

CHAPTER 1:

# *Introduction*

## **1.1 Background**

This thesis attempts to clarify the growing importance of *public relations*, particularly the role of *relationship management*, during change in organisations. More precisely, the thesis proposes a challenge to current ways of thinking about the application of public relations and communication management during organisational change. Presented here are contrasts between systemic and process thinking about the ways that communication and relationships are managed and realised. While systemic thinking revolves around deterministic approaches to change strategy, process thinking addresses participation and complex connections between all entities within an organisation.

The basic assumption here is that changes occur in organisations because of changes in the environment. More specifically, conflicts of dynamics often arise between an organisation and different interest groups of the organisation because of uncontrolled influences from the environment. During high change situations, the different publics of the organisation become involved in the change issues and actively seek information about those issues. The amount of information in our world has increased beyond all expectations, but paradoxically, while information continues to increase, the ability to utilise that information to the benefit of organisations and their stakeholders has decreased (Lissack & Gunz, 1999). The role of the public relations practitioner has been that of strategic communication manager between an organisation and its publics (Grunig, 1992), but mostly from a structured, planned, controlled, and linear perspective. This structured approach worked when all the variables in the environment were more or less predictable and changes were evolutionary. However, current social and economic life defies all attempts to control because the environment has become too complex. The modernist approach worked well when capitalism was the driving force in organisations, but less well when the public started expecting much more in terms of the responsibilities and roles of corporations within society. Essentially, because

of revolutionary changes in the environment, and also in the expectations and behaviour of stakeholders, the role of the public relations manager has also changed. This thesis examines how the approaches of strategic communication management and public relations within changing environments have evolved in response to the complexities that organisations face in our postmodern society.

## 1.2 Key concepts

### 1.2.1 Public relations, communication management and relationship management – their role within strategic management

Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (1992, p. 4) define public relations as the “management of communication between an organisation and its publics”. This definition equates public relations with communication management. A recent development in the field of public relations is that the term ‘communication management’ is seen as not describing the full strategic function of the field. Instead, the term ‘relationship management’ is becoming more widely used because it describes the study field more in terms of the organisation- public/stakeholder relationships, thereby taking the central focus away from communication (Ledingham, 2000). Dozier (1995) argues that

*the purpose and direction of an organisation (its mission) is affected by relationships with key constituents (publics) in the organisation's environment (p. 85).*

Ledingham (2003) supports this and reasons that communication is used as a tool to achieve healthy relationships, which leads to the achievement of goals and objectives of the organisation. But the effectiveness of communication in terms of relationships lies merely in its use as a strategic tool to achieve relationship goals and objectives (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000). This shifts the domain of public relations from communication management to relationship management because the suppositions have changed, as Ledingham (2003) observes,

*from the area of communication to one with relationships as the supposition source (p. 184).*

For these reasons, the term ‘public relations’ will be used in this thesis even though it is sometimes misunderstood, especially in the administrative management sciences. The term ‘communication management’ will also be used as it is found extensively in the public relations literature, as well as in industry. The focus of this study, however, is relationship, as according to Bruning (2000),

*many scholars are moving towards the notion that the primary purpose of public relations is to manage the relationships between an organisation and the organisation's key publics (p. 159).*

Strategic management has also been developing alongside public relations and communication management; more specifically, the stakeholder approach to strategic management has been evolving since the mid-1980s (Harrison, 2003, p. 11; Post et al., 2002). This approach views the organisation as a network of relationships with stakeholders, and according to Post et al. (2002), this is essentially the definition of a corporation, namely, an organisation that

*engage[s] in mobilizing resources for productive uses in order to create wealth and other benefits (and not to intentionally destroy wealth, increase risk, or cause harm) for its multiple constituents, or stakeholders (p. 17).*

Implied in this definition is that management should build a strategy around the identification of stakeholders and that they should “listen and respond to their interests and concerns” (Post et al., 2002, p. 17). When referring to ‘organisations’ in this study all forms of organisations are implied, including governments, companies, non-for-profits, and larger social structures.

The word ‘stakeholder’ was first used by Freeman (1984) in 1984 when he described stakeholders as:

*any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the activities of an organisation (p. 46).*

Post et al. (2002, p. 19) expand on this idea, but suggest that the definition should have a narrower scope because competitors could also be included in such a broad definition. Furthermore, they prefer to view stakeholder as individuals and groups who receive benefits from the organisation, and accept the risk of any loss incurred

by the organisation. Within public relations literature the terms ‘stakeholders’ and ‘publics’ are often used interchangeably, although Grunig & Repper (1992) and Steyn & Puth (2002) see ‘publics’ as being more aware and active than those stakeholders who are passive. At the same time, Grunig describes publics as “groups that affect the ability of an organisation to meet its goals” (Grunig, 1992, p. 4), which correlates with the definition of stakeholders by Freeman. For the purpose of this study the two terms will be used interchangeably as this differentiation is too subtle to have an impact on this study.

Post et al. (2002, p. 19) also support the notion that the organisation should manage their mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, because corporate activities depend on co-operation from all these diverse constituents. At the same time, the organisation should recognise that stakeholders have the right to expect benefits from their relationship with the organisation. Being paramount to the stakeholder approach to strategic management, this notion of mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their stakeholders describes the function of public relations within organisations. As outlined by Grunig (2002) rather accurately:

*The purpose of public relations is to help organisations build relationships with the publics found within several categories of stakeholders. Public relations professionals help to build relationships by facilitating communication between subsystems of the organisation and publics in and around the organisation (p. 2).*

This comparison illustrates the crucial link between these two fields of study. The relevance of communication management for strategic management will be explored in more detail further on in this study.

### 1.2.2 Relationships

The concept of ‘relationships’ have been mentioned repeatedly in the discussions of public relations, communication management and strategic management, so it needs further exploration. Relationships can be conceptualised as **relationship antecedents** (behavioural consequences on each other); **maintenance strategies** that include five dimensions (positivity, openness, assurances, networking and shared responsibility); and **relationship outcomes** (Grunig &

Huang, 2000, p. 34). Relationship maintenance strategies are important in terms of the strategies followed in change management and relationship outcomes pertain to the effects of the strategies. The four relational outcomes measured in this study are: **trust**, **control mutuality**, **relational satisfaction** and **relational commitment**. The development and composition of the term 'relationships' and 'relationship management', as well as the contributions from different fields of study, will be explored in much more detail in Chapter 5.

### 1.2.3 Change management in organisations and public relations

The two basic approaches to change management will be elaborated in Chapter 3 because they formed the basis for the assumptions tested in this study. These approaches to change have evolved in the same way that management approaches have evolved from the mechanistic view held in the Industrial Age to a more organic epistemology; that is, when managers began to think and learn about business as organisms (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 28). The traditional approaches to management correlate well with the planned approaches to change management, and emergent management styles with developing transformation approaches. Stacey (2003) views this difference in terms of the dynamics of organisations, and more specifically in terms of the

*properties of stability and instability, predictability and unpredictability they display (p. 3).*

A further difference lies in the way that organisations work with paradoxes where some organisations approach them as though they are contradictions that need to be sorted out and managed, and others approach them as a reality that always exists. There are thus two main approaches or paradigms to organisational change management.

#### 1.2.3.1 The planned approach to change management

The first approach is the planned approach representing a variety of models descending from the practice of Organisational Development (OD) (Burnes, 1996, p. 180; Senior, 1997, p. 258). Senior (1997, p. 227) also distinguishes between hard-systems models and soft-systems models (OD). Hard-systems change management

relates to rational-logical models where people issues are of low priority. Soft-systems models, on the other hand, refer to change models concerning organisational politics, culture and leadership; in other words, people issues.

The three most important models of the planned or OD cadre of change is the Action research model, the Three-step model and the Phases of planned change approach (Burnes, 1996, p. 179; Senior, 1997, p. 229; Genus, 1998, p. 7). Action research was designed to address social and organisational issues and involves a collective approach where all parties involved participate in the formulation of research problems, and the action taken to solve these problems. The change process thus becomes a learning process, and is a rational, systematic analysis of issues through social action.

The second model proposes that change should involve three steps of unfreezing, moving and refreezing, where old behaviour has to be discarded before new ways can be adopted successfully (Burnes, 1996, p. 182). A further elaboration of Lewin's model (Burnes, 1996) is the third model of planned change, which consists of change phases (distinct states an organisation moves through), and change process (methods to move the organisation through these states). This model concentrated mostly on structural changes.

Specific characteristics of the planned approach (OD) is that it places emphasis on processes; deals with change over a significant period of time; follows a holistic approach; encourages participation; ensures full support from top-management; and involves a facilitator that takes on the role of change agent (Senior, 1997, p. 258). These models have been criticised as too rigid; that phases cannot be distinct and chronologically ordered because of the extreme turbulence in the environment; that the emphasis is on incremental and isolated change rather than radical transformation; that reliance on management is too heavy; and one kind of change could not work for all organisations (Burnes, 1996, p. 186).

### *1.2.3.2 Emergent approaches to change management*

The second group of approaches to change management recognises that highly dynamic environments demand more contingent methods, that are more

situational, and where change strategies can be adapted to achieve maximum fit with the ever changing environment. These approaches have been developed out of the basic disbelief in the effectiveness of the planned change approaches (Burnes, 1996, p. 187) and in dealing with the fast changing and unpredictable environments organisations are faced with (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 22). According to the emergent approaches, organisations can rely less on detailed plans and projections, and develop instead an understanding of the complexities of environments and the issues concerned. Change should be linked to the reality of the changing markets, flexible boundaries and relationships with stakeholders, changing work ethics, and alterations in management controls (Burnes, 1996, p. 188). Short-term change strategies and plans yield short-term results and more instability.

In following the emergent approaches to change management, organisations will need to increase their environmental scanning abilities in order to identify issues and trends that might affect them so that decision-making processes can be adjusted accordingly (Burnes, 1996, p. 188). Management will also have to rethink and reformulate what change is all about, and not just change for the sake of change. They will have to move away from thinking in a linear and planned fashion, but and allow for unanticipated behaviours and probabilities (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 22). Postmodern management is more complex and chaotic than before. Chaos theory and complexity theory are postmodern approaches have contributed as paradigms to the discipline of change management, offering alternative methodologies for traditional planned change. These approaches will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Emergent approaches to change have a few characteristics in common. Change is seen as a continuous process of learning and experimentation to adapt and align to the turbulent environment (Burnes, 1996). Small-scale changes over time can lead to larger changes in the organisations where the primary role of managers is to gather information, as well as facilitate and communicate the creation and maintenance of the organisation's vision. *Chaos* and *complexity* theories, as discussed in this thesis, do not provide simple plans and answers to change management efforts, but promote instead discourse and participation in decision-making as an ongoing and ever-emerging process (Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001). Within the emergent paradigms of change and management, the practice and thinking of

public relations will have to adjust accordingly, and new strategic interventions will have to be followed.

A first implication is the way information is managed. Traditionally, the reaction to crises and disorder was to secure and control information; however, from the emergent approaches, information should flow more freely so that systems can adapt faster to environmental changes using feedback and intelligence (Youngblood, 1997, p. 69).

A second implication for public relations, is the important obligation of relationship building in order for organisations to achieve its strategic objectives (Grunig et al., 1992, p. 11). Communication can be used strategically in order to build trust, commitment, mutual satisfaction and mutual control of relationships with all the important stakeholders of the organisation (Flower, 1993, p. 50). The quality of relationships can be increased by facilitating participation and communication in all directions and overcoming barriers to knowledge sharing (Marlow & O'Connor Wilson, 1997, p. 68).

Furthermore, traditional hierarchies and borders in organisations should be challenged in the two imminent paradigms of change and management. Kiel (cited in Evans, 1996, p. 492) proposes that the participations of citizens and customers should be encouraged to increase participation, ownership and service excellence. More strategic and improved communication can enhance these relationships with outside stakeholders and create arbitrary boundaries for the organisation (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 169). Boundaries within the organisation are also broken down and a more interdisciplinary approach is followed.

Building a culture of constant, flexible change within the organisation is a further responsibility of public relations within the postmodern paradigms. Leadership should be concerned with guiding vision and values through constant communication in all directions (Wheatley, 1994, p. 64). This would imply allowing, and even facilitating, the questioning of management decisions, conflict, dialogue and debate. Participation of employees in the decision-making and driving change processes should be facilitated by providing channels to transmit, analyse and discuss change issues (Burnes, 1996, p. 194).



A further implication for public relations is the involvement in strategic planning and strategic decision-making. As environments become more turbulent and unpredictable organisations find it increasingly difficult to plan for specific outcomes. As Sherman points out,

*Planning does not work well in relation to unanticipated behaviours because it is essentially linear (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 22).*

New sciences emphasise limitless possibilities and the “process of everlasting becoming” (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 23). This entails the practice of scenario planning and considering all possibilities for outcomes. In order to consider all possibilities it is necessary to have enough information from the environment.

The boundary spanning function of the communication manager is prevalent in this regard. Because the communication managers are the mediators between organisations and environments, they can assist by providing intelligence to assist in decision-making (Spicer, 1997, p. 61). By performing environmental scanning, the public relations manager can gather information that brings all the possibilities to the strategic boardroom.

#### **1.2.4 The situational theory**

The situational theory explains why and when groups of people communicate, and what the effects of communication could be for different publics (Grunig, 1992). The publics most pertinent to public relations strategies are differentiated according to the amount of responsiveness around issues regarding the organisation. During times of change, publics want to be involved and more active in the issues that influence them. They become, therefore, more prominent because of changes (Grunig, 1992, p. 18). The more relevant the problems are to these publics, the more they will become active in dealing with those issues. In other words, it is the problems that help to define the publics, rather than the publics defining the problems. When publics become involved and active they generate consequences for organisations, which is why it is important to pay attention to these publics. The most effective communication would be to be active and aware publics because they are more likely to process and seek information on issues at hand (Grunig, 1992, p. 171). When a problem is recognised (such as issues that

cause changes in environments and organisations) (Grunig, 1997), and if the constraints are low in terms of communication, a group feels very connected to a situation and start to feel that something should be done about the issue. The likelihood of processing and actively seeking information on those issues increase. Furthermore the communication effects will be strong and people will change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. As communication management is about the management of relationships, an assumption to be made here is that this public will thus also have a positive relationship with its organisation. It can also be derived that a positive relationship will lead to greater communication effects and a greater willingness to change. These assumptions were tested in this study.

### **1.3 Conceptual framework**

The different classifications for research and philosophical conceptual frameworks come on different dimensions. The following dimensions will be addressed: ways of gaining knowledge, the research orientation, meta-theoretical paradigm, paradigmatic orientation and conceptual position within the field of study.

#### **1.3.1 Philosophical assumptions underlying approaches to gaining knowledge**

The first dimension is that of the philosophical assumptions underlying knowledge. According to Hudson & Ozanne (1988), Littlejohn (2002) and Griffin (2003), there are basically two categories of philosophical arguments: the traditional or positivistic ideal of theory, and the alternative paradigm or interpretive approaches. In addressing the ontological question about reality, the positivists posit an objective reality independent from those who perceive it, and thus interaction and behaviour are individualistic. In other words, human behaviour can be measured and predicted. This is a deterministic view of the nature of social beings. On the contrary, the ontological assumptions of interpretivists are that there is no single reality, but that reality is socially-constructed. Reality changes as the environment changes; and human beings actively engage in the creation of their environments through social interaction and relationships. In brief, the epistemological assumptions of the positivists are nomothetic and knowledge is

context-independent; whereas, for the interpretivists knowledge is idiographic and context-dependent.

Until recently, public relations during change has been researched and applied mainly from a practice-oriented approach. This thesis, however, aims to provide some theoretical frameworks within which public relations can be practised during times of change in organisations. In taking an interpretivist perspective, the thesis is primarily concerned with the creation of meaning through interaction and relationships in organisations. The ‘truth’ sought throughout is subjective and does not claim to be the ‘only truth’ about organisations and relationships during change. The thesis does not intend to provide answers, but aims to incite debate and discourse, and ultimately, to contribute to improving the ethical environments of organisations.

### **1.3.2 Research orientation**

The purpose of research for the positivists is to test theory in order to predict future behaviours (Griffin, 2003) from a privileged point of observation (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Research is conducted according to strict protocol, and the research design is a fixed structure that allows for reliable and valid answers to research questions. The ideal for the positivists is experimental design where control is provided in order to isolate and test variables independently.

Contradictory to this, the interpretive orientation to research is interactive and co-operative, and without a privileged point of observation (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Interpretivists are subjectively involved in the research process, so there really is not a neutral approach to knowledge. The aim is to understand behaviours, so the interpretive research orientation is not an end in itself, but an ongoing process.

This thesis developed out of the general cynicism in industry towards interpretive approaches to change management and, in particular, the role of communication and participation. Paradoxically the aim of the thesis was an attempt to prove some interpretivist theoretical assumptions. Ironically the research design has been positivistic; namely, the isolation of variables in order to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between change strategies and the

resulting relationship outcomes between organisations and their internal publics. Nevertheless, an initial qualitative, interpretivist research approach was followed with the creation of the independent variables for the experimental design. The researcher therefore acknowledges that although strict experimental design protocols were followed, the entire setup of the experiment is ultimately subjective and value-laden, and the results are not fully confirmable.

*In so-called “objective” research, concepts and methods are held a priori, are unknown projections of researchers’ own ways of encountering the world, constitute the world as observed without ownership or critical reflection, and are not subject to the “objection” of the outside towards possible alternatively constituted worlds (Deetz, 1996, p. 193).*

So while it is advisable to follow research methodologies that are consistent with the philosophical assumptions of the researcher, nevertheless, as Hudson & Ozanne (1988) points out, “the violation of assumptions may at times lead to valuable insights” (p. 518).

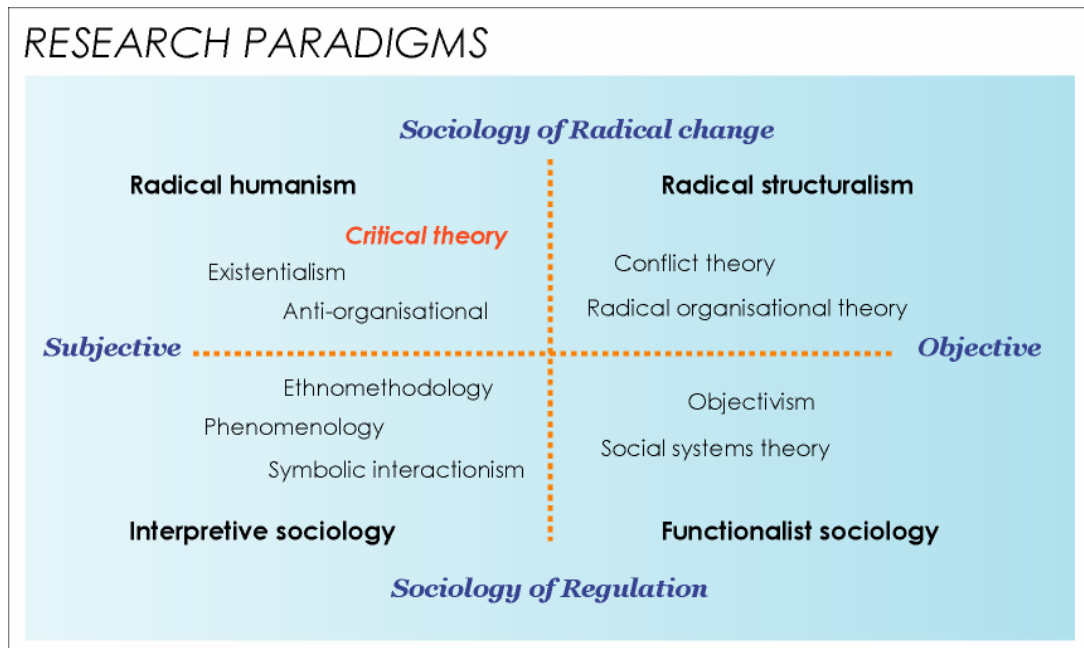
In this study, interpretivist theoretical assumptions are combined with positivistic research in an effort to get a better understanding of the theory. To be true also to the conceptual position of postmodernism, no single approach can be privileged over another. The time constraints to complete this study forced the experimental design, but the results of this study should be seen as the beginning of a continuously evolving research process and investigation into change and communication in relationships. The researcher’s ultimately aim is to use a diversity of research approaches and follow a dialectic alternative that, according to Hudson & Ozanne (1988),

*seeks diversity by counterposing aspects of the different world views in the hope of resolving conflict and developing a completely new mode of understanding through the debate generated by this juxtaposing (p. 519).*

### **1.3.3 Meta-theoretical paradigm**

Burrell & Morgan (1979) have put together a classification of sociological paradigms and identified four ways of thinking about social systems and research on change of social systems:

Figure 1-1: Research paradigms



Adapted from Burrell & Morgan (1979)

The above illustration of Burrell & Morgan's (1979) classification shows the dimension of *change* versus *regulation*, and the dimension of the *subjective worldview*, that is, as opposed to *objective worldview*. *Functionalist sociology* depicts rational, deterministic and nomothetic approaches. Functionalism is highly pragmatic, rational, and where equilibrium is an important goal. The functionalists believe in social order, consensus, social integration and solidarity. *Radical structuralism* is also realistic, positivistic, deterministic and nomothetic, but they approach radical change from an objectivist point of view.

Burrell & Morgan (1979) describe the *interpretive sociological* approach as being subjective and seeking explanation within the realm of individual consciousness. Research within this approach is nominalistic, ideographic and voluntaristic. The world therefore is seen as an emergent process, and changes are regulated and controlled.

The final approach is *radical humanism* with the critical paradigm as an example where the emphasis is on overthrowing the limitation of existing social arrangements. This paradigm is nominalist, ideographic and approaches change from a somewhat radical and subjective point of view. Paul Lazarsfeld was perhaps

the first political scientist to distinguish between the administrative and critical research approaches,

*Administrative research is designed to aid the administration of public and private programs, and critical research is designed to oppose and resist the administration of power in society (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 229).*

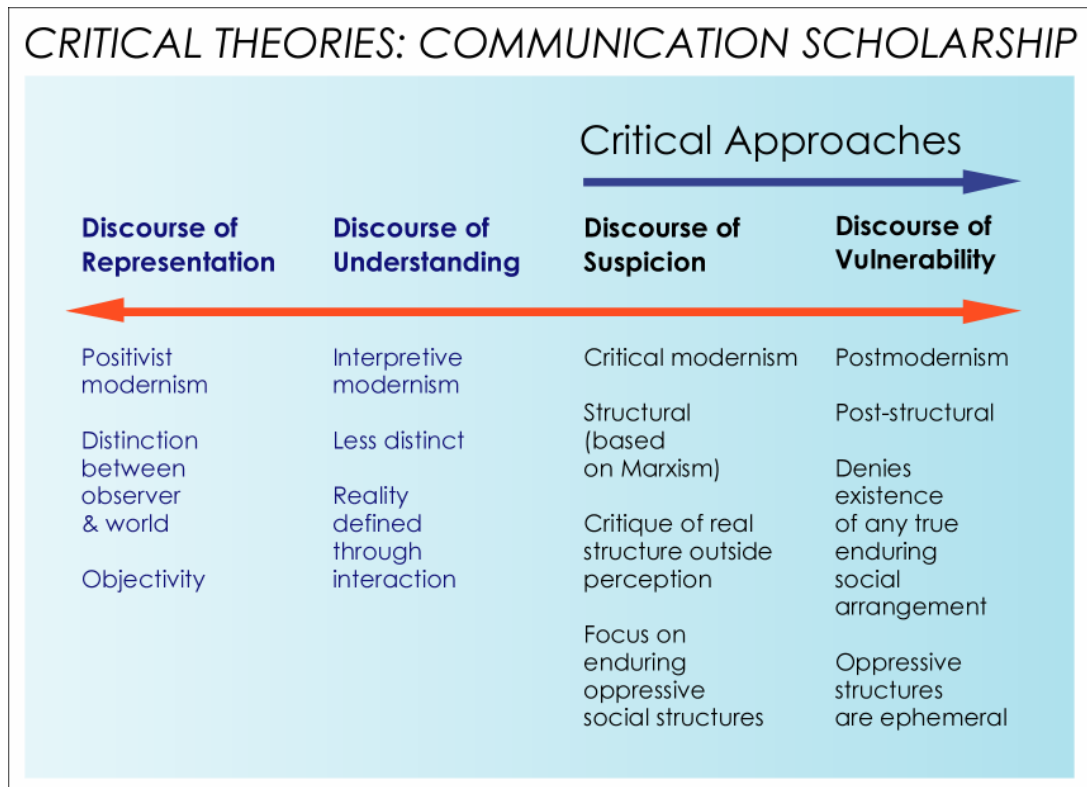
Critical theorists are distinctively reformist. They call for a serious transformation of Western society by specifically revealing existing power structures and the way the dominant forces are using the mass media to perpetuate their domination. Critical theorists see their activist role as instrumental to forcing changes in society by placing issues on the public agenda and getting society involved in public discourse and debate.

Burrell & Morgan's grid (1979) have been contentious and many theorists have offered some alternatives. Deetz (1996), for example, questions the use of the subjective/objective labels used in the grid of Burrell & Morgan, and points out that all research has an element of both. But he further explains that to classify research into one of these, or to make the claim that all research is both subjective and objective, is not his main concern. He questions the dualism itself as well as the underlying ontological assumptions of the so-called interpretivist and positivist worldviews. Deetz prefers to see the differences between research orientations in terms of the extent to which research would, on the one hand work within dominant structures of knowledge, social relations, and identities (consensus discourse), or on the other hand the extent to which they work towards disrupting dominating structures (dissensus discourse).

Figure 1.2 (below) illustrates Littlejohn's (2002) analysis of Mumby's (1997) conceptualisation of the critical theories in communication. Mumby (1997) has conceptualised a typology for the critical approaches and classified communication studies into *modernism* and *postmodernism*. This is not a simple dichotomy but is a continuum. The *discourse of representation* and *discourse of understanding* are modernist approaches, which distinguish between the observer and the objective world. In this sense, critical approaches are the discourses of suspicion and vulnerability, and both critical modernism and postmodernist approaches focus on oppressive structures as well as the opposition of traditional social sciences. The

function of critical approaches is to point to the contradictions that exist in society, and to engage in the discourse about these opposing forces in an effort to change the existing order (Littlejohn, 2002). Only by becoming aware that they are being dominated can individuals free themselves from domination; otherwise, they will become complacent about their own oppression.

Figure 1-2: Critical theories: communication scholarship



Littlejohn's (2002) analysis of Mumby's (1997)

Critical theorists believe that tension, conflict and paradoxes are not negative powers that need to be eliminated; rather that only through the process of debate and discourse can issues be raised that will address domination (Littlejohn, 2002; Deetz, 1996). Diversity and tolerance for all viewpoints and voices are the ideal condition to ensure equal opportunities for all. Since no single ideology should dominate in society, critical theorists also believe that their role is to refute predominant ideologies and allow competing ideologies to be heard. An ideology for critical theorists, according to Littlejohn (2002), is

*a set of ideas that structure a group's reality, as system of representations or a code of meanings governing how individuals and groups see the world (p. 211).*

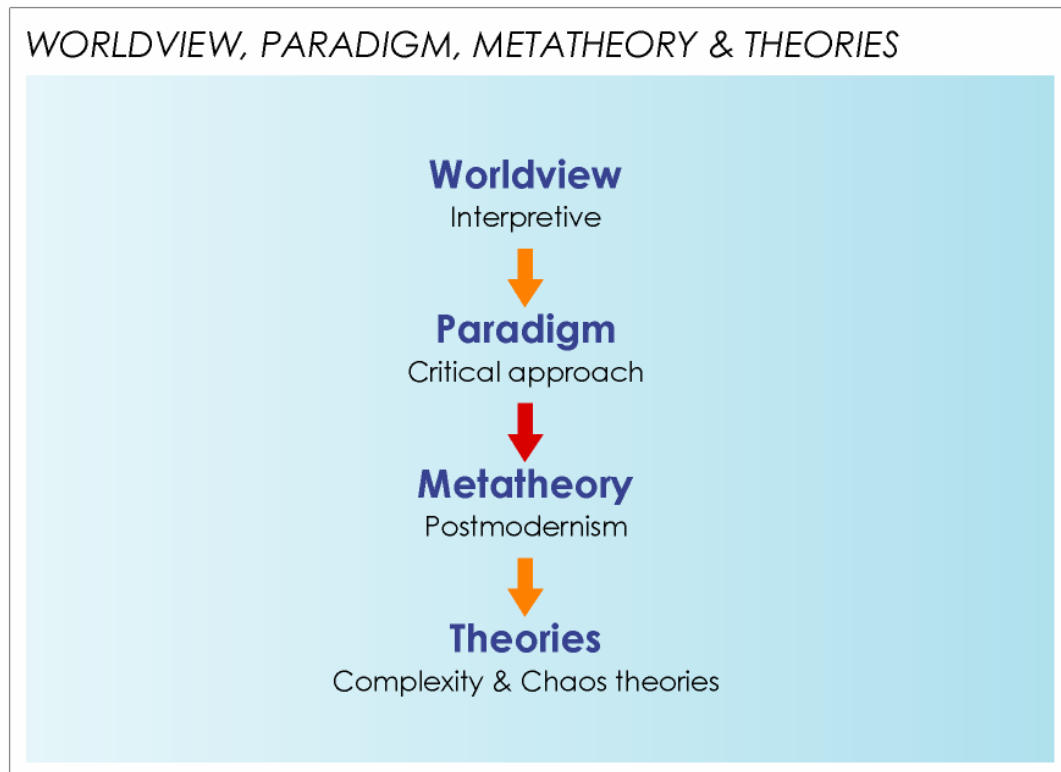
Ideologies form peoples' consciousness through language, culture and social structures. We understand our relationship to reality through our ideologies. Critical theory resists hegemony where one ideology undermines another or where one group dominates all others.

Cilliers (1998, p. 114) calls postmodernism an “incredulity towards meta-narratives”. In simple terms, this means that different groups within society take on different perspectives of reality and truth, each trying to make sense of their environment in order to achieve their goals and to make sense of what they perceive and experience. Since these paradigms or views are created out of each group's unique circumstances, it is impossible to unify these views into one single grand account or description of reality.

From the postmodern stance, complexity is an indicator that “there are more possibilities than can be actualised” (Luhmann, cited in Cilliers, 1998, p. 2). When viewed as subsystems of a complex system, the relationships formed and the creation of information and knowledge through these interactions, form the basis of the complexity approach to change management. Postmodern theorists believe that when the power that spreads throughout systems in society is challenged, transformation will take place inherently (Holtzhausen, 2000). This thesis thus comes from a critical paradigm and metatheoretical perspective of postmodernism, drawing mainly from chaos and complexity theories (more details in Chapter 4), even though the research design follows a very positivistic approach. Different research approaches have different goals and ontological assumptions, and thus require different forms of evaluation (Deetz, 1996). This thesis needed to show a causal relationship between an interpretive, critical, postmodern participative approach to organisational management and change and the resultant relationship outcomes between employees and their employers. This paradoxically thus led to a positivistic, functionalist research design within a radical humanist, postmodern, dialogical metatheoretical approach.



Figure 1-3: Paradigmatic orientation & conceptual position within the field of study



## 1.4 Research statement and objectives

### 1.4.1 Research statement

An experimental study of:

- (1) the connection between the communication management strategy followed during change in organisations and the relationship and behavioural effects on internal stakeholders (employees); and
- (2) the effects of the communication management strategy followed during high change on relationships and behaviours with the internal stakeholders (employees).

### 1.4.2 Research objectives

The main research objective of this study was to ascertain the relational, communication and behavioural outcomes of different communication strategies during change in organisations.

The secondary research objectives were:

(1) To compare the different communication strategies followed in order to establish a causal relationship between:

- (i) the strategy and the relationship between the organisation and its publics; and
- (ii) the strategy and the change effects achieved.

(2) To establish a strategic communication management strategy that builds positive relationships with publics, thus achieving the desired change effects during high change.

### 1.4.3 Research propositions and hypotheses

**Table 1-1: Summary of research propositions that lead to the hypotheses**

<b>High participatory communication and change strategy will lead to:</b>	
P1	= high trust
P2	= high control mutuality
P3	= high commitment
P4	= high satisfaction with the relationship
P5	= positive goal attainment and change behavioural effects
<b>Low participatory planned change and one-way communication strategy will lead to:</b>	
P6	= low trust
P7	= low control mutuality
P8	= low commitment
P9	= low satisfaction with the relationship
P10	= negative goal attainment and change behavioural effects
P11	= High degree of participation during high change in organisations will lead to significantly more positive relationship between an organisation and its publics than with lower degrees of participation and a planned approach
P12	= High degree of participation during high change in organisations will be significantly more effective in terms of the desired behavioural transformational effects achieved than in low participation scenarios.

## 1.5 Research design and methodology

The research design was executed in two broad phases, namely the exploratory phase (literature and qualitative phase) and the descriptive-empirical phase. The research methodology is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

### 1.5.1 Exploratory phase

A literature review provided background information on all related theories and data relevant to the study in question. The exploratory phase of the project involved qualitative testing of the constructs used in the questionnaire, and the qualitative and quantitative pre-testing of the questionnaire. The information obtained from this phase was used to construct the final questionnaire.

### 1.5.2 Descriptive empirical phase

After completion of the exploratory phase, the descriptive empirical phase of the research followed which involved the sampling frame of the research and physical data collection.

#### 1.5.2.1 Measures

A randomised block design was used with projective scenarios involving a mixed, two-factor experiment with repeated measure variables. Data collection was conducted in 9 different organisations, representing different fields of enterprises and state organisations. The independent randomised block variables on the change strategy were operationalised by 2 scenarios:

- (1) **Scenario A:** a planned, low participatory approach using existing literature on communication and change management; and
- (2) **Scenario B:** a flexible, high participatory approach using chaos and complexity theories.

The two scenarios of change were treated as fixed variables in the organisations selected (refer to Table 1.3). This also ensured that the independent variable did not rely merely on a single stimulus, thus minimising experimental error (McGuigan, 1990, p. 232).

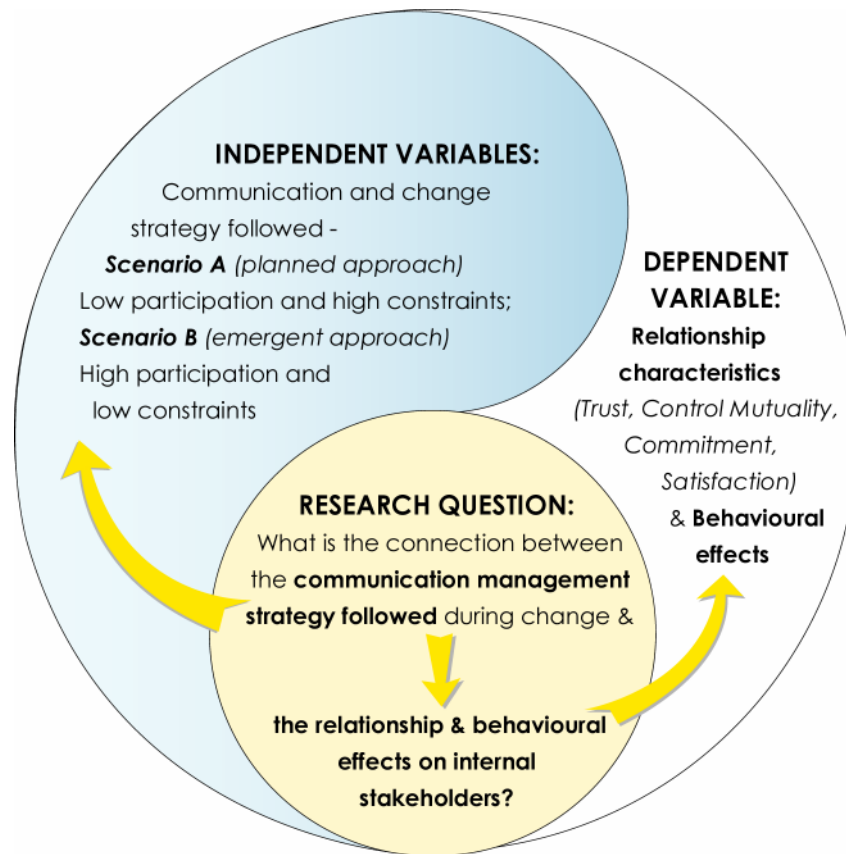
The randomised block variable of the communication strategy followed was based on a situational theory of Grunig (1997), and on other literature on change approaches and the resulting effects. This variable was treated as a repeated measure where respondents received the 2 projected scenarios. The dependent

variable measure consisted of a battery of statements operationalised through selected existing literature on relationships with publics and behavioural and change effects.

The independent variables in this study, which were the two change scenarios, were pre-tested both qualitatively and quantitatively for manipulation success. The use of focus groups and manipulation check were used to test the wording of the scenarios of the independent variables in order to ensure that these variables actually operated in the study.

The dependent variables were measured using an itemised questionnaire, where two change and participation scenarios were given to the respondents before they completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire used the relationship scale distributed by The Institute of Public Relations (Hon & Grunig, 1999) as basis for measuring relationships internally, as well as relationships with external stakeholders. The measuring instrument consisted of 21 items measuring **trust** (six items), **control mutuality** (five items), **commitment** (five items), and **satisfaction** (five items). Seven manipulation check items were used after each relationship measure of a scenario to ascertain the effectiveness of the explanations of each scenario. This was followed by some classification questions, of which some were used as control measures for extraneous variables.

Figure 1-4: Research questions, constructs and measures



#### 1.5.2.2 Data collection

Nine organisations were used from different industries and sectors, and the experimental subjects consisted of 10 to 37 employees from each organisation. Because of the experimental design being used no sampling methods were necessary; that is, the subjects available were used instead, keeping in mind a responsible distribution of respondents. Each employee evaluated the two different scenarios, which resulted in, more or less, 372 evaluations in total (some questionnaires were not fully completed). The questionnaires were distributed evenly between levels from upper management to non-managerial levels in each organisation. The scenarios were concerned with changes in general and about various issues.

#### 1.5.2.3 Data processing

Questionnaires were distributed to the employees of the organisations involved. Available employees completed the measuring instrument and they were returned,

recorded, coded, and data analysis was conducted to ensure reliability and validity of the methodology and the data

The data was captured using Microsoft Excel, and this data file was exported to a statistical software package (Statistica) for analysis. ANOVA, MANOVA, correlations and cross-tabulations were performed on the data.

#### *1.5.2.4 Data analysis and statistical analysis*

Reliable and valid scientifically acceptable methods were used in this study. The most important of these methods are as follows:

### **1.5.3 Reliability analysis**

Reliability refers to consistency and the extent to which the same results would be obtained if the measure was repeated. This has to do with the accuracy and precision at which the measurement procedure is performed (Cooper & Schindler, 1998, p. 148).

Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to establish the internal consistency of the measurement instrument. Cronbach's Alpha is best suited to a multi-item scale with the interval level of measurement such as was used in this questionnaire (Cooper & Schindler, 1998, p. 173). The reliability analysis was used in this case to indicate whether the questionnaire was reliable to test relationships between the employees and the organisations in the scenarios.

### **1.5.4 Analysis of construct validity**

Cooper & Schindler (1998, p. 149) describe validity as the extent to which differences found in the research reflect true differences among respondents. The extent to which a measurement instrument actually measures what it sets out to measure determines the internal validity of the instrument.

A principal component factor analysis was performed on the results obtained in this study in order to determine to what extent the instrument measured what it was intended to measure. A satisfactory factor solution would imply a high possibility that the instrument was measuring what it set out to measure.

### **1.5.5 ANOVA and MANOVA**

ANOVA is useful for studies involving two or more groups in determining whether there are significant differences between two or more means at a selected probability level (Gay & Diehl, 1992). MANOVA is an extension of ANOVA. It is used when a study involves more than one dependent variable and one or more independent variables. These techniques were used to determine if significant differences existed between variables, and for hypotheses testing purposes.

### **1.6 Advantages and limitations**

The importance of this study for public relations lies in the fact that practitioners are more likely to play a managerial and strategic role in an organisation during times of instability. When the organisation is threatened by environmental changes, such as a crisis or competition as a result of information technology development or increased customer demands on service and product innovation, the need for communication increases (Grunig, 1992, p. 344). The role of the public relations or communication manager as part of top management and strategic decision-making is becoming increasingly important as organisations are redesigning to become more open and their structures more horizontal in order to adjust to fast changing environments in the Communication Age (Gouillart & Kelly, 1995). Successful organisations use the potential of communication management to assist in transformation and the relationships with the environment (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 126).

This study departs from other studies in this field because it concentrates specifically on the communication strategies during change within the framework of chaos and complexity theories. Previous studies have either ignored the importance of strategic communication as a contribution to successful change, or communication was only seen as a tool in changing culture, which is one of the many stages of transformation (Gouillart & Kelly, 1995).

This study does not focus on management functions other than communication management because the study intends to research specifically the contribution of communication management and public relations to change

management in organisations. At the same time, it does not intend to deny the importance of other management functions in change management. Chaos theory, complexity theory and other postmodern approaches to social sciences and administrative management are applied, and the epistemological, ontological and methodological approach to this study is within this framework.

The findings in this study could contribute to the body of knowledge in public relations and change management in stressing the importance of scenario planning and participation. Furthermore, the study supports the use of a model for transformation communication, which allows communication to become part of an organisation's overall strategic process. Communication consultants have here a different approach of how communication should contribute to transformation, and how it connects to an emerging business strategy of the organisation. There are also some guidelines for communication management teachers for addressing the direction and motivation of strategic transformation management, and the role of public relations within the chaos management paradigm.

This study makes a further contribution in the methodology used for change management and public relations. There is little evidence of the use of experimental design for change management and less so on the influence of communication management as a facilitator in the process of change. The use of experimental design is not a common strategy in basic public relations research, and should provide interesting possibilities for future research.

## **1.7 Chapter index**

This study consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 is a general introduction explaining the basic background and problem statement leading up to the research question and objectives, conceptualisation and methodology followed in this study.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on strategic management and transformation, as well as the different approaches to change in organisations. Chapter 4 examines the theoretical concepts of postmodernism, chaos and complexity theories with reference to change. Chapter 5 explores relationship management and communication management with specific references to the previous two chapters.



Chapter 6 discusses the motivation for the research design as well as a systematic and comprehensive explanation of the procedures followed. Chapter 7 presents the data analyses performed and the results. Chapter 8 concludes with interpretations of the results and recommendations for further research.

## **1.8 Frameworks**

Figure 1-5: Outlines of thesis chapters

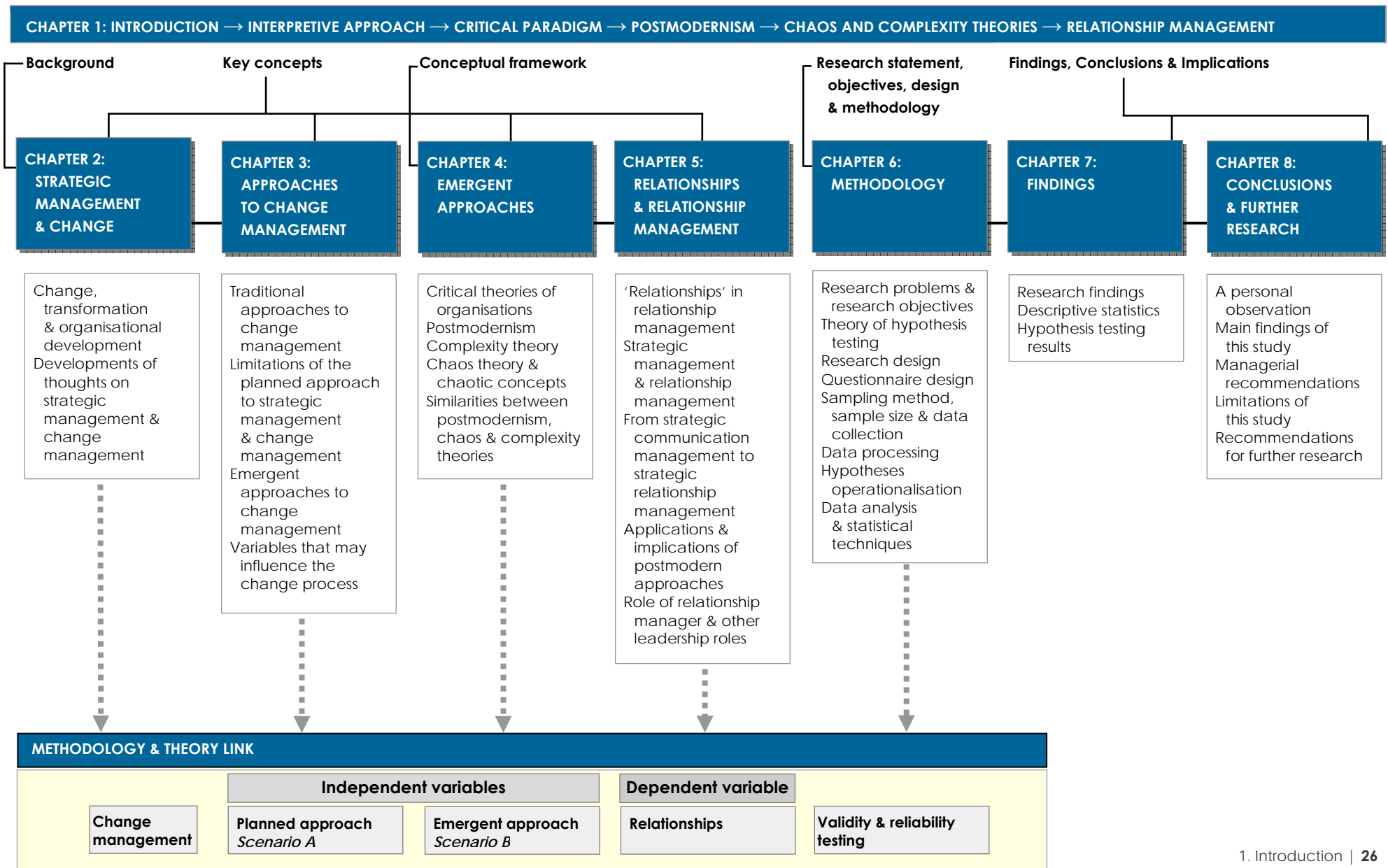


Figure 1-6: Themes across chapters

