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ANTECEDENTS OF JOB ADVANCEMENT AMONG
BLACK INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN DURBAN:
ASPECTS OF AN ON-GOING STUDY.

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SOME INSTITUTIONAL AND ATTITUDINAL ANTECEDENTS OF JOB
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The survey-based research described here forms part of a broader program of "Black Advancement" studies presently being undertaken at C.A.S.S.

At the time of writing the study not yet completed - it is through the fieldwork stages but still in process of analysis -, so the "antecedents" referred to in the title are as yet hypotheses. For this reason the major interest of the study for present purposes is necessarily limited to a brief account of its aims, its design, and some of the techniques adopted to overcome characteristic problems of communication and measurement, rather than a report of findings. The present state of the investigation is regarded as a pilot study with respect to an envisaged follow-up study based on a larger and more varied sample.

Some of the topical and theoretical backgrounds to the study are as follows.

The general motivation for the study is based on, *inter alia*, current concerns with:

- Black advancement in industry, particularly in high-level skilled or blue-collar jobs.
- Identification of latent "industrial aptitude" skills or orientations underlying and enhancing overt industrial job-skills.
- More particularly, identification of dimensions of ability relevant to Black job-advancement at higher levels.
- "Individual modernity" as a reflection of changing values and aspirations in "developing societies".
- The individual modernisation of "transitionals", and the township dweller in South Africa as a probable transitional.
- Conceptions of work, work-ethics, and perceptions of work --- particularly of industrial work --- as they vary crossculturally.
- The motivational base of industrial work manned largely by "transitionals" or migrants.

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- Individual modernity as an underlying "skill"/aptitude in the full mastery of industrial work, in participation in industrial organizations, and in advancement in those contexts.
- The role of education as a prime antecedent to modernity and industrial/technical/professional aptitudes.

The formal design of the study is centred on attitudes and similar individually-based qualities, and a major theoretical premise is the significance of attitudes in the context of modernisation. With this view, the process of change known as modernisation, most often regarded in the human sciences as social-structural in character, and therefore taken to refer essentially to changes of organisation and scale in collective institutions, is recognized as also involving characteristics of individual people. Common sense would suggest, and research has begun to confirm, that as changes take place in important social and economic institutions, so must more or less complementary and equally important changes occur in the social perceptions and behavioural dispositions of the persons involved. Effective modernisation, it is therefore assumed, consists not only of changes in the attributes of society but also of changes in the attributes of individuals. It is these individually-based attributes, when identified as concomitants of adequately functioning modern macro-structural institutions that are in a growing body of research and writings referred to as "individual modernity".

In this socio-psychological perspective on modernisation, individual modernity is typically conceived of as attitudinal and dispositional in nature.

Growing out of the earlier conceptualisations of Daniel Lerner and David Riesman, fairly elaborate models of individual modernity have been proposed and tested — in Latin America, for instance, by Joseph Kahl*, and in the "Harvard Six-Nation Study" (fielded in six Third World countries) by Inkeles* and Smith.

* details of these models of "modernism" or "modernity" are given in the attached appendix.

Perhaps the most general practical goal of the present study is to clarify the identities and roles of factors conducive to the emergence, in a society which is highly stratified, plural and polycultural, of persons who are "modern" in outlook and effective in work. The two qualities are assumed to be in some degree related, and another aim of the study is to investigate this relationship.

In conceptualising "effectiveness in work" the study is, as a guideline, oriented toward the needs of manufacturing industry. Although it might be claimed that such an orientation entails the adoption of values which are culturally-loaded and which reflect specific economic interests, as far as is possible the study concentrates on a level of cognitive and behavioural requirements which are, in the industrial work context*, *universal*, irrespective of the sociopolitical dispensation obtaining in the wider society. Moreover, it seems likely that many of the underlying values and assumptions implicitly in effective execution of industrial work are highly useful in other forms of work.

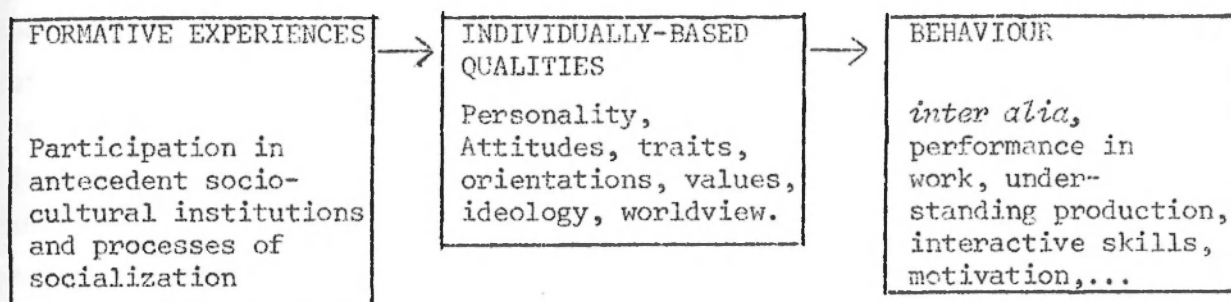
The considerable sociocultural plurality of the South African setting of the study, seen in contrast to the essential unity, at a fundamental level, of industrial work-culture, contributes to the interest, and I hope the potential usefulness, of the investigation.

The central role of attitude variables in the design of the study rests on a view of attitudes as entities or concepts which appropriately and heuristically mediate the influence of antecedent sociocultural experiences on later individual behaviour, and at a level of abstraction which is revealing of patterns of interaction and is amenable to analysis. Attitudinal qualities are seen as tending to determine the perceptions and behaviour of individuals, while at the same time being in varying degrees derived from aspects of earlier life-experiences such as child-rearing/training, acquisition of language and culture, socialisation, and education.

* a "culture of industrial production", as I have termed it elsewhere.

A variety of concepts are available at attitudinal or quasi-attitudinal level, which, taken in certain combinations, can suggest fruitful ways of conceptualising the behavioural or "performance" needs of functionally effective workers, organizations, and, more generally, modern industrial society.

Attitudes, then, and similar attributes are seen as intermediate between formative factors and elements of behaviour, in a process which, very simply represented, is as follows:



Correspondingly, three broad species of variables are yielded by the study: what may be termed antecedents, attitudinals, and behavioural

The antecedent experience variables consist for the most part of demographic variables and measures of participation in sociocultural institutions and processes, the latter measures serving as indices of exposure to characteristic types of formative and socialising experiences. Looming large among these variables is the education received by individuals, with an interest in both the quantity and the quality received. The task of operationalising a multi-component variable "quality of education", as applicable to schools, forms the subject of a related sub-study.

The behavioural variables, which include characteristic ways of perceiving the material and social environments, are confined in their context almost entirely to the workplace. Present operationalisations of "performance" and "advancement" are still primitive, approximating mainly to promotion, increased responsibility in work, and acquisition of further work/job-skills. However, it is hoped eventually to use a few refined composite indices of "performance in work" derived from

combinations of scores on a number of component criteria — which are themselves the subject of a smaller sub-study. Other behavioural variables include perceptions of hypothetically-presented aspects of industrial work, in the form of reactions to pictorial stimuli; and perceptions of actual industrial work, in the form of, *inter alia*, measures of job-satisfaction.

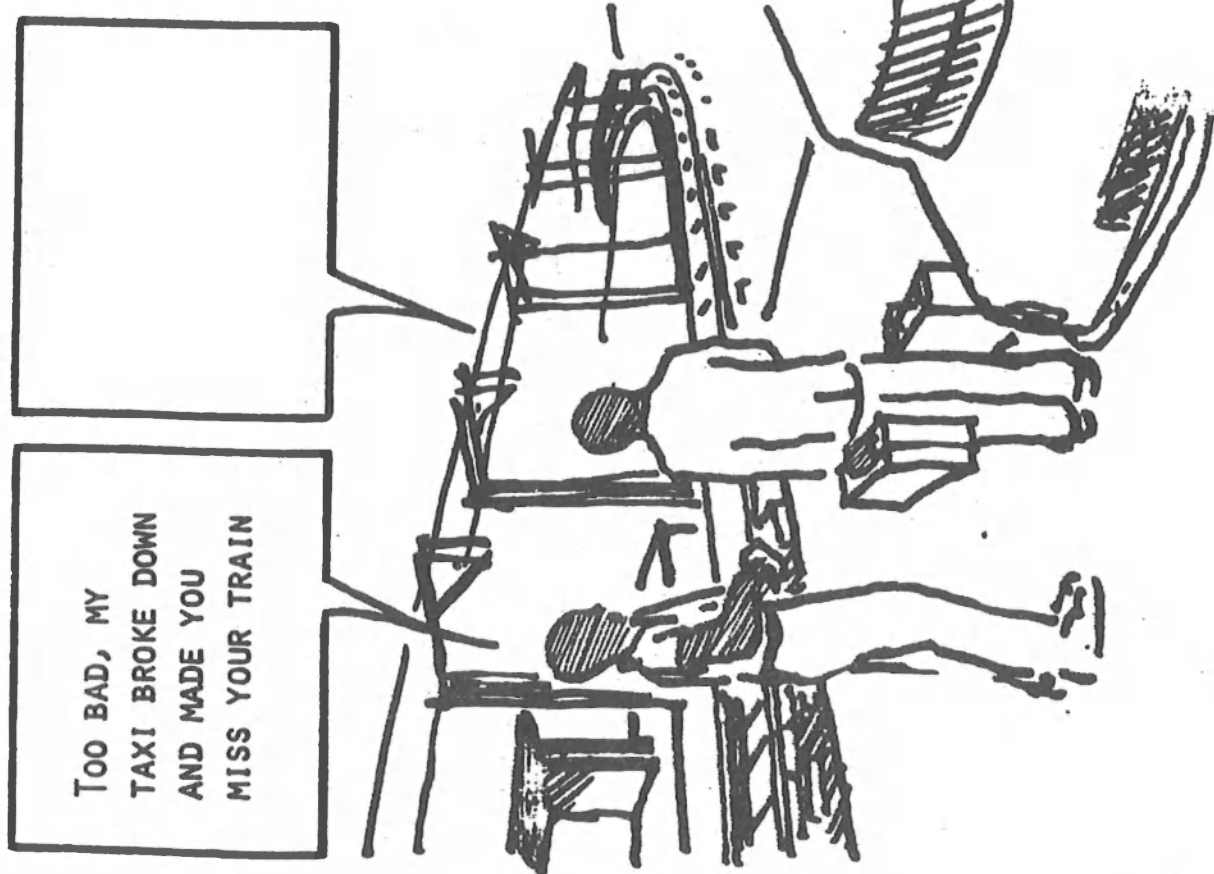
The attitudinal variables, constituting the central theoretical interest of the study are the most numerous and complex. Among them, "modernity" or "modernism" is one of the conceptual bases of the present study — but a "cryptic variable" at present, in the sense that while it is not included *per se* in this stage of the research, other explanatory variables are chosen either to elaborate or to complement it. Factor analyses of Kahl's "modernism" elements and my own consideration of the Inkeles "syndrome of modernity" suggest that these socially-specific surface manifestations of individual "modernisation" arise out of changes in a relatively smaller number of underlying and more general attitudes or personality factors, such as locus of control, achievement orientation, and certain "authoritarian" variables such as autonomy, empathic capacity, and dogmatism. (Changes in some aspects of basic worldview also seem evident, as does an increased understanding of the functional principles of a modern industrial society.) Accordingly, certain attitudinal variables measured in the present study are chosen to approximate to what are considered to be some of the underlying factors in question, in the hope that some equivalence may be demonstrated and some of the more fundamental constituents of modernity discerned. Some of these variables are referred to in a discussion of techniques below.

Some of the more practical aspects of the research may now be referred to in a very brief outline of the setting of the study and of some methods and techniques of measurement employed.

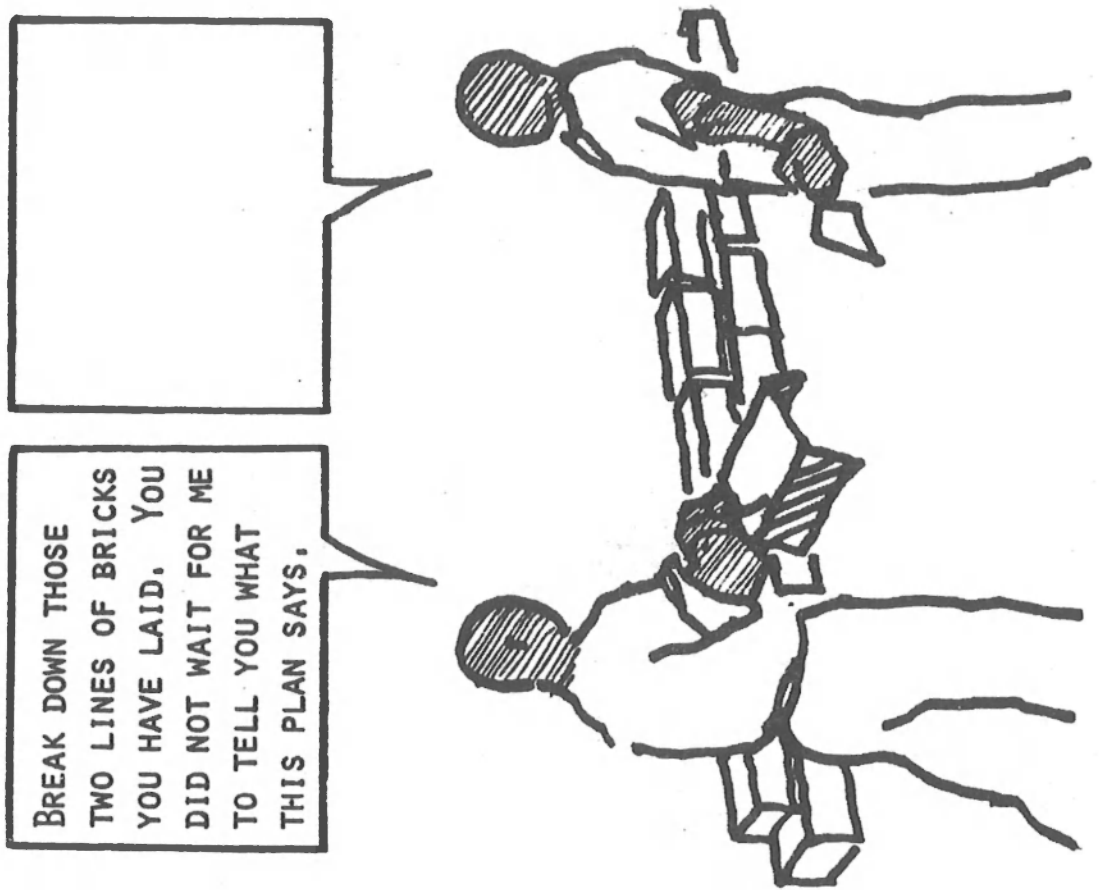
The present stage of the investigation, regarded as something of a pilot study, is based on a sample of approximately one hundred African male employees drawn from higher-level blue-collar and skilled jobs in manufacturing industry in Durban. The respondents/subjects are chosen so

as to be of fairly accomplished literacy — for two reasons: in order to concentrate the study on more likely candidates for advancement, and in order that respondents be able to handle what is an essentially self-administered questionnaire of some complexity and length. The questionnaire is designed to be introduced, but not closely administered, by a trained "interviewer", enabling information to be simultaneously collected from a number of respondents, in a relatively brief session, and with a minimum of misunderstanding in respect of the more elaborate instruments.

The measurement of attitudes, which presents customary methodological problems at the best of times, is made more difficult and uncertain in cross-cultural research. As a pioneering opinion-researcher once observed, "All research on attitudes and values is haunted by the possibility that verbal expressions by respondents may bear no relation to the subsequent behaviour of these people." This is a comment on the nature of attitudes. In addition, attitudinal measures rely on a close understanding of meanings, which must, moreover, be shared by both investigator and subject. In cross-cultural research this problem is compounded by further problems of communication and understanding arising out of differing languages, world-views, and definitions of situations. Finally, as is often the case in applied research, the investigation of a problem area which is not yet sharply discerned or defined calls for a more open-ended and less structured line of inquiry. While wishing to direct the respondent's attention clearly to an area of concern, one equally does not wish to focus unduly on any particular part of it, nor impose one's own definition of the situation, which may, especially in cross-cultural research, be quite inappropriate. The research here being discussed, which is indeed attitudinal, cross-cultural, and open-ended in character, attempts to overcome these inter-related problems partly by maximising the Zulu content of the questionnaires but principally by employing, wherever possible, projective measures and/or pictorial stimuli. Present indications are that the considerable extra efforts involved in setting up projectively/pictorially-based measures have been justified.



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One example of such an instrument is a measure of the typical reactions of individuals to frustration. Information on this theme is derived from a PF (picture-frustration) test, a versatile diagnostic device of which a locally-oriented "black" version has been developed for this study. Based on pictures of the type illustrated, the PF is an administratively simple but functionally complex projective instrument yielding a number of variables. Information yielded by this test permits, for example, an analysis of the differing attitudinal profiles distinguishing persons who are more, and less, perceptive of frustration. Empirically and methodologically the PF is very promising. It is easily understood by respondents, highly projective, and rapidly handled. As a potential index of other variables the PF is highly amenable to adjustments which may "tune" it to the desired variables. The situational and personal content of the pictures, for example, can be varied (work/leisure, male/female, etc.), and the interpretive schemata elaborated.

Another projectively-elicited variable which is important to the study is n Ach (need for achievement or "achievement orientation"). This is measured very much in the classic manner of McClelland and associates by scoring achievement imagery as evident in written material produced by respondents in response to projective stimuli. In this case the written material is of two kinds: narratives based on a number of ambiguous pictures selected from a TAT developed for use with African subjects, and relatively structured descriptions based on a number of photographs of African employees in industrial work situations. Of interest here has been the differential ability of pictures to evoke achievement themes. Indeed in the case of the TAT one of the more serendipitous findings of the method has been that the evocation of achievement content in stories is limited almost entirely to pictures with solely "traditional" content or African actors. With very few exceptions indeed, pictures showing or implying "contact-areas" with the world of whites and/or urban work singularly fail to elicit n Ach scores. This indication is, it should be emphasised, as yet *tentative*, but its possible implications strike this writer as disquieting.

It would appear that another projective indication of n Ach will be derivable from responses to the PF test mentioned earlier. As the PF test depicts persons temporarily thwarted in the execution of activities which are goal-oriented in varying degrees, while requiring their ensuing behaviour to be predicted by the respondent, it seems probable that this instrument taps an achievement orientation. If this is so, then it demonstrates this orientation in hypothetical settings which, in terms of both environment and social interactions, are more appropriate to the world of industrial work than those in TAT pictures.

A further use of projective/pictorial devices is in the examination of a number of related socio-psychological traits such as empathy, prejudice, expression of aggression, autonomy, and approaches to differentiated status relationships. These are scored by content analysis of stories written by the respondents, based on ambiguous TAT pictures. In accordance with the traits examined the choice of pictures for this purpose has favoured scenes depicting more than one person, so as to evoke the content of interpersonal relationships.

Yet another use of pictorial stimuli in the study is in the generation of a group of variables describing the respondent's perceptions of or reactions to the world of work and employment --- in particular, responses to a number of archetypal features of employment in large-scale industrial work involving the operation of heavy or precision technology. A selection of clear photographs of industrial work scenes are shown to respondents, who reply to a number of open-ended questions applied to each picture. It is assumed that the respondent identifies to some degree with the depicted worker(s) in his response. However, this projective aspect of the method is employed mainly to overcome the difficulty, particularly in cross-cultural research, of describing a *hypothetical* situation (in this case a total work-situation), rather than to reveal unconscious processes in the individual. As the photographs are of high definition in contrast to ambiguous TAT pictures it seems that a process of identification is prompted in the respondent, rather than projection. The questions used with the pictures, and the analysis applied, are open-ended, but the content of the pictures has been carefully chosen with the intention of evoking at least some specific themes.

These themes have the following in common:

1. They are, as noted above, typical of industrial work.
2. They would tend to stand out as novel to persons of rural and traditional background.
3. They are characteristics of work which, previous research *tentatively* suggests, tend to provoke particular anxiety in African migrant workers.

The results of this examination of perceptions of work and employment are so far promising. Emerging analytic themes include respondent perceptions of: effort, stress, danger, unusual environments, contamination, isolation, supervision, needs, skills, precision, aspirations and advancement.

Although the present state of the research is conceived of as, initially, a validation study and a test of the practical workability of novel instruments and methods, it is undoubtedly yielding interesting and usable information. In further analysis of the data thus far acquired I shall be seeking, for instance:

- To relate variations in attitudes and similar dispositions to "performance" and other behavioural variables — and hence, to establish attitudinal and demographic profiles of such types as "performers", "advancers", and "satisfieds", and of their opposites.
- To examine in more detail the attitudinal profiles referred to above, looking at the differential contribution of (1) underlying personality factors, and (2) institutional antecedents, to the essential character of each profile.
- To examine the differential influence of locally relevant individual attributes, and hence locally relevant antecedent experiences, on satisfaction and performance in industrial work. What kind of people, for instance, are adapting/advancing best? — those distinctive on education, or socioeconomic status, or personality factors, or work opportunities, etc.?

In facilitating some aspects of method and perspective a research design almost inevitably compromises others. One of the shortcomings of the present study arises out of its concern with the individual. Partly as a result of being based on survey methods and survey-research technology, the study design overlooks, or does not cater for, the role of social and group phenomena in the workplace, taking instead an atomistic view of the worker. This relates to the problem of refining the criterion variable(s) in such a way as to give a more group-based than individually-based indication of human "performance", an indicator which would also take into account such factors as interactive skills and longer-term conceptions of self, work, and career.

"...the problem is actually that of shifting research emphasis from individual differences (as in psychological tests) to understanding human performance in the "real" world. In a sense it is to devote our time to what most psychologists *say* they do, 'study behaviour'." *

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I am grateful to the Rev. Simeon Zulu, of C.A.S.S., who has sampled and fielded a good deal of the study to date, and to Mrs. Anita Craig, of the Department of Psychiatry, Addington Hospital, Durban, for collaboration in analysing and scoring projective material.

* Ronan, W.W. and Prien, E.P. *Perspectives on the Measurement of Human Performance*.

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