; Kraak & Young 2001; Webster & Leger 1992; Young 2001) by recognising the need to make training primarily interactive, negotiated and drawn from the practical experience of the trainee. This must involve drawing the unions, and more particularly the National Union Mineworkers (NUM), into the process. This is precisely what the new skills system\(^6\) promotes.

The essence of the new Skills Development Act (1998) is to involve all stakeholders, including employees and unions, in developing a Skills Plan. Furthermore, the Skills Levy Act taxes businesses to generate resources for training; it encourages employers to make use of the workplace as a learning environment. Companies can reclaim a percentage of the levy (in grants) by presenting evidence that workplace skills plans are being developed and implemented. By being allowed to claim a portion of their contributions in the form of training grants, employers are being given an added

incentive to develop the skills of their workforce.

The lofty ideals often found in wording of policy guidelines are notoriously difficult to translate into workable practice. The hard realities of actual practice resist categorisation and change imposed from above. Current legislative guidelines for redressing inequities of the past are directed towards the expression of greater initiative on the part of those who struggle against myriad real constraints and a host of practical exigencies in their daily lives and in the workplace. However scant attention is paid to developing policy on the basis of the perceptions, feelings, aspirations and demands of those at whom they are directed. Furthermore, while few may argue with the guidelines, as formulated, effective modes of implementation are in short supply.

Whether attempting to implement broad national guidelines for education and training or the impeccable values of self-directed teamwork in a specific industry, this paper argues that it is with the perceptions, feelings, aspirations and demands of those who are the supposed beneficiaries that any such task should begin. This principle informs this research. It is the occupational culture of workers that provides the starting point for any workable strategy of fast tracking skills formation in South Africa.

Furthermore, the notion of *planisa* further reveals a workplace scenario where worker citizenship behaviour is not complemented by management citizenship behaviour\(^7\) (Hodson 1999a, 2001, 2004; Jackall 1988). Hodson (2004:679-80) notes that:

> Employee citizenship behaviours are defined as actions on the part of workers to improve productivity and cohesion in the workplace that are above and beyond role requirements. Employee citizenship includes cooperation, taking pride in work and freely giving extra effort and time to meet ongoing organisational goals …

Perspectives from the rockface reveal that the organisational level practices are not congruent with the job level practices. Underground work teams were often

\(^7\) Management citizenship behaviour “involves abiding by minimal norms concerning the treatment of workers and providing a workable technical technical system of production” (Hodson 1999:462). Hodson (1999:462) argues further that “failure by management to abide by these workplace norms results in chaotic and disorganised production systems.” The practice of *planisa* in the South African gold mining workplace clearly illustrates this point.
inconvenienced by management inefficiencies in carrying out their work activities. Research findings clearly showed that the lack of managerial competence and organisational coherence prevented the mine from successfully implementing the SDWT training. In relation to this research finding, Hodson (2004:677-8) argues that:

A core component of effective organisational practices is a coherent and efficient organisation of production. Coherent organisational procedures are essential for organisational effectiveness, for ensuring a positive organisational climate and for the maintenance of management legitimacy. Ineffective organisations of production can involve the purchase of faulty components, failure to schedule activities in a coherent fashion, or any number of other failures. Effective leadership implies both setting standards for excellence and identify ways to achieve these standards. Good communication is also essential for keeping employees informed about goals, procedures and expectations.

Hodson (2001, 2004) points out further that managerial and supervisory competence are key requirement of organisational success and worker dignity. Perspectives from the gold mining workplace revealed that mineworkers were often discontent with management and supervisory style. This finding confirms Hodson’s (2001) research on dignity at work that workers dislike managerial incompetence. Hodson (2001) suggests that worker dignity in the workplace can be ensured by making management accountable to their actions.

Furthermore, it is important to note that although the new forms of work and human resource development signal a shift, at least on the part of workers at the lower levels, from alienation to participation in the day-to-day workplace decision-making, workers need not be viewed as passive and docile reactors to management initiatives (see

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8 This is not surprising given that the work teams and their supervisors attended SDWT training separately. This was found to be one of the negative aspects of the mine’s training programme.

9 Therefore, in the context of the gold mining workplace grappling with transition, further research is proposed to examine the impact of the bureaucratic structure of the gold mining industry on the occupational culture of mine managers and supervisors. Such a workplace inquiry will enhance our understanding of the manner in which the organisational structure exerts pressure on managers in ways that may lead to unethical outcomes. Also of importance, is to investigate the views and subjective experiences of black underground mineworkers on the changing nature of work and its impact on worker dignity in the post-apartheid South African gold mining industry. Such a workplace inquiry needs to be located within the social, political and economic transformation in order to fully understand the nature and form of challenges confronting labour, employers and the state in the democratic South Africa (see Crush et al. 2001; Webster 1999; Webster & Adler 2000, 2001; Webster & von Holdt 2005).

… labour process treats workers as active agents who have to consciously comply with managerial efforts to control them and may equally resist these, and that these psychological processes in turn shape working practices.

Moreover, on the basis of the research findings presented in this paper, it is argued that enterprise restructuring need not overlook the social, psychological and organisational aspects of the adoption and implementation of new forms of work and human resource development.

These underlying social, psychological, political and organisational aspects of workplace change are essential to understanding work practices and workplace relations in the contemporary South African enterprises. Evidence from enterprise studies reveals that a total shift to a new workplace and total implementation of modern working practices has been difficult to be achieved in many of the enterprises. For example, traditional working practices based on Fordism and Taylorism are still influencing the manner in which modern working practices are implemented in various companies. As Holman et al. (2005:5-6) argue:

… modern working practices are not always accompanied by flexible, pro-active employee and fundamentally different experiences of self and work.

The notion of planisa further confirms the findings of other workplace researches that in certain enterprises, the introduction of modern working practices and technologies have yielded unintended results. Holman et al. (2005:1) express the point:

When modern working practices are implemented they can alter work in unintended ways, have deleterious effects on employees and not produce the hoped for improvements in employee and organisational performance.

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10 Modern working practices include, among others, teamwork, total quality management, lean manufacturing, call centres, employee involvement and empowerment, knowledge management, advanced manufacturing technology, supply-chain partnering and teleworking/virtual working (see Holman et al. 2005).
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