

# **Influence of COVID-19 on personal work perspective transformation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** To evaluate whether the COVID-19 pandemic caused people to transform their attitudes towards work.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study was conducted among 276 working professionals from different sized South African organisations and occupying different professional levels in these organisations. Data was collected using a Google form and analysed using Microsoft Excel and RStudio programs.

**Findings:** The results show that most respondents experienced perspective transformation regarding their jobs. The main drivers of perspective transformation reported were new work processes, changed priorities, health concerns and perceived increased value of relationships. Though people reported perspective transformation, they still thought their old attitude towards work was relevant.

**Recommendations/value:** These results suggest that organisations should increase investment in communication technology to improve online communication, encourage work-life balance and increase employees' financial literacy.

**Managerial implications:** Since many most respondents report having adopted new work processes, which are mostly underpinned by technology, organisations should invest adequately in the relevant technology to enhance the effectiveness of the new processes.

## **Keywords**

COVID-19; disorienting dilemma; Kubler-Ross Curve; perspective transformation; Transformative learning; work attitude.

## **JEL Classification: M12**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The SARS-CoV-2 virus causing COVID-19 has resulted in significant human suffering, huge economic losses and changes to how people work. At the end of December 2020, 86.8 million people had tested positive and 1.9 million had died worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2020). In South Africa alone, of the 1,127,759 confirmed cases, 30,524 people had died by the end of December 2020 (Corona Tracker, 2020). Statistics South Africa (2020a) estimates that Gross Domestic Product shrunk by a record 51.0 percent in the second quarter of 2020. This shrinking is characterised by about half of operating companies closing temporarily during the pandemic (Statistics South Africa, 2020b) and 3 million jobs being lost (Jain *et al.*, 2020).

Those companies which survived had to transform and adapt to a new way of conducting business. Many had at least to embark on a digital transformation, and some had to reconsider their strategies (Conforto *et al.*, 2020). As such, the crisis exposed some pockets of excellence, especially in the education sector (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). The significant suffering experienced in South Africa due to loss of income, illness and death possibly changed people's fundamental beliefs about the value of work in their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic possibly introduced a disorienting dilemma which triggered perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000; 2009; 2012). This perception is premised on the understanding that a life crisis forces people to reflect on their fundamental beliefs (Mälkki, 2012; Meyer *et al.*, 2022).

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to evaluate the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic caused people's perspectives of their own jobs to transform. Its specific objective is to investigate whether the COVID-19 pandemic caused a perspective transformation of the study respondents' attitudes toward work. Transformative learning literature mostly deals with transformation induced by personal events such as entrepreneurial training (Nyamunda & Van der Westhuizen, 2020), the experience of being childless (Mälkki, 2012) or re-entry into college after a long hiatus (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). There is limited research on perspective transformation caused by a pervasive crisis such as that caused by the rapid spreading of the COVID-19 virus. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions: Is the influence of a pervasive crisis on attitudes similar to that of a more personal issue such as divorce or being childless? Does the pervasive nature of the crisis encourage or prevent people from reflecting and changing their perspective on life and work?

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review introduces the key concepts for this study. These aspects include transformative learning, disorienting dilemma, the value of disorientation in transformation, transforming attitudes towards work and different stages of personal change.

### 2.1 Transformative learning

Learning is a lifelong human endeavour (Merriam & Bierema, 2014) emanating from a person's need to effectively interact with the external environment (MacKeracher, 2004). In a sense, learning combines cognition and experience (Jarvis, 2011) and starts from a need to minimise uncertainty and enhance security and survival (MacKeracher, 2004). Learning becomes transformative if it "enables actors to recognize and reassess the structure of assumptions and expectations, which frame their thinking, feeling, and acting" (Boström *et al.*, 2018:2).

Transformative learning is a multi-step process. Mezirow and Marsick (1978) proposed a ten-step process which leads to perspective transformation. Nohl (2015), however, argues for a five-step transformative learning strategy commencing with a non-determining start; then experimentation and undirected inquiry; followed by social testing and lastly mirroring. The fourth step according to Nohl (2015) is a shift in relevancy; and the last step is a reinterpretation of the individual's biography. On a slightly different note, Kitchenham (2008) condenses the 10-step transformative learning processes of Mezirow and Marsick (1978) into four steps namely: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, rational discourse and action.

This study is concerned with the extent to which a pervasive crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can be the disorienting dilemma to trigger a perspective transformation towards work. As argued by Kitchenham (2008), the first step in perspective transformation is a disorienting dilemma, which is discussed in the next section.

### 2.2 Disorienting dilemma

According to Shor *et al.* (2017) discomfort is a necessary catalyst for transformative learning. Disorienting events are generally negative (Mezirow, 1990) and are accompanied by pessimistic emotions which encourage meaning formation (Mälkki, 2012). A crisis becomes a disorienting dilemma when it exceeds the person's cognitive capacity to cope with this situation (Green & Mälkki, 2017). The complexity of this condition forces the person to adopt a more open capacity (Green & Mälkki, 2017) resulting in a desire for change, through a process of questioning, reflecting and, ultimately, transformation (Johnston, 2011).

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It is important to highlight that not all disorienting events lead to transformative outcomes (Ensign, 2019) and that not all transformative events are sudden (Nohl, 2015). However, scholars seem to agree that a disorienting dilemma is a harbinger for exploring alternatives (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978; Malkki, 2012; Nohl, 2015). Mezirow and Marsick (1978) propose that a disorienting dilemma precedes critical reflection, while Nerstrom (2014) argues that disorienting events herald transformative learning but not necessarily critical reflection.

Conforto *et al.* (2020) propose three elements necessary for a disorienting dilemma to lead to successful transformation. These elements are a deliberate move into crisis mode, followed by a focus on people and processes and, finally, prioritisation of speed in decision making and execution (Conforto *et al.*, 2020). A disorienting dilemma is a pivotal element within the transformative learning process.

### **2.3 The value of the disorienting dilemma in transformative learning**

The idea of a disorienting dilemma triggering the transformative process was initially proposed by Dewey (1997) who equated this process to the point which warrants a person stopping and climbing a tree to assess the entire landscape. This idea is supported by Mezirow (2012) who regards a disorienting dilemma as a distinct marker of the commencement of the transformative process. In Freire's (1970) formulation, a disorienting dilemma is a limiting situation, during which the individual realises the limits of his freedom which prevent him/her from achieving the desired outcome.

However, Taylor (2000) argues that a disorienting event does not need to be dramatic; it can be an accumulation of much smaller events which trigger "inner disillusionment". Also, according to Raikou (2018), a disorienting dilemma can be activated by an unexpected or opposing point of view, which arouses a long-held unconscious belief. Despite the negative connotations associated with the term disorienting dilemma, Brookfield (2012) asserts that it can be positive, arising from events such as falling in love or being a parent. In the context of this study, however, the disorienting dilemma from the COVID-19 pandemic is negative and pervasive. While this situation has changed people's way of life and working, the question of whether it has transformed their attitude towards work still remains unanswered.

### **2.4 Transforming attitude towards work**

The COVID-19 pandemic is such a unique disorienting experience that it is likely to force people to evaluate their attitude toward their own work (Guan *et al.*, 2020). Some of the drivers of re-evaluation include loss of jobs, working from home and spending a significant amount of time with family (Snyder, 2020). Snyder (2020) opines that many people, even if they did not

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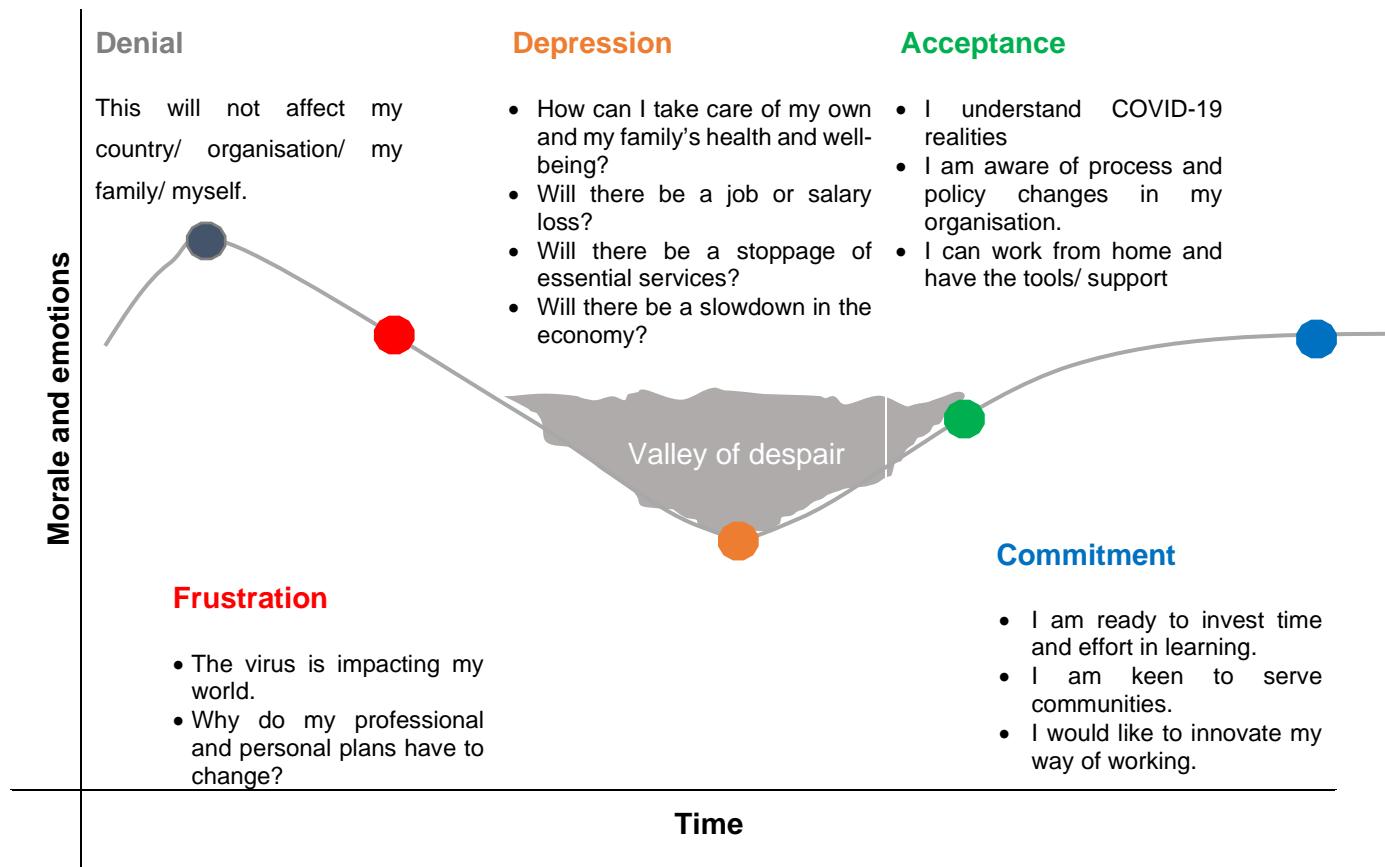
lose their jobs, will re-evaluate their work/life balance. Such evaluation will be significantly influenced by their culture (Guan *et al.*, 2020).

Brown (2020) argues that the COVID-19 crisis has most likely led people to evaluate several issues regarding their work. These concerns include the desire to work for a purpose-led organisation, heightened focus on mental health, a thirst for learning, greater humanity in the workplace and a rise in personal projects unrelated to work (Brown, 2020). Vroom Digital (2020) found that many workers enjoy several aspects of working from home which include a lack of commuting time, more time available to do other things, saving money, enjoying more time with family and increased flexibility. In fact, they found that 92 percent of employees believed their colleagues were having a positive work experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be of interest to assess whether the purported change in expectations about work (Brown, 2020), together with the positive experiences reported in the Vroom Digital (2020) online survey, lead to a fundamental change in people's attitudes towards work. Further, if there is a real change in perspective due to the COVID-19 crisis, did this change follow any discernible stages?

## 2.5 The different stages of personal change

Personal change can effectively be mapped using the Kubler-Ross curve (Kubler-Ross, 1969), also known as the five stages of grief. This curve, although originating from a study of patients dealing with a terminal illness, has been adapted and modified to reflect the typical stages of personal change (Leybourne, 2016). Figure 1 shows a Kubler-Ross curve that has been adapted to apply to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: The COVID-19 Adapted Kubler-Ross Curve



Source: Deloitte (2020)

Figure 1 has been adapted to reflect the likely COVID-19 change journey followed by many people. The stages shown are denial, frustration, depression, acceptance and commitment. Of interest to this study is the issue of whether people's perspectives about work have transformed to a stage in which they are now committed to the new norm.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

The objective of this study is to evaluate whether the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a transformative change in people's attitudes toward their work. People resist change, mostly driven by the insecurity they feel about the proposed alteration (Grama & Todericiu, 2016). There is no doubt that the COVID-19 virus significantly affected people's current way of life both psychologically and socially (Kontoangelos *et al.*, 2020). It is possible, however, that while people's work processes have changed, their personal perspective toward their work has not varied.

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### 3.1 Question

To what extent did the rapid spreading of the COVID-19 virus, as a pervasive crisis, trigger important perspective transformation within employees towards their work?

### 3.2 Objectives

Based on the research question above, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To investigate whether the COVID-19 pandemic caused important perspective transformation within the study respondents with regard to their work.
- To explore, if there is reported perspective transformation and whether this attitude is deemed permanent.

### 3.3 Hypothesis

Based on the above research objectives, this study hypothesises thus:

$H_0$ : The COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to important perspective transformation of the study respondents towards their jobs.

$H_1$ : The COVID-19 pandemic led to important perspective transformation of the study respondents towards their jobs.

## 4. RESEARCH METHOD

This section presents the research approach and design as well as the measurement instrument, population, sampling criteria and statistical analysis.

### 4.1 Research approach and design

This study used a deductive research approach, which utilised a quantitative research design underpinned by a survey conducted among working 'white-collar' professionals. The survey captured the attitudes and opinions of respondents. The researcher utilised a convenience sampling method to obtain feedback from respondents in several different sized South African organisations.

### 4.2 Population and sampling strategy

The population for this study comprised people working in South Africa. The sample of the employed people was drawn from LinkedIn users and other people professionally connected to the researcher. A message was sent to 1,500 people in October 2020, with a request for them to access a link to the questionnaire which was hosted on Google forms. A total of 276 people responded, which translated to an 18.4 percent response rate. Saleh and Bista (2017)

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found that the response rate to online surveys was influenced by participants' interest in the subject, survey structure, reminders, length and assurance of privacy and confidentiality. Completion rates are negatively affected by the length of the instrument and complexity (Liu & Wronski, 2017), hence, this study's questionnaire comprised 24 questions, which could be answered in approximately five minutes.

#### 4.3 Instrumentation

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from King's (1997) Learning Activities survey, which was initially conducted among adult students. King's questionnaire is based on Mezirow and Marsick's (1978) ten steps to transformative learning. To test the validity and reliability of the instrument, King (1997) conducted a pilot study and made necessary adaptations suggested by a panel of experts. The Learning Activities survey has been used in several other studies (King & Wright, 2003; King & Kerekes, 2008; Kumi-Yeboah, 2012).

Notwithstanding the previous validation, the researcher conducted a pilot study to test the validity of the adapted instrument. The instrument was sent to 20 participants in the researcher's network with similar demographics to the study respondents who were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide feedback on this experience. Pilot study respondents reported that the questionnaire could be completed within five minutes which was deemed ideal given that Saleh and Bista (2017) found that people were likely to respond to short surveys. Some suggestions from the respondents included the need to explicitly cater for respondents whose perspectives did not change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This concern was already catered for in the scaled responses provided.

Unlike the Learning Activities survey which required "Yes" or "No" responses, this study questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree). Each question had a "Not applicable" option. The questionnaire comprised 24 questions of which eight were demographic questions, eight tested transformational changes in organisational processes, seven tested perspective transformation and one was an open-ended question. A Cronbach's alpha of more than 0.7 is required to ensure good reliability (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2017). The Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables tested in the pilot survey was  $\alpha = 0.935$ . This result was deemed acceptable in line with Rockinson-Szapkiw's (2017) recommendation and, thus, the instrument was judged reliable. From an analysis of the received pilot data, it was noted that a significant percentage of respondents had chosen the "Neutral" response. For some questions as many as 46 percent of pilot respondents chose a neutral response. The researcher, consequently, eliminated the "Neutral" response from the final questionnaire because he felt that if a respondent indicated a Neutral response, he or she could choose the

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“Not applicable” option which was available under all relevant questions. A factor analysis of the pilot data could not be conducted, because the number of variables exceeded the number of pilot respondents.

#### **4.4 Data collection procedure**

Since the research posed no ethical concerns, no ethical clearance was obtained. An electronic link to the study Google form was sent to 1,500 individuals. They received an electronic message, informing them about the purpose of the study, assurance of confidentiality and that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Only those respondents who wanted to receive the final research results were asked to indicate their names and email addresses. The data collected from this research survey is recorded on a Google sheet on the researcher's Google Drive account. The Google Drive account is secured by a two-factor authentication, to prevent unauthorised access.

#### **4.5 Data statistical analysis**

Once all responses were received, the data was exported from the Google sheet to the Microsoft Excel 2016 program for preliminary statistical analysis. The RStudio program was used to calculate Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and conduct a factor analysis. The descriptive statistics comprised means, standard deviation and Cronbach's Alpha. The significance level set was 95 percent and, before factor analysis, the Bartlett's test of sphericity was conducted to determine common bias variance and whether the majority of these variances could be rationalised into a single factor. The Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the different elements. This process is used to measure internal consistency or reliability and is employed mainly when there are multiple items using a Likert scale in a questionnaire (Bonett & Wright, 2015). Field (2013) suggests that in social sciences research a Cronbach's alpha above 0.5 can be accepted as reliable for questionnaires designed to measure attitudes. The T-Test was used for hypothesis testing, to determine whether the COVID-19 pandemic had led to the perspective transformation of study respondents.

#### **4.6 Participants**

From the 1500 surveys disseminated, 276 valid responses were received. Of these, 169 (61.23%) were males and 107 (38.77%) from females. The gender and age distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Gender and age distribution of respondents**

| Gender       | Age                | Number | Percent (%) |
|--------------|--------------------|--------|-------------|
| Female       | Below 30 years     | 8      | 2.90        |
|              | 30-35 years        | 23     | 8.33        |
|              | 36-40 years        | 15     | 5.43        |
|              | 41-45 years        | 14     | 5.07        |
|              | 45-50 years        | 20     | 7.25        |
|              | 50-60 years        | 22     | 7.97        |
|              | More than 60 years | 5      | 1.81        |
| Female Total |                    | 107    | 38.77       |
| Male         | Below 30 years     | 6      | 2.17        |
|              | 30-35 years        | 17     | 6.16        |
|              | 36-40 years        | 21     | 7.61        |
|              | 41-45 years        | 28     | 10.14       |
|              | 45-50 years        | 28     | 10.14       |
|              | 50-60 years        | 49     | 17.75       |
|              | More than 60 years | 20     | 7.25        |
| Male Total   |                    | 169    | 61.23       |
| Grand Total  |                    | 276    | 100.00      |

Source: Author's compilation

It should be noted that the fact that more males responded (see Table 1) was mainly because being male, the researcher is professionally connected online to more men than women. Of the 276 respondents, 34.78 percent (96) were aged 50 years and over, 32.61 percent (90) were between 40 and 50 years, and the rest (32.61%) were less than 40 years old.

Respondents from small organisations employing less than 10 people dominated at 25.72 percent (71), followed by 10 to 50 people organisations at 23.91 percent (66), then very large organisations of more than 500 people at 22.46 percent (62). In terms of working experience, 39.46 percent (109) respondents have been working for their organisation for more than 10 years, followed by people who have been employed by their organisation for 5 to 10 years at 21.01 percent (58) and then 17.03 percent (47) of respondents fell within the 3 to 5 years category. The rest of the respondents (19.57%) have worked for their organisations for less than 3 years.

The following 3 industries comprised more than 10 percent of respondents, namely Communication and Information Technology, Financial, and Manufacturing. Of these industries, the financial industry had 26.12 percent (70) respondents, followed by Manufacturing at 11.57 percent (31) and Communication and Information Technology at 10.07 percent (27). Education was marginally below 10 percent at 8.21 percent (22) and the rest of the organisations were below 5 percent.

Lastly, the most predominant positions of respondents were Director, Executive, Senior Manager, Manager and Specialist. Directors comprised 37.88 percent (111) of respondents, Executives, 11.60 percent (34), Senior Managers, 12.63 percent (37), Specialists, 9.9 percent (29) and Managers, 9.56 percent (28). From this distribution of participant positions, it is apparent white-collar employees with senior organisational positions are overrepresented at more than 62 percent.

## 5. RESULTS

After the cleaning of data, the percentage responses were computed, together with the mean and standard deviation. Missing values were deemed to mean “Not Applicable”.

### 5.1 Reliability and other statistical analysis

A reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was carried out again on the 7 items shown in Table 2 which showed that the questionnaire had maintained an acceptable level of reliability,  $\alpha = 0.87$ . All the 7 items indicated that they were worth retaining, with the alpha reducing if any of them were deleted (refer to Table 2). Other statistical results from the sample are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary change in attitude statistics

| Summary                                      | Responses |       |       |       |       | Mean | SD   | $\alpha$ if item removed |
|--|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|--------------------------|
|  | N/A (%)   | 1 (%) | 2 (%) | 3 (%) | 4 (%) |      |      |                          |
| Q1. Revaluing importance of work             | 4.7       | 9.1   | 15.9  | 30.1  | 40.2  | 3.06 | 1.16 | 0.86                     |
| Q3. Changed belief in values of work         | 6.9       | 14.1  | 30.4  | 35.1  | 13.4  | 2.51 | 1.09 | 0.84                     |
| Q5. Adopting new behaviour                   | 6.9       | 7.2   | 25.0  | 45.3  | 15.6  | 2.74 | 1.06 | 0.83                     |
| Q7. Uncomfortable with previous work value   | 5.8       | 14.1  | 43.5  | 26.4  | 10.1  | 2.35 | 1.00 | 0.84                     |
| Q9. Comfortable with new behaviour           | 12.0      | 3.6   | 13.4  | 52.5  | 18.5  | 2.98 | 1.18 | 0.84                     |
| Q11. Reflected before adopting new behaviour | 8.3       | 3.3   | 19.9  | 50.0  | 18.5  | 2.91 | 1.08 | 0.86                     |
| Q15. Degree of change due to COVID-19        | 1.8       | 6.5   | 8.3   | 58.7  | 24.6  | 3.03 | 0.87 | 0.85                     |

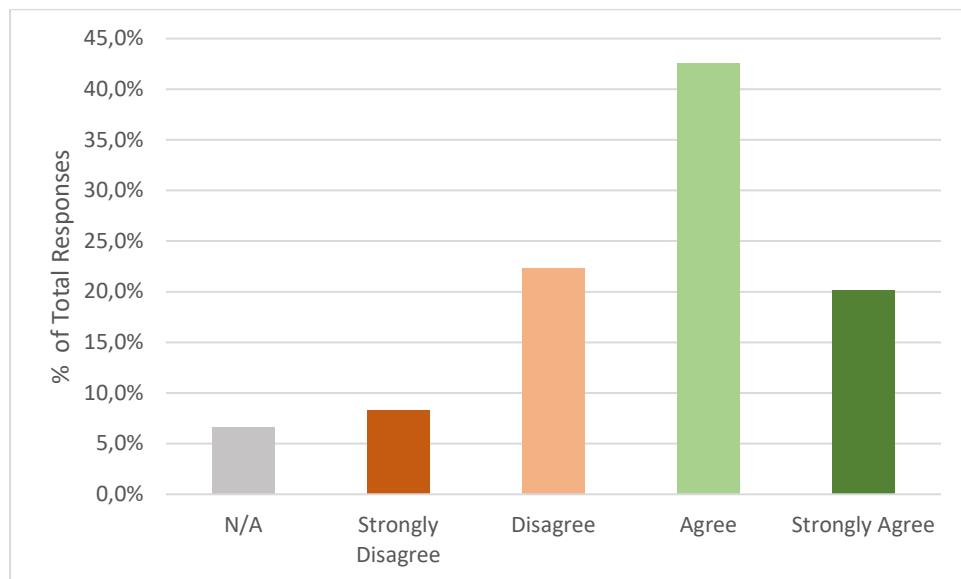
Source: Author's compilation

Table 2 indicates that the highest means are for “Revaluing the importance of work” (mean = 3.06, SD = 1.16) and “Degree of change due to COVID-19” (mean = 3.03, SD = 0.87). Other items with high means include “Reflected before adopting new behaviour” (mean = 2.91, SD = 1.08), “Comfortable with new behaviour” (mean 2.98) and “Adopting new behaviour” (Mean = 2.74, SD = 1.06). These results suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic made people

reconsider the value of work in their lives (Q1), mostly because of significant changes made by their organisations (Q15) and that, after making relevant changes to their own behaviour, people are reasonably happy with these changes (Q9).

In the open-ended question, the main drivers of change cited by respondents have changed work processes, changed life priorities, the perceived value of relationships, health concerns, concerns about income security and work/life balance. Of the six drivers, the leading change drivers cited by more than 10 percent of respondents are changes to working processes by 32.42 percent (95) and changed life priorities by 15.02 percent (44). These drivers are followed by health concerns at 9.90 percent, the perceived value of relationships at 9.22 percent, concerns about income security at 7.1 percent and work/life balance at 6.83 percent. All the results are aggregated and further summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Overall Level of Perspective Transformation



Source: Author's compilation

From Figure 2, 42.6 percent of responses were "Agreed", followed by 22.4 percent which were "Disagree". In total, 62.7 percent of the respondents either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree", while 30.6 percent of respondents either "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" that their work perspective was transformed. These results show that most respondents (62.7%) reported perspective transformation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next section, the researcher evaluates to what extent the questions measure the object of interest, that is, perspective transformation, using factor analysis.

## 5.2 Factor analysis

Factor analysis is a mathematical procedure aimed at simplifying data, also known as “parsimony” (Yong & Pearce, 2013). First, a Bartlett Test was conducted to test sampling adequacy. The p-value was = 1.014, which was considered adequate as it is above  $p > 0.05$ . The total variance results indicated that there is only 1 Eigenvalue above one, for this set of questions. The first factor explained a total variance of 56.00percent. The data was then subjected to factor analysis using Orthogonal Varimax rotation, to assess how the items loaded to one factor. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Factor Analysis results

| #   | Items                                   | Perspective Transformation |
|-----|---|----------------------------|
| Q1  | Revaluing importance of work            | 0.612                      |
| Q3  | Changed belief in values of work        | 0.756                      |
| Q5  | Adopting new behaviour                  | 0.810                      |
| Q7  | Uncomfortable with previous work value  | 0.769                      |
| Q9  | Comfortable with new behaviours         | 0.749                      |
| Q11 | Reflected before adopting new behaviour | 0.547                      |
| Q15 | Degree of change due to COVID-19        | 0.619                      |

Source: Author's compilation

It is evident from Table 3, that all the items have high correlation with the factor being measured. Six of the seven items have high factor loadings of more than 0.6 which indicates high convergent validity. Based on the results in Table 3 and the literature review, the factor being measured is perspective transformation. The next step was to conduct hypothesis testing, to evaluate whether the results above were significant.

## 5.3 Hypothesis testing

The null and alternate hypotheses for this study are:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** The COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to important perspective transformation of respondents towards their jobs.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The COVID-19 pandemic led to important perspective transformation of respondents towards their jobs.

To conduct hypothesis testing, the T-Test was used. A T-Test is utilised to evaluate if there is a significant difference in the means between two samples or between a specific value and the sample (Bevans, 2020). The T-test was used to evaluate if respondents agree ( $M > 2$ ) that

their important work perspectives were transformed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: One-Sample T-test results

| Statistical Measure          | Value  |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Mean                         | 2.776  |
| Standard Deviation           | 0.631  |
| Observations                 | 275    |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 2      |
| Df                           | 274.   |
| t Stat                       | 20.385 |
| P(T<=t) one-tail             | 0.000  |
| t Critical one-tail          | 1.650  |

Source: Author's compilation

From Table 4 it is evident that there was a statistically significant transformation of respondents' perspectives (df (274),  $M = 2.776$ ,  $SD = 0.631$ ) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, t-stat (20.385), t critical one tail (1.650) and p one tail (0.000). These statistics resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an important perspective transformation by respondents.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This research study sought to evaluate the extent to which the pervasive COVID-19 crisis caused transformation to people's personal perspectives of their work. The idea of perspective transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic is premised on previous research results which argued that a disorienting dilemma (personal crisis) is a necessary catalyst for transformation (Mezirow, 1990; Shor *et al.*, 2017). Transformation is necessary if a personal crisis exceeds the person's cognitive capacity to cope with the existing situation (Green & Mälkki, 2017). The scope of this study was to investigate if a pervasive crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as opposed to a personal crisis, also leads to perspective transformation.

From the results of this study, respondents experienced perspective transformation regarding their attitude towards work ( $M = 3.02$ ). This view was mostly driven by the pervasiveness of the changes they had to make due to the COVID-19 crisis (83.3% of respondents reported

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changes). This finding is consistent with Snyder's (2020) assertion that there were significant changes brought to the work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These pervasive changes introduced in organisations led most respondents to re-evaluate the importance of work (70.3%,  $M = 3.06$ ). This process of re-evaluation is in line with Guan *et al.* (2020) who argue that the COVID-19 crisis is such a unique experience that people were forced to reassess their attitudes toward work.

Interestingly, despite the significant changes reported by most respondents, they disagreed with the assertion that they are now "*uncomfortable with previous value they placed on work*" (57.6%,  $M = 2.35$ ). In many ways, their perspective about work has changed but they still hold valid their previous attitude towards work. This belief could be interpreted to mean that they view their current attitudes towards work as a broadening of their perspective and not a transformation. This opinion would be consistent with that of Hoggan (2016), who proposes that in transformative learning a person's worldview becomes more comprehensive. However, this finding is contrary to West (2014) who argues that transformation is a break from the past or Hoggan's (2016) further assertion that transformation involves a change in personal identity.

The drivers of perspective transformation reported in responses to the open-ended question posed in the questionnaire were: new work processes, changed priorities, health concerns and value of relationships. One respondent said "*I stopped being busy just for the sake of being busy. I had time to reflect on what I valued and what I wanted to invest my time on.*"

From the above findings, it can be concluded that pervasive disorienting events such as the COVID-19 virus led to the transformation of behaviours when people adapt to disruptive changes. These changes are associated with the adoption of new perspectives. However, this study's contribution to the research into transformative learning is that people do not necessarily abandon and despise their old perspectives as a result of the change. This finding is in line with the objective of this study, which was to investigate whether the COVID-19 pandemic led to perspective transformation.

## 7. LIMITATIONS

This study which focused on perspective transformation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in common with many other studies, has some limitations.

The first limitation concerns the sampling procedure. A convenient sampling procedure was used which limits the generalisability of the results (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). It is also possible that only people with a significant interest in the topic responded to the online survey and,

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therefore, the results exclude a certain portion of possible respondents with systematically different opinions and experiences.

The second limitation is that the study was a cross-sectional study and not a longitudinal one. The measures of transformation would have been more accurate if there had been a similar survey conducted before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with which to compare this study's results.

## 8. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of this study, there are a few recommendations which can be made. Firstly, given that many people have already adopted new work processes, mostly driven by technology, organisations should keep investing in technology to make sure it is stable. Organisations should also keep improving the processes they adopted due to the rapid spreading of the COVID-19 virus and eliminate old processes which have been shown to be unnecessary and unimportant.

Secondly, people should always be careful to maintain good personal relationships because they are the ones who would be helpful during times of crisis. Management and organisations should be more supportive of people taking time to sustain or improve personal relationships. Hossain *et al.* (2019) found that the scope of people's relationships defines their health outcomes. Employees with good personal relationships are likely to be more productive and well rounded.

Lastly, people should work on their own financial security. This surety can be achieved by establishing an emergency fund on which to rely during times of crisis. Organisations should encourage their employees to engage in such schemes by offering financial wellbeing seminars or workshops. These courses will help employees survive financially during times of emergency (Bharti & Singh, 2020) and, hence, reduce their stress levels.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

This study has indicated that the respondents have transformed their attitude towards work due to changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Though they report that their changes are permanent, future studies could further investigate whether these changes are really permanent and if people will revert to their old work habits once the pandemic is over.

Further studies are also needed to assess the extent to which organisations changed processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Such studies might evaluate whether these organisational changes were transformational processes or minor adaptations.

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## 10. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study showed that worldwide disorienting events can change people's perspectives. In addition, a change in work processes also can lead to changed perspective. However, when people's perspective changes, it does not follow automatically that they believe their old perspective was less valid. It seems they adopt a new perspective which they deem relevant to the current realities. This fact implies that perspective transformation in some cases is not associated with transformed identity as suggested by Hoggan (2016).

## 11. CONCLUSION

This study sought to ascertain whether respondents experienced perspective transformation regarding their work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was conducted among 276 professionals in different fields. The study found that respondents experienced perspective transformation regarding their employment. On further probing of the situation, using an open-ended question, the main areas which drove transformation were new work processes, changed priorities, health concerns and the value of relationships. Though respondents reported perspective transformation, they still thought their previous attitudes towards work were still relevant. This finding contradicts those of some studies which argue that transformative learning means a break from the past. In other words, this research study found that people might assume a new perspective, but still hold their earlier perspectives as relevant under different realities. To a degree, this outcome is consistent with studies which consider transformative learning as the widening of perspective. The contribution of this study is that even pervasive disorienting dilemmas (crises) can trigger transformative learning. Further research is needed regarding the degree to which the COVID-19 pandemic caused and will continue to cause, organisations and employees to change their work-related processes.

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