CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters have provided considerable information into understanding what corporate communication is and how it has been measured in the past. As seen in Chapter 2, literature claims that corporate communication does have a strategic role to play in an organisational context, and identifies numerous functions and roles that corporate communication should fulfil. Of concern is that corporate communication, practised in industry, does not necessarily mirror literature, and battles to maintain its worth. The explanation for this is provided by numerous academics, claiming that corporate communication, as a function, should be accountable and illustrate its worth, by measuring its performance.

Consequently, Chapter 3 provided ample literature on how to measure corporate communication activities. The chapter clearly demonstrated that most academics have approached the measurement of communication from an evaluation perspective, and that these evaluation models and measurement techniques are adequately comprehensive. However, very little literature indicated how to practically tie the results from these evaluation models back into the quantitative, positivistic organisational performance measurement model, and in so doing, 'make known' corporate communication's value and contribution. Literature that did provide this sort of perspective was not able to capture the intangible value that corporate communication provides to the organisation as a whole. It appears that literature, on corporate communication measurement, tends to view the function as a silo and not as a part of a synergistic whole.

Chapter 4 continued by investigating the possibility of incorporating intangible assets into currently used organisational performance measurement models. These models were then examined and it was concluded that despite these models' ability to measure intangible assets, the identification of communication, its role, significance and purpose as part of the organisation's intangible assets, was deficient.

This gap in literature has strategic implications. From Chapter 1, a conclusion was derived that corporate communication (as a function of the organisation), forms part of the ship's rudder (strategy). In addition, the organisation's performance measurement model / system should measure and monitor this strategy on a continual basis. As determined in the following chapters, simply measuring what and how many activities corporate communication endeavours into will not truly reflect its contributions. The true results of corporate communication's intangible value will only be seen in the organisation's *ability* to communicate as a whole. The necessity to explore how this is being done in practice will provide the insight to determine how communication is best measured practically. It will also offer knowledge into understanding how to accomplish communication measurement with KPIs.

This chapter describes the selection and implications of the research method used to approach industry, in exploring and understanding the possibility of adapting performance measurement models, to capture the intangible nature of corporate communication. In this exploration, the focus of this study has been to produce depth as opposed to breadth, where future studies may test the generality of the concept.

5.2   RESEARCH STRATEGY

Research is the process in which scientific methods are used to expand knowledge in a particular field of study (Welman & Kruger, 2002:2). Sandin and Simolin (2006:2) distinguish between three types of research: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Exploratory research is applied when a problem is complex and little knowledge exists to address that area of study. It is typically seen in a pilot study, where the purpose is to collect as much information as possible about a specific subject. This will then generate a basis of understanding for further studies to formulate and test (Patton, 2001:227).

5.2.1   <u>An exploratory study</u>

This study is exploratory in nature, investigating the possibility of developing KPIs for corporate communication, designed to capture intangible contributions quantitatively, and have the ability to slot these KPIs into an organisational performance measurement model. Babbie and Mouton (2002:80) explain that exploratory studies attempt to better understand

a phenomenon and provide a platform for future research. This study's purpose is, firstly, to provide a better understanding of how to measure corporate communication intangibly within an organisational context, and secondly, that the results of this study may hopefully facilitate future research, that can expand on its findings. Babbie and Mouton (2002:80) elaborate that exploratory studies typically review relevant literature and then turn to research, to obtain additional information. The research requires people, who have practical experience of the concept, to be contacted, to search for this value. This study has reviewed literature relating to corporate communication and the measurement thereof, organisational performance measurement models, and KPIs. People with relevant knowledge and experience were then approached to gain a practical understanding of the concepts.

5.2.2 <u>A qualitative inquiry</u>

This study pursued a qualitative inquiry, due to the depth of information required for exploration purposes. This was accomplished by conducting in-depth personal interviews, where the actual meaning of the information obtained, was more valuable than being able to generalise it (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:18). Embracing an interpretive worldview, as opposed to a realist worldview, this study explored the way that people make sense of their social worlds, as well as the way in which they express these understandings (Davmon & Holloway, 2002:5). This was accomplished by identifying how communication practitioners demonstrate their worth in positivistically dominated measurement environments. This required a degree of phenomenology, where Welman and Kruger (2002:181-182) explain that phenomenologists attempt to experience phenomena as the people involved experience them. The length of the interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to attempt to understand how these respondents experienced their environments. Rather than subjecting and limiting respondents to a positivistic approach to inquiry, in the form of a quantitative survey, this study wished to preserve and analyse the situation and content, and experience the social action that practitioners go through on a daily basis, by conducting in-depth interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:18). The qualitative inquiry allowed respondents to speak freely about their experiences and helped identify how performance measurement in general, could be adjusted in the future to facilitate their daily efforts as communicators.

For the above reasons this study chose words over numbers; researcher involvement over mere observation; in-depth understanding over generalisations; and a small-scale study over population representation (Merrigan & Huston, 2004:5-6). Babbie and Mouton (2002:80) explain that a study following a qualitative inquiry will be open and flexible. The design strategy for this study followed an *emergent design*, where the study was open to adapting the instrument of inquiry as understanding deepened and / or situations changed (Patton, 2001:40). The emergent design will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design created for this study was based on two components. The first was an exploratory literary review, designed to gain an understanding of the concepts, incorporated in this study. This was conducted in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The second element consisted of the exploratory qualitative inquiry, approaching experts in industry to gain insight into the way corporate communication is practised and measured in organisations. The categorisation discussed in the subsequent section is adapted from Cooper and Schindler (2003:12-15,146-151) as well as Welman and Kruger (2002:83-94).

5.3.1   Contributing to the body of knowledge with basic research

Research in business is typically conducted to respond to a problem that has been identified by management. This is known as applied research and pure / basic research (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:12-13). Despite the fact that both these categories relate to solving problems, applied research is directed at making immediate managerial decisions, where pure or basic research builds knowledge.

According to Patton (2001:217), applied research may study problems or issues in an attempt to address or solve them. As identified in Chapter 1, there is a work related problem, associated with communication practitioners, who do not measure their performance. Notwithstanding the fact that this study does attempt to address and solve this business problem, it mainly resides as basic research, because it is focused on exploration and the ability to contribute towards the body of knowledge (Patton, 2001:215).

5.3.2   Pursuing an *ex post facto* design

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it does not contain hypotheses and does not attempt to manipulate and control any variables (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:148). The findings of this study attempt to direct future research to test quantitatively, the results of this study. Consequently, the *ex post facto* design is applied.

5.3.3   Defining the research environment of the study

A characteristic of phenomenological inquiry is that research is conducted in the respondent's natural settings (Davmon & Holloway, 2002:5-6). As a result, the interviews of this study were conducted in the respondents' environments (i.e., such as their offices) for the following reasons:

- Firstly, to make the respondent feel more comfortable and open to relating to the interviewer;
- Secondly, to enable the researcher to gain additional insight into the respondent's environment (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:121); and,
- Thirdly, for practical and logistical purposes, it made it more convenient for the respondents to avoid spending additional time, travelling to the interview location.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002:82) indicate that *time* can become a limiting factor, in the intensity of information gathered, during an in-depth interview. By minimising the travelling time, more time could be spent on creating rapport with the respondent and gathering detailed information.

5.3.4   Defining the time dimension of the study

Babbie and Mouton (2002:93) explain that exploratory research typically follows a cross-sectional approach, where information is gathered on one occasion and not over an extended period. Typically, longitudinal studies attempt to make comparisons from the information collected over a lengthy period. This study can be termed 'cross-sectional', because it did not follow the longitudinal approach.

5.4   SAMPLING DESIGN

In a qualitative inquiry, the sampling strategy is not based on procedures of random probability, where every element of the population has an equally and independent chance of being selected (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:122). As a result, qualitative research cannot legitimately be extrapolated to the population, from which they were drawn. Patton (2001:230) explains that *purposeful sampling* centrals around the importance of purposing the inquiry. In other words, researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity, and / or previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis, which will add value to their study and represent the target population (Welman & Kruger, 2002:63). This study's target population was purposed, after investigating the literature, as well as identifying the people who would afford value to the concepts of this study.

5.4.1   <u>Defining the target population of the study</u>

Lindlof and Taylor (2002:121) explain that qualitative interview-based studies recruit persons, based on their value. This is because they have had experience, or possess knowledge and / or expertise, that are important to the research problem (Welman & Kruger, 2002:188-191). The ideal target population for this study would include individuals that contain experience, knowledge and / or expertise of all three underlying constructs namely, corporate communication, performance measurement, and KPIs. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:179) note that these people often share the same activity, status or attribute. In this study's case, it can be argued that there are very few eligible people in South Africa (especially in the IT industry), who meet the requirements of this target population, simply because the rationale of this is study is conceptual. It is estimated that the target population confirming to these requirements, status or attributes, consists of less than 30 individuals, because there are very few people with corporate communication, performance measurement and KPI knowledge.

The limited target population resulted in an extensive literature review, which attempted to generate sufficient information, where limited industry knowledge was available. For this reason, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are lengthy chapters that attempt to address each construct comprehensively. Additionally, interviews that were done with suitable respondents were extensive and lengthy, in an attempt to draw as much information as possible. Lastly, the target population was grouped into subsections, to represent each of the constructs of the

study. For this reason, the target population of this study centres around corporate communication practitioners, corporate communication consultants, and finally members of management, who are required to implement and manage performance measurement models, and had KPI knowledge.

- The first subpopulation comprising corporate communication practitioners mainly resided in corporate communication departments of organisations. For the purposes of this study, these respondents were required to have senior positions within their communication department (either as managers or executives), to shed light on the strategic influence of corporate communication within their organisation. Initially (due to the topic of this study) only IT organisations were approached. However, the shortage of communication practitioners residing in these organisations opened this subgroup to communication practitioners from organisations in various industries. As a result, four communication practitioners were interviewed from the communication departments of IT organisations, and an additional four were interviewed from organisations in other industries.

- The second subpopulation contained corporate communication consultants. These respondents were approached for their rich experience in providing and measuring various communication services, to numerous organisations. These consultants' clients, varied in industry and size, and often included IT organisations. Their communication services also varied from corporate communication strategies, to campaigns, to media placements and publicity, and lastly, communication research. There were five respondents in this category, who had gained substantial experience in working with organisations that employed performance measurement models and KPIs. These consultancies were in a position to share knowledge about the way they were measured as well as how these organisations measured communication efforts internally.

- The last subpopulation included respondents with performance measurement system and / or KPI experience, knowledge and / or expertise. These respondents were related in their positions representing executives, business managers, or HR managers. Although the majority of the respondents in the previous subgroups had experience and

knowledge regarding KPIs, these respondents were responsible for creating and implementing KPIs. There were two respondents in this category.

5.4.2 Identifying the sampling methods

In qualitative research, there are numerous sampling methods that may be employed simultaneously (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:124). Consequently, it is acceptable to implement a combination of methods, especially when following an emergent research design (Welman & Kruger, 2002:191). An amalgamation of the sampling methods incorporated in this study, included homogeneous sampling, opportunistic / emergent sampling, snowball sampling, maximum variation sampling, and intensity sampling.

Initially this study made use of *homogeneous samples* of people who worked in, or consulted to, IT organisations as corporate communication practitioners (Patton, 2001:235). The motivation behind using this approach was to obtain in-depth information into the daily activities of corporate communication practitioners in IT organisations, as well as the way performance measurement was conducted. This sampling method was successful in providing for four of the fifteen respondents. Having not gathered enough information to continue with data analysis, an *opportunistic / emergent sampling* method was followed to identify new leads, during the actual fieldwork. Patton (2001:244) explains that this approach takes advantage of the 'unexpected' and allows for a degree of flexibility. This sampling method led to the *snowball sampling* method, otherwise known as chain sampling (Patton, 2001:237).

Snowball sampling acquires respondents from referrals made by already sampled respondents, who are acquainted with individuals who posses the same characteristics, that are of research interest (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:124). Patton (2001:237) explains that this method proves beneficial in gaining contact to near inaccessible respondents. This proved true, as far as this study was concerned, because referrals from certain respondents persuaded other very busy, time-strapped practitioners to be interviewed. These respondents would not have agreed to participate, if they had directly been approached by the researcher. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:124) explain that these referrals can continue over a series of cycles, where one respondent refers another, and that

respondent refers another *etcetera*. Patton (2001:23), however, warns that following this approach could lead to stale information, as respondents from the same circles of acquaintances are continuously interviewed.

In this study, snowball sampling occurred twice. In the one case, a respondent referred one additional prospect, who then agreed to participate, and was interviewed. In the second case, a respondent referred eight additional leads of which only three agreed to be interviewed. From this latter circle, an additional respondent was referred (forming the second cycle). As only five of the fifteen respondents emerged from the snowball sampling method, a conclusion could be drawn that the respondents were not generic enough to result in stale information, because they represented a variety of subpopulations of the specific target group.

By embracing the opportunistic / emergent and snowball sampling methods, the sample became increasingly heterogeneous with regards to organisational industry focus. Patton (2001:235) explains that *maximum variation sampling* captures and describes central themes that cut across a great deal of variation. In this study's case, respondents were interviewed from a variety of industries, and provided insight into determining whether corporate communication had the same function in all these industries, as well as whether they were measured similarly. According to Patton (2001:235), if any common patterns emerge in the data analysis from this sampling method, these should be of particular interest and value to the research. Patton (2001:235) further elaborates that a small diverse sample (as in the case of this study), typically yields two types of findings. The first is the high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which is useful for documenting uniqueness. The second is important shared / similar patterns that cut across the different cases, and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:123). For this reason, detailed descriptions of specific cases, such as an executive's perspective, on the role and measurement of corporate communication, in the function of investor relations, provides indispensable depth to the study. Additionally, comparable patterns that emerged in this study's data analysis, may suggest that the results of this study, can be transferred to organisations and corporate communication departments in diverse industries and organisational size.

Despite the numerous sampling methods embraced in this study, the dominant sampling method that was threaded throughout the entire sampling process was *intensity sampling*. According to Patton (2001:234), this technique selects cases that are information rich, because they are intensely valuable in the manifestation of the phenomenon of interest. In this study, respondents were only interviewed if they were intensely experienced or knowledgeable about the constructs of this study. An example from this study's sampling pool is a respondent who have had extensive experience in conducting a communication strategy and campaign, in a large multinational corporation. The communication effort took years to implement, but eventually delivered incredible results to the overall performance of the organisation. The respondent was in a position, to relay the difficulties of implementing a communication effort of this size, in an organisation that had previously not valued communication at all. The respondent was able to recall how accountability had to be proved, by measuring communication results, and feeding the results back into the organisation's performance measurement model. Through following intensity sampling, all the respondents interviewed for this study had rich information and insight that they could provide to this study.

Furthermore, the above sampling methods proved valuable, in providing respondents, who had insight into the measurement of the array of corporate communication functions. Chapter 2 extensively clarified that corporate communication is expected to cover a variety of responsibilities and stakeholder groups in the assortment of communication functions. The respondents interviewed in this study represented these communication functions, and were able to contribute important information about the daily activities and measurements for each of these functions.

5.4.3   Specifying the sample size of the study

Patton (2001:244) explains that no rules exist for determining sample sizes in qualitative inquiry. The sample size is dependant on what the researcher wishes to know; the purpose of the inquiry; the usefulness of the information; the credibility of the information; and what is possible with the available time and resources (Patton, 2001:245). Lindlof and Taylor (2002:129) further clarify that qualitative studies typically do not consider the sample size, until much later in the course of the study, where respondents are sampled until a critical threshold of interpretive competence has been reached. An example of this

nature occurred in the study, when respondents were no longer revealing previously unspecified daily activities of corporate communication practitioners, nor were they disclosing ways of measuring communication any longer. In addition, Lindlof and Taylor (2002:129) explicate that disconfirmation, is another indication of when the threshold is reached. Fortunately, despite the variety of subjects interviewed in the sample of this study, the explanations did not reach a disproportionate, disconfirming stage.

The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from a qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness than the sample size (Patton, 2001:244). Considering that the ideal target population was considerably small, this study conducted 15 in-depth personal interviews averaging around two hours each. The extensive sources, consulates in the literature review, and the length of the interviews conducted in the research, provided the breadth and depth, needed for this study. The phenomenon, under study, was sufficiently covered in the lengthy interviews, which did not require a larger sample size. Incorporating *thick description* (discussed later in this chapter), accounted for the above-mentioned depth.

5.5   DATA COLLECTION

The data collection method used in this study was *in-depth personal interviews.* In-depth personal interviews are a commonly employed method of data collection for qualitative research, and are known by several names including unstructured / semi-structured interviews, intensive interviews, collaborative interviews, and face-to-face interviews (Babbie & Mouton, 2002:249; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:4). According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:325) it is a two-way conversation, initiated by an interviewer, to obtain information from a participant. This method encourages participants to share as much information as possible in an unconstrained environment, and resembles a form of conversation that systematically explores topics of interest (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:4). The researcher provides guidelines by using a set of questions, to promote discussion and elaboration by the participant (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:362). The questions asked may be *structured* (consisting of predetermined choices, called close-ended questions) or *unstructured* (where responses are not limited to choices, called open-ended questions) (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:178). To achieve detailed information, this study incorporated open-ended questions, and encouraged participants through probing.

Furthermore, the interviews in this study were recorded, by tape recorder, for accuracy purposes. The information, therefore, did not rely on the memory of the researcher. An additional reason for employing this recording method was to enable the interviewer to be in a position to participate appropriately during the entire interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:187). There are a few disadvantages, to using the tape recorder. These are mainly attributed to the uncomfortable and compromised behaviour, which the respondent might adopt, when informed of the recording. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:187). These disadvantages can be overcome, by creating rapport with the respondent (Patton, 2001:14).

5.5.1 Motivating the use of personal interviews as a data collection method

The purpose of conducting these interviews was to understand the respondents' perspectives, on the subjects of corporate communication activities, within an organisation, the measurement thereof, and the development of KPIs for communication. Where respondents were knowledgeable on these topics, the personal interviews were able to retrieve the respondents' experiences from the past, to gain expert insight or information that would not have been attainable through observation alone. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:4). Known as *empathetic interaction* (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:4), the researcher in this study fostered trust and understanding with the respondents, who then felt at ease to disclose experiences they have had in being measured.

Considering the characteristics of the target population, the best and appropriate means of obtaining information from the respondents, was in-depth, personal interview. Cooper and Schindler (2003:326) comment that the depth of information and detail gained from this data collection method is far greater than other forms of questioning, especially when limited for time.

5.5.2 Considering the researcher of the study

Only one interviewer was employed to conduct all interviews, due to the intended, required, depth, therefore the author of this study, assumed said role. Babbie and Mouton (2002:273) explain that qualitative inquiries rely heavily on the researcher. They become the important instrument in the research process, that 'gets close to the subject', to gain insight into the respondent's perceptions. Moreover, the interviewer must be disciplined in

knowing when to watch, listen, go with the action, reflect or intervene tactfully (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:66).

A second reason for utilising one interviewer only, was to assert control over the sampling process. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:126) clarify that this is especially important, in order to manage the snowball sampling process; as it has been known to decrease the quality of the respondents produced. By ensuring that one researcher approved every respondent, the snowball sampling method was managed successfully, and the respondent pool was kept dynamic.

The last reason for persevering with single interviewer status, was attributed to the fact that the questionnaire remained unstructured. This study therefore relied heavily on the interviewer to probe and uncover detailed information. By maintaining one interviewer, the information obtained in terms of depth, became consistent in purpose, especially as the researcher was knowledgeable about how to direct the questions, which would elicit the additional information needed. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:193) also elucidate that *active listening* becomes easier for a researcher who is familiar with previous interviews, and is able to adjust and probe aspects with greater ease.

5.5.3   <u>Examining the interview protocol of the study</u>

As previously mentioned, this study made use of an unstructured questionnaire design. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:195) expound that the format of an unstructured questionnaire normally appears as an *interview guide,* which follows an informal and flexible approach. The interview guide clusters topics and questions in different ways for different respondents, depending on how the conversation evolves during the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:195). Patton (2001:349) stipulates these topics and issues should be specified as an outline, in advance, and furthermore, the interview guide should not dictate how and when questions should be asked.

In this study, the interview guide consisted of three major themes, including questions related to the organisational performance measurement model; the corporate communication activities and means of measurement; as well as KPIs. The questions

within these themes were expected to evolve, as the respondents' answers unfolded with the conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:172). This method was adopted, because respondents varied in their experiences and areas of specialities. In addition, Patton (2001:349) motivates that this approach increases the comprehensiveness of the data, and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent. Patton (2001:350) does, on the other hand, warn that this could lead to different responses from different perspectives, thus reducing the comparability of the responses. In this study, however, the three major themes were reinforced, throughout all the interviews (including those with the subpopulations), allowing similarity to be underpinned in the structure of the interviews. The frame for the interview guide is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: The framework for the interview guide of the study

Theme 1:
Corporate Communication
This theme focused on understanding the corporate communication situation in these organisations. Aspects such as the presence of corporate communication departments, and whether these departments were represented on a strategic, managerial and technical level, were considered. The size and structure of the department, as well as the roles and functions of these departments were investigated. The daily activities conducted by the departments and the practitioners were explored, as well as whether these activities were linked to the strategic goals of the organisation. The corporate communication's intangible value and the role of building and maintaining stakeholder relations were examined, as well as the organisation's ability to communicate.
Theme 2:
Performance Measurement
The second theme related to the way performance was measured on an organisational level, communication departmental level, and individual level. The organisation's approach to research, as well as the organisational performance measurement models, was investigated. Focus was placed on understanding how each of the performance measurement models or systems operated practically, and whether they followed a positivistic process of enquiry. The representation of corporate communication was particularly important, as well as any models or techniques used to measure communication. A major focus, was determining if corporate communication was being measured appropriately.
Theme 3:
Key Performance Indicators
Respondents' familiarity with KPIs was established, especially concerning corporate communication. Where KPIs were known, aspects such as the structure, composition, and link to performance measurement system, were examined. In so doing, understanding into whether KPIs represented quantitative or qualitative aspects, was gathered. Additionally, where applicable, practical examples of communication KPIs were obtained, for all the levels of the organisation.

The above explanation is typical of the *emergent design*, which entails that the entire approach to inquiry is adapted throughout the research process, even to the point of the questionnaire. According to Welman and Kruger (2002:181-192) this happens, because data collecting procedures benefit from data, which has only just emerged during the research process itself. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:172) warn that for various reasons, respondents might not report information accurately. They might inflate their role or minimise it, tell stories from other people's perspectives, ignore or forget certain factors or even chose to lie about certain things. This motivated the incorporation of the emergent design, allowing the interviewer to establish rapport and question the respondent according to the respondent's development. Welman and Kruger (2002:188) refer to this as *spontaneous development*.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002:188-189) mention that it is the researcher's responsibility to put respondents at ease, as early as possible. In this study, rapport was accomplished by initiating 'easy-to-answer' questions (Patton, 2001:351). The questionnaire, therefore, initiated with demographical questions, and continued with difficult questions, as the respondents became more comfortable. In addition, affinity was created at the start of the interview, by assuring the respondent that there were no right or wrong answers. This is typical of a *non-directive questionnaire format,* which avoids pushing the respondent into a direction, that they think the interviewer wishes to hear (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:196; Welman & Kruger, 2002:187-188). Another technique integrated, for rapport and probing purposes, was the inclusion of sections, where the interviewer entered into *self-disclosure,* questions to encourage the respondent to reveal personal experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:190). The reactionary chain was facilitated with open-ended questions, which allowed respondents the opportunity to provide their own answers to the questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2002:233). Patton (2001:351) explicates that respondents frequently have aspects / information they might wish to elaborate on or question, and very often, these specific areas, yield rich information. This motivated the study, to incorporate a final or closing question, at the end of the questionnaire, which provided enough time for the respondents, to add anything that they had not mentioned during the interview.

5.6   DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis phase of research attempts to manage data, reduce it and develop it conceptually. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:211) clarify that there are three major stages, which include the data management, data reduction, and conceptual development phase. During data management, tools are used to categorise, sort or retrieve data. Data reduction then prioritises the 'use-value' of the data, according to emerging schemes of interpretation. The conceptual development grows from an early stage in the project and ultimately shapes the data. The following section discusses the process followed to manage, reduce and conceptualise the data obtained during the interviews.

5.6.1   <u>The data analysis process of the study</u>

An *inductive analysis and creative synthesis* provided the framework for analysis in this study. According to Patton (2002:41), the researcher becomes immersed in the details and specifics of the data, to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships. The process begins with the researcher, exploring and then confirming themes, being guided by analytical principles rather than rules, ending up with a creative synthesis (Patton, 2002:42).

Strictly speaking, data analysis initiates with the categorisation by means of a thematic content analysis, however, in order to engage in a critical analysis and to propose instructive communication, extensive data reduction processes had to be followed. This data reduction process is schematically represented in Figure 5.1 and initiates with the first phase of documenting the raw data. This data was acquired from the audio tapes that contained the recorded interviews. These interviews were then precisely transcribed (word-for-word) from audio format into readable Microsoft Office Word documents.

The next phase entailed re-writing each interview into the third person, at which the transcriptions were approximately 20 pages in length. This increased the data's manageability and readability, and contributed towards reducing the data. This process was selected, since the managed data, could still directly be correlated to the raw data, to prove credibility and dependability.

Figure 5.1: The data preparation process of the study
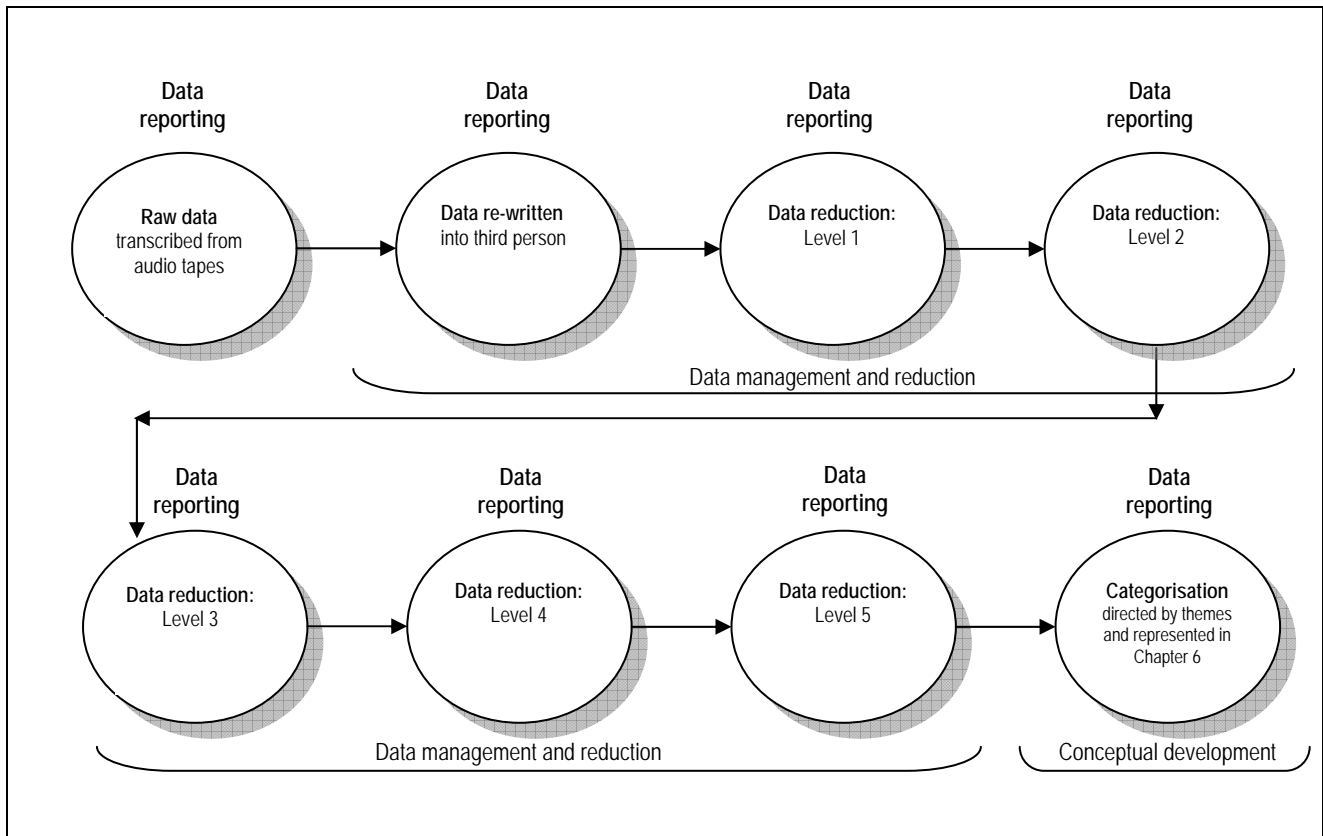
Subsequently a series of data reduction activities followed, while entering what Lindlof and Taylor (2002:214) refer to as the *process of categorisation*. This was done by means of a thematic content analysis, where a unit of data of any length, otherwise known as a 'chunk', is identified as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some general phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2002:272). In this study, the three main themes were derived from the literature review represented in Chapter 2, 3 and 4. Additional themes / categories were induced from the data collected (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:215). During this phase, themes and sub-themes were identified by re-reading the third person data, as numerously as required. In this study's case, this review / re-reading process occurred several times, as depicted in Figure 5.1, before the data was in a format that could be categorised. These themes were then reviewed and verified, by the supervisor of this study, to confirm credibility and dependability. The data was conceptualised, during this stage, by consolidating the relevant sections of the interviews, into one document, below the relevant theme. Data that did not provide relevance to any theme was excluded. Additionally, data was not considered mutually exclusive, and could have been represented in two or more themes, depending on its relevance (Babbie & Mouton, 2002:272).

The last phase synthesised the data by summarising and condensing the data into an academic report. Once again, this process was lengthy, where the synthesised data were reviewed several times, to ensure that the meaning of the data was unaltered. This summary can be considered a credible representation of the data, because the researcher's subjective interpretations only occurred during the theme identification and reduction phase. The data represented in this report is not subjected to additional analysis, but merely summarised, ensuring that the depth of the information is not lost. This re-conceptualisation is presented in Chapter 6, which reflects the interviews and data collected, in a thematic representation.

As mentioned before, the data analysis process incorporated the use of a thematic content analysis, as the analysis tool. Welman and Kruger (2002:195) clarify that content analyses have been associated with both quantitative and qualitative approaches and been used in communication research for various purposes, mostly concerning the analysis of media material. Content analyses may also be applied in unstructured interviews, in order to report the essence of the contents (Welman & Kruger, 2002:195). Du Plooy (2002:191) notes that this tool analyses repeating patterns of ideas related to the issues of the study. As previously indicated, this study identified the three themes from literature, which were based on the constructs of this study, and focused on understanding**:**

- What the manifestation of corporate communication is, in organisations today (focusing on the functions, roles, activities, value add and structure);

- What methods of organisational performance measurement are being utilised, to measure the organisation, and how does corporate communication integrate with these; and,

- What KPIs are being used for corporate communication, and how they are displayed.

The content analysis was used to identify additional themes as they emerged, placing emphasis on obtaining *thick descriptions*. Babbie and Mouton (2002:272) describe 'thick description' to be a rich, detailed and lengthy description of specifics. The notion is maintained that the more detail that goes into the description, the richer the understanding, and the more value the account holds for the reader. Lindlof and Taylor (2002:16) indicate that thick description has immense contextual significance, which is especially important to

this study, as only the content of the interviews were examined, as opposed to the other aspects of phenomenological studies. This decision is motivated by the purpose of the study, and did not delve into sensitive topics, where non-verbal language, hesitation and other aspects of the respondent, would contribute towards the findings of this study. Interviews were conducted to obtain a deep understanding of the way corporate communication operates, and is measured in organisations, for creating KPIs. This was sufficiently analysed by means of a thematic content analysis.

5.6.2   The use of computer aided software in the study

This study did not make use of content analysis software applications. The manual process did, however, employ Mind Manager 6, to organise the data, according to the themes, in the form of a mind map.   The process was, to transfer the transcribed interviews from Word documents, into visible themes, depicted in the Mind Manager 6 software application. A graphical illustration of this mind map is presented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: The use of Mind Manager 6 for the manual categorisation of themes
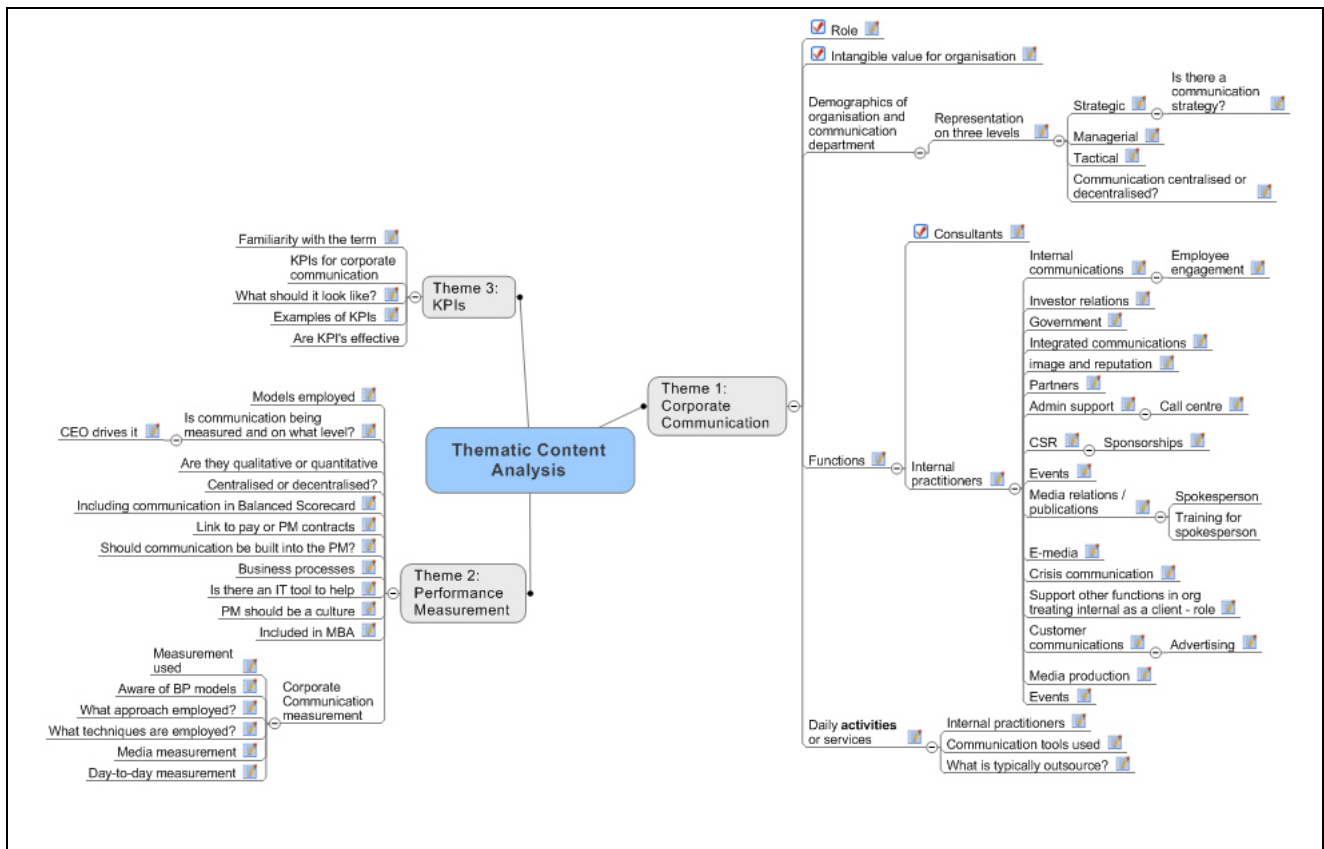
5.7   THE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

Validity has to do with the *truth value of observations*, in other words, whether the research instrument is being accurately reporting the nature of the object (Davmon & Holloway 2002:89). Reliability has to do with the *consistency of observations* and whether the results can be reproduced consistently, every time it is applied (Davmon & Holloway 2002:80; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:238). Lindlof and Taylor (2002:239) clarify that validity and reliability, as understood in quantitative research, is not possible with qualitative inquiry, as the questionnaire does not remain the same throughout the entire process. Additionally, the research relies on the interpretivistic assumption of multiple changing realities, not statistical processes.

For the above reasons, Davmon and Holloway (2002:92-95) suggest alternative ways that qualitative inquiries can justify their validity and reliability. According to these authors, validity can be demonstrated, by showing relevance or authenticity and trustworthiness. Therefore, research should be meaningful and useful to the reader who reads it (relevance), and the authenticity is acknowledged when the strategies used, are appropriate for the true reporting of participants' ideas. A study is fair when it helps readers to understand the world of the respondents, and identify how they can improve it (Davmon & Holloway, 2002:94). Additionally, Davmon and Holloway (2002:89-90) consider qualitative studies to be reliable, when an audit trail or decision trail is presented, that documents the decisions and steps, that the researcher took during the project. This allows future researchers the ability to follow the same process, as the original researcher, and helps readers to understand the decisions made. The validity and reliability of this study according to Davmon and Holloway (2002:89-95) is provided throughout this section.

Babbie and Mouton (2002:276-278) reveal an additional means of justifying the qualitative research conducted. These authors explain that qualitative studies need to focus on being objective through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Babbie & Mouton, 2002:276). These are applied to this study:

• Credibility asks whether what is being represented, is true and is achieved by obtaining a sufficient sample size, and attaining peer briefing for verification purposes. Due to the small target population, the sample size adequately represented the target population. In addition, data saturation was guaranteed by the prolonged interview engagement, and

the extended literature review provided the credibility. This study then relied on peer debriefing, from colleagues and the supervisor of this study, to review perceptions, insights and analysis, and assist with identifying the phases of the data analysis process.

- Transferability refers to the extent that the findings can be applied to other contexts, or with other respondents. In quantitative research, sampling is based on a statistically representative sample, to account for generality. In qualitative research, this is not possible; however, theoretical ideas may be applied to wider contexts. Littlejohn and Foss (2005:29) refer to this as the comprehensiveness or inclusiveness of the theoretical scope, where the theoretical explanation should go beyond a single instance and cover a range of events. In this study, the length and depth of the interviews, as well as the subpopulations included in the target population, allow for transferability. The *thick description* aids readers, in making judgements about the transferability, and the *purposive sampling* ensured that respondents from different industries were included, to allow similarities in the findings, to be transferred to various organisational contexts other than IT.

- Dependability provides the evidence to illustrate, that if the study were to be repeated with the same respondents, in the same contexts, its findings would be similar. By allowing the supervisor of this study to review the transcribed interviews, and *inquiry audit* was conducted, confirming the dependability of the research.

- Confirmability is the degree to which the findings are the product of focus in the inquiry. A confirmability audit trail should enable conclusions, interpretations and recommendations to be traced to their sources, to see if they are supported by the inquiry. In this study, the confirmability of the study is maintained by the thematic content analysis, where the report can be traced back to the raw data. Furthermore, during each phase of the data analysis process (the data reduction, analysis, reconstruction and synthesis), the supervisor of this study was required to review the data for accuracy and dependability purposes, warranting the entire process as credible and confirmable.

Furthermore, Davmon and Holloway (2002:95-100) make a case for ensuring *quality* in qualitative research. Davmon and Holloway (2002:99) explain that the quality of research is increased, and proves credibility, when the following is conducting:

- Longitudinal research;

- Member checking;

- Peer debriefing;

- The demonstration of an audit trail; and,

- Thick description.

True to the phenomenological approach, the researcher of this gained experience of this subject, by working for a year and a half as a corporate communication practitioner in the IT industry. This experience was obtained prior to the commencement of this study. Although the cross sectional interviews were conducted, the understanding obtained by the researcher during the field experience, increased the quality of the information obtained from the respondents. This was because the researcher was familiar with the topic at hand, and knew how to approach the respondents to encourage in-depth responses. An additional quality check incorporated in this study, was member checking. This was done during the interview by paraphrasing, summarising, and repeating the respondent's comments, to ensure that the researcher verified her understanding of the data. Peer debriefing was then incorporated, to identify inappropriate subjectivity or explanations of data. Furthermore, the research analysis process, depicted graphically in Figure 5.1, as well the contents of this chapter, provide an audit trail of the research process. Finally, the thick description, reflected in Chapter 6, ensures that the responses of the respondents reflect their circumstances.
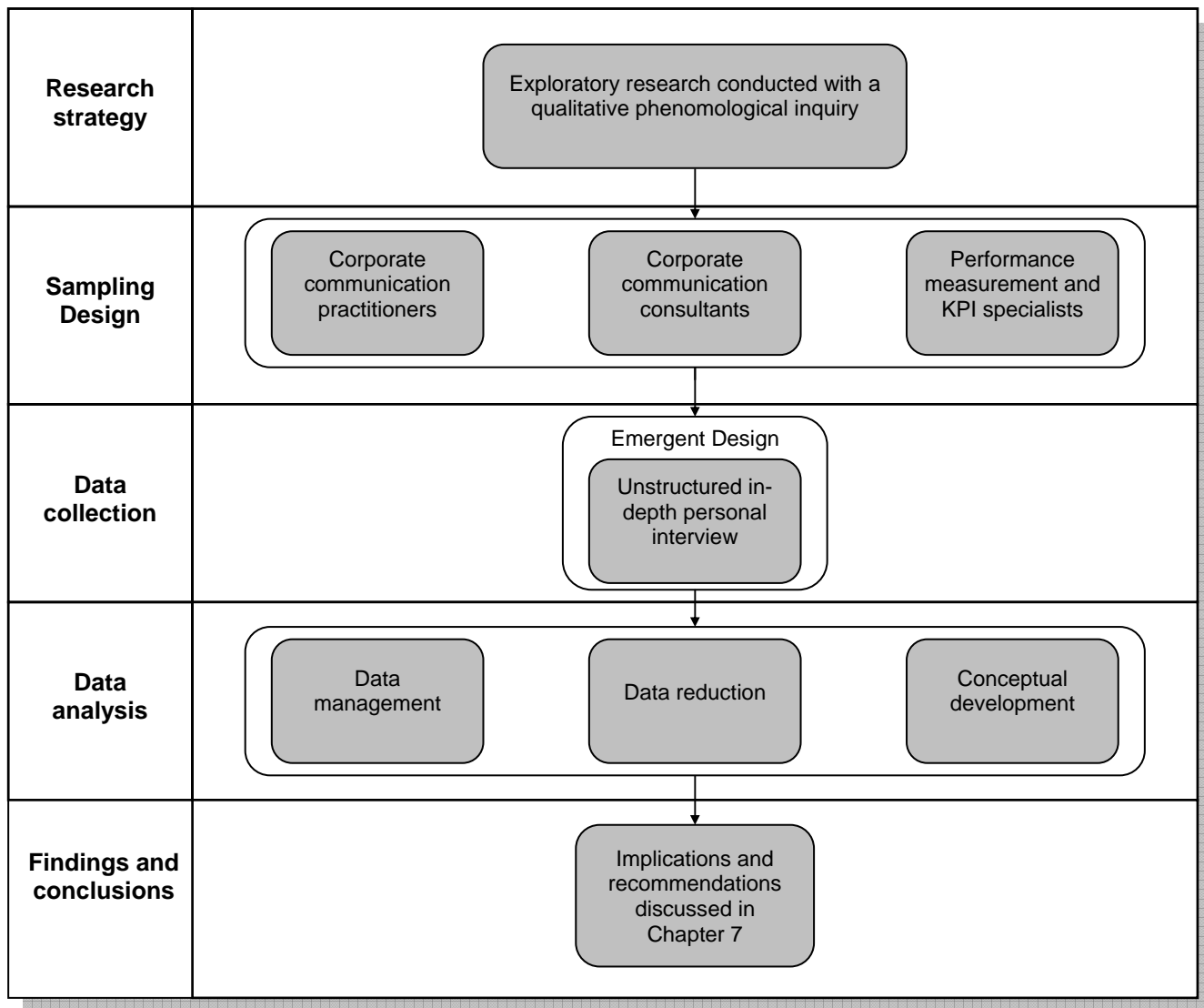
Qualitative research seeks to produce and demonstrate credible data. The above methods have been integrated into this study, to assist researchers in evaluating the trustworthiness and credibility of this study's interpretations.

5.8   CONCLUSION

After investigating Chapters 2, 3, and 4, it has become evident that a gap in literature exists, in scientifically determining how to measure the performance of corporate communication and communication (in general), in an organisational context, on a daily basis. This chapter describes how this study conducted scientific research, to explore this gap. The chapter functions as an audit trail that illustrates the decisions made with regard to the research strategy, design, sampling methods, data collection, data analysis process, and validity and reliability concerns.

Figure 5.2 provides a summary of the entire chapter and indicates the research strategy, research design, sampling method, data collection, data analysis and results of the findings. The heading of the figure indicates the research strategy of exploratory research and qualitative inquiry.

Figure 5.3: A summation of the research methodology incorporated in this study

Research strategy	Exploratory research conducted with a qualitative phenomological inquiry
Sampling Design	Corporate communication practitioners · Corporate communication consultants · Performance measurement and KPI specialists
Data collection	Emergent Design — Unstructured in-depth personal interview
Data analysis	Data management · Data reduction · Conceptual development
Findings and conclusions	Implications and recommendations discussed in Chapter 7

After discovering that the target population was considerably small, the population was divided into three subpopulations based on the respondents' focus of expertise. This was strategically chosen, after considering the target population, the purpose of this study, and the type of information needed, to achieve this purpose. The data collection method, chosen to obtain data, was by means of an unstructured in-depth personal interview. Fifteen lengthy interviews were conducted, each averaging around two hours. The in-depth interview practised an emergent design, in an attempt to obtain as much in-depth

information for the thematic content analysis as possible. The data analysis process was inductive and incorporated three major phases, data management, data reduction and re-conceptualisation. Incorporating a thematic content analysis allowed the data to be reported without excessive interpretation from the researcher. The reconstructed information from the interviews is reported as Chapter 6 of this document, and the findings and conclusions are elaborated on in Chapter 7 of this study.