CHAPTER 3.   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the conceptual framework, methods and operational plan by which the research question has been addressed. The study is essentially concerned with method. In order to provide a set of practical guidelines to evaluators, it explores alternatives to conventional linear evaluation. In conjunction with this, and more widely generalisable, it highlights the principles of developmental process that emerge from a set of experiences with CBOs. These were achieved using a grounded action research approach, which is described in detail in this chapter.

The chapter begins with an overarching theoretical framework, elucidating the application of grounded theory, process use and critical change in this study. I then outline the research structure, explaining the nature of the nested layers of content, method and meta-method.

The research approach is then divided into two themes; each discussed in terms key epistemological concepts, as follows:

Meta-evaluation: towards alternative methods -

- Exploratory research

- The use of action research in developing methodology

Evaluation: concepts for alternative approaches to evaluation -

- The methodological implications of action learning as an iterative, cumulative learning process

- Narrative in evaluation

- The Most Significant Change approach

- Qualitative evaluation

This completes the theoretical and conceptual background.

The practical description of the participant engagement and data recording processes then covers the research setting, sampling and recording of data. The two major components of the study are outlined: the inward-looking, Stories and Metaphor Process in Gauteng; and the outward-looking Most Significant Change (MSC) approach taken in North West. A brief overview is given of the nature of the evaluation methods applied

for each. Data analysis is then outlined, describing the interpretation of data, the reasoning used to reach conclusions and the peer review mechanisms used in interrogating those conclusions. The chapter ends with discussions on research trustworthiness and ethics.

3.2 Overarching theoretical framework: evaluation and meta-evaluation

Based in a constructionist ontology, the study will use grounded theory and concepts of theory emergence to surface the practice and principles of more developmental approaches to CBO evaluation.

3.2.1. Grounded theory

3.2.1.1. Grounded theory in brief

Grounded theory provides the central, fundamental concept underpinning this study. Founded in theories of complexity, dynamism, and emergence, grounded theory states that trends, experiences, events and outcomes are more realistically recorded as they emerge from reality (Kopainsky & Luna-Reyes, 2008; Dey, 2004). Grounded theory allows conclusions to emerge from data and participants, rather than beginning with a preconception or a prediction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pg. 32-33; Fouché, 2005, pg. 170, Creswell, 2007, pg. 62; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Dey, 2007; Hood, 2007). Social theories should emerge from '*the action, interactions and social processes of people*' (Creswell, 2007. p. 63). Grounded theory asks us to begin with an area of enquiry or a question, and to try to approach it with an open mind (de Vos, 2005, p. 265). Questions rather than theories or predictions form the driving force (Soal, 2004; de Vos, 2005, p. 265; Fouché, 2005, p. 270; Punch, 2005, p. 155). Grounded evaluation asks for sincere curiosity.

Although it explicitly sets preconceptions aside, grounded theory and emergence are not without bias (de Vos, 2005, p. 5). On the contrary, they are often set in a critical change paradigm where political intent and an active bias are acknowledged (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Experiences and grounded data are drawn though a lens of ideology, such as a social development, grassroots, rights-based paradigm. Without a lens, or a reason for asking questions, grounded research becomes an exercise in random data gathering (Mouton & Marais, 1990).

Writers on grounded theory describe its application as being pulled up on 'bootstraps' (Kelly, 1999). A general area of study is defined at the outset. As data are analysed to formulate conclusions, these conclusions influence the interpretation and subsequent

refocusing of data collection. This iterative uncovering of new theory is the essence of action research (McNiff, 2002). Grounded approaches, particularly in a context of applied research, use action research principles, and vice versa.

Grounded theory is explicitly designed for the formulation of new theory, rather than theory testing, although the process of theory generation invariably also integrates iterative theory testing. As such, it is highly relevant to this study's exploratory research into new alternatives for evaluation.

Although experience forms the basis and the core of theory, the use of those observations is influenced by interpretation, reflection, peer review and other data and analysis sources (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Grounded theory therefore begins with and draws substantially on experience, but does not expect to exclude interpretive, intellectual or documented insight from the range of relevant sources.

Grounded theory applies to both the evaluation and the meta-evaluation in this research.

3.2.1.2.   The grounded theory debate

The field of grounded theory was conceived in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). They reached considerable disagreement as they each developed their thinking over the next three decades (Charmaz, 2006, p. 134). By the time of Strauss and Corbin's writing on structured processes for grounded analysis in the 1990s (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 487; Punch, 2005, p. 156; Dey, 2004; Creswell, 2007, p. 63), the Strauss and Glaser schools had taken opposing stands (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The schools of thought have since drawn richly on the debate, and Bryant and Charmaz (2007) regard the ongoing development of method and approach to have provided a valuable maturity. They see grounded theory to have evolved into a 'family of methods' from which researchers may draw in terms of their own epistemology, ontology and needs.

While with regard to the importance of structure and method opinions might be divided, many of the fundamental concepts remained uncontested. Pattern, data, the context or situation, and constant comparison with data remain established elements of grounded approaches (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

3.2.1.3.   Grounded theory

In one respect, grounded theory refers to a strategy for research, and flexible principles of theory generation. This study draws strongly on the application of grounded theory in

terms of a principle for rooting theory in data and the emergence of meaning from reality, rather than comparing reality with a preconceived hypothesis: "Grounded theory *is what is*, not what should, could, or ought to be" (Glaser, 1999). Glaser (1999) speaks of grounded theory being most widely applied in post-graduate research because of the imperative of contributing to new theory.

This application of the principles of grounded theory, where data feeds into theory, rather than theory driving data, is regarded as a legitimate and mature interpretation of grounding (Henning, 2004, p. 47; Punch, 2005, p. 155). Original grounded theory was drafted in a context when research legitimacy demanded the extremes of positivist, objective hypothesis testing. Contemporary qualitative methods have long since moved beyond this positivism, and the rigid application of grounded theory structures is accused of being rather conservative form of post-positivism (Charmaz 2006, p. 132; Creswell, 2007, p. 64).

The use of structured, rigid axial coding has been criticized as being prescriptive and mechanistic (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). On the contrary, grounded researchers need the ability to "conceptualize data, an ability to tolerate some confusion, and an ability to tolerate confusion's attendant regression" Glaser, 1999. We are cautioned against deifying methodology, over principles.

3.2.1.4. Grounded theory method

In the other respect, grounded theory refers to a structured methodology for analysing data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Coding is regarded as fundamental to analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). While the principles of grounding are upheld in much of qualitative research, there is considerable disagreement in the scientific community around the legitimacy of its rigid application in an analytical method (Dey, 2004; Creswell, 2007, p. 63).

Another deviation between Glaser and Strauss relates to Strauss's emphasis on verifying and proving the theories emerging from axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Glaser remains skeptical of such certainty, talking about 'worrisome accuracy' (Glaser, 1999).

Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory devised detailed and systematic methods for extracting and triangulating theory from data. They attempt to design qualitative mechanisms for ensuring objectivity (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 487; Punch, 2005, p. 156; Dey, 2004; Creswell, 2007, p. 63). Their method provides a prescriptively structured, strongly methodical approach by which they consider theory to be extracted from data (Fouché, 2005; Dey, 2004; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The process progresses

from open coding of raw data to extract emergent themes, to axial coding to arrange the themes in relation to each other and into clusters or families of concepts, through to selective coding where explanations of these relationships are generated as new theory (de Vos, 2005).

These analytical concepts have stimulated and informed the design of software tools for qualitative data analysis (Dey, 2004), such as Atlas-ti, which has been used for part of the data analysis for this research. I draw to a limited, and somewhat adapted extent on grounded analysis approaches.

3.2.1.5. *Constructivist grounded theory*

In reaction to the rigidly structured analytic approach of Strauss and Corbin, Charmaz entered the grounded theory debate with the concept of 'constructivist grounded theory' (Creswell, 2007, p. 65). She contrasts constructivist grounded theory with objectivist grounded theory. Grounded constructivists are cautious of positivist analysis, and view the world as an ever-changing, complexity of multiple realities (Charmaz 2006, p. 132). Objectivist grounded theory, however, regards data as separate from participants and researchers, and considers the careful application of rigorous method to provide theoretical understanding.

3.2.2. Critical change theory and process use

A theme for ongoing discussion in the evaluation community is the impact and purposeful use of the research *process* and its opportunities for interaction, as well as the information or *content* it elicits (Edwards, 1999; Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 159). The *findings* of organisational research should be useful, but constructive evaluation should, centrally, provide organisations with the skills and opportunity to reflect of their own practice, to learn self-evaluation skills and to communicate better internally (McClintock, 2004; Birdsall, et al., 2007).

The *processes* which stakeholders engage with during research invariably have impact. Evaluation itself is an intervention (Quinn-Patton, 2002, p. 405). Evaluation in development settings should be designed to ensure that this impact is constructive. The basis of this research lies in the risks of negligent process being destructive to organisations (Gaspar, 2000; Bornstein, 2006a; Gray, et al., 2006). Evaluation processes and indeed, meta-evaluation research such as this study, must support development with integrity.

Grounded theory is immersed in a critical change paradigm to the extent that its origins lie in giving participants' voice, or data, precedence (Gibson, 2007). This lies in the

responsibility of researchers to fairly represent research subjects. Grounded theory also points us to the dangers of a critical change paradigm. In approaching research with intent and purpose, we risk pre-interpreting situations and purveying bias. This would be in direct conflict with the openness and data-honesty of grounded theory. In this sense, grounded theory brings valuable realism and integrity into critical change, which otherwise risks being used as rhetoric, rather then learning.

The methods in this study and their application are designed in terms of utilisation-based evaluation principles (Quinn-Patton, 2002). Charmaz (2006, p. 134) regards grounded approaches as being well-suited to critical change research. Just as the recommendations on methods and principles support investment in organisations, so too, the methodological study should be clearly educational, reflective and valuable to the organisations that participate in methods development.

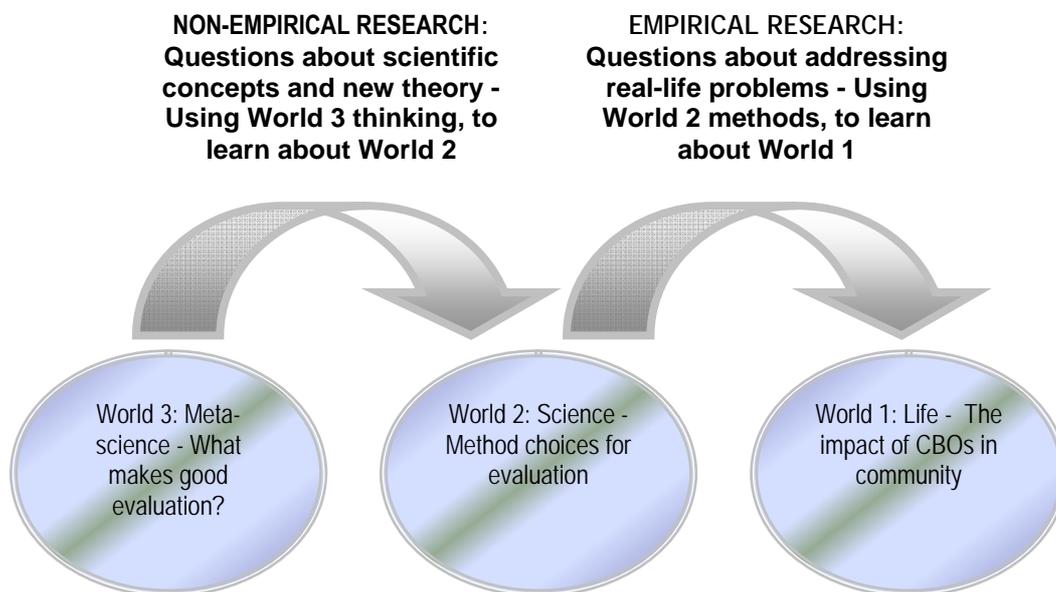## 3.3   Research structure: Three worlds and two legs

This is a study on researching the practice and principles of alternative methodology. As such, its methodology must describe a meta-methodology, or a study of methodology (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 211). In action research, evaluation design and development must run concurrently with, and will partially overlap, evaluation itself (Thomas, 1994, p. 285). In a study which aims to explore improved methodological principles and practice, methodology is itself the research object. The research methods are those by which the new or explored methodological principles and practice are developed. In a further nesting, the content of the conversation, or the sociology or business of the organisations to which emerging methods and principles are applied, are simply the grist for the methodological work.

Mouton's (2001) Three Worlds framework) describes this nesting particularly clearly. We need to distinguish between:

- World 1 - the content and practice of CBOs;

- World 2 - the processes and principles of evaluating and learning in that context; and

- World 3 - the science of exploring optimal ways of conducting evaluation that meet ethical and ontological standpoints.

These "Worlds" are connected by the distinction between empirical and non-empirical research. Empirical research is World 2's investigations into the World 1 of an

evaluation participant. Non-empirical research is World 3's investigations into designing good methodology for World 2 (Figure 5).

| NON-EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: Questions about scientific concepts and new theory - Using World 3 thinking, to learn about World 2 | EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: Questions about addressing real-life problems - Using World 2 methods, to learn about World 1 |

World 3: Meta-science - What makes good evaluation?

World 2: Science - Method choices for evaluation

World 1: Life - The impact of CBOs in community

Figure 5   *Distinctions between the non-empirical and empirical elements relevant to this study, in terms of the Three Worlds Framework*

Source: Mouton, 2001, pp. 5

As research into evaluation methodology, this study is classified as a hybrid between a non-empirical and an empirical study (Table 2). Empirical study: understanding real world problems, such as evaluating the impact of CBOs in communities. Non-empirical study: understanding the science, theory and principles of how best we evaluate and developing the concept of developmental evaluation. This classification is particularly helpful in clearly defining and bounding the study. Although the empirical and non-empirical components are integrated into a single research process, they need to be conceptualised, analysed and presented differently.

There are therefore three nested conceptual layers, which need to be carefully separated in our thoughts. Table 2 and Figure 5 offer elaborations of the relationships between three worlds in this study, and non-empirical and empirical research into them.

Table 2. *Empirical and non-empirical conceptual layers of meta-method, methodology research and business content*

	Conceptual layer	Description	Where in the thesis?
NON-EMPIRICAL RESERACH	**Methods for studying methods**	*The meta-methodology (World 3)* How does one best design new methodology? What is the process for exploring better processes?	This is the layer with which the **Methods Section** below is most concerned
	Alternative methods for evaluating CBOs and their programmes	*The research question (World 2)* In reaction to limitations of linear, predictive models, what are the principles of stronger alternative methods? How might the development industry perform better in this regard, especially with regard to CBOs?	This is the layer with which the **Results, Discussion** and **Conclusions Sections** are most concerned. The **Literature Review** was also primarily concerned with this layer.
EMPIRICAL RESERACH	**Evaluation data**	*The organisations' content (World 1)* What do CBOs achieve? How do they impact on people's lives? In what ways can they improve their programmes? This layer is the context of development CBOs. It is significant to the extent that the methods support CBO learning.	The content itself is not central to this study. Any CBOs and any content would have supported exploring alternative methods. Examples of this content appear under the **Exhibits** in the Results Section as demonstrations of the methodological processes.

3.4 Research approach

The research approach is discussed in terms of the major research components: the non-empirical investigation of alternative evaluation method and principles; and the empirical evaluation processes for understanding CBO impact in a user-centred participatory approach.

3.4.1. Meta-methodology : Key concepts in reality-based methods development

3.4.1.1. Exploratory research

An exploratory approach is used to develop guidelines for an evaluation system which attempts to address the weaknesses of traditional 'logical' systems, particularly with regard to prediction, positivism and linear arguments. Exploratory studies, or 'discovery', produce grounded theory, and share the principles of grounded theory (Babbie, 2005, p. 90; Dey, 2004). They are used to break new ground, yield new insights and wrangle with intractable challenges, including the development of new methodologies (Mouton & Marais 1990, p. 59; Stebbins, 2001; Babbie, 2005, p. 89; Quinn

Patton, 2002, p. 193). Alternative methodology and the impacts of process in organisations require that we carve at the cutting edge of new concepts.

Exploratory research may produce approximate answers to research questions to which definitive, conclusive answers are inappropriate or unrealistic. It may also provide further questions rather than concrete answers (Babbie, 2005, p. 89; Kelly, 1999, p. 412). This openness to emergence and serendipity is part of a research approach in exploratory, grounded epistemology (Charmaz 2006, p. 180; Dick, 2007).
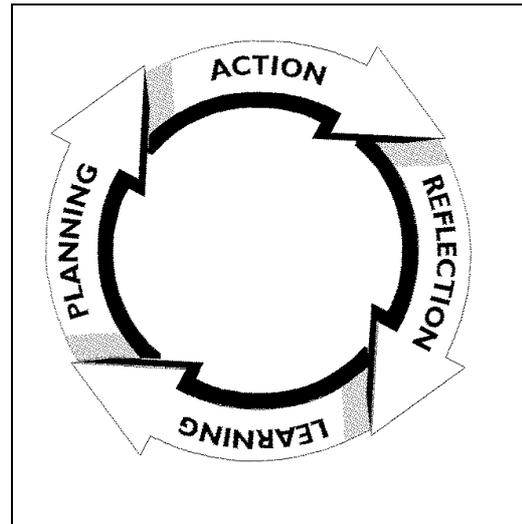

Figure 6 *The Action Learning Cycle*

Source: Taylor, et al., (1997)

3.4.1.2.   Action Research for methods development

Action research is an accepted approach for meta-methodology (Dick, 2007). Although action research tends to be strongly grounded, the explicit integration of grounded theory into an action research based meta-methods process is unusual. Dick (2007) encourages research that works with the connections between grounding and action research, cross-pollinating between their methods, skills and techniques.

In an action research process, conclusions are accumulated, with each data item building the richness of the picture and certainty in the conclusions. There is no real replication in an action research design – each event is a learning point in its own right. Theory therefore accumulates from data, grounded in experience, with iterative cycles of induction and deduction. There are strong complimentary threads between grounded theory and action learning (Dick, 2007). This cumulative building of theory through successive iterations of qualitative research termed 'theoretical sampling' in the grounded theory discourse, was used, for example, by Ian Dey in his trade union studies in 1979 (Dey, 2004). In a sense, this is regarded as a form of cumulative coding, as codes firm up with supporting experience to create patterns.

Although based on principles of responsiveness, action research is not unstructured. It follows a simple iterative cycle of action, reflection, learning and planning (Figure 6) (Dick, 2007).   The formal documentation of both process and outcome is key to grounded and action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1991, p. 185, Bhana, 1999, p. 231;

Taylor, et al., 1997; Dey, 2007). Simplicity of method is essential to understanding complexity (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory should not lead to complicated processes. Their power lies in the skilful application of simple methods to understand complex situations.

Practice informs new theory, and theory informs new practice (McNiff, 2002). Iterative, reflective processes of systematic testing and meta-evaluation, progress towards an effective method (Thomas, 1994, p. 289).

3.4.2. Evaluation: Key concepts in alternative, participatory, developmental processes

The evaluation design is based on stories and metaphor. It uses these processes, hinged around collective action learning, integrated with organisation development. Evaluation of this nature is primarily qualitative. Each of these facets of the research process is discussed below.

3.4.2.1. Action Learning or Participatory Action Research

Action learning is founded in principles of critical change research and concepts of utilisation-based evaluation (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 173). It acknowledges that the process of research is inseparable from the outcomes of change.

Action research asks that participants and researchers learn together, rather than researchers extracting information and learning about participants as outsiders. Knowledge, insight and understanding are seen as bonds that connect people, rather than barriers that separate them (Bhana, 1999, p. 230).

Ideally, evaluation methods should be embraced and institutionalised into the everyday practice of an organisation, for its own benefit, and with intrinsic motivation. This would describe evaluation that is a genuine contributor to development outcomes (Gaspar, 2000). To the extent that the alternative approach achieves this goal, we can regard them as 'developmental'.

3.4.2.2. Narrative in evaluation

Success stories are among the most valuable evaluation sources (Rhodes, 1996; Taylor, et al., 1997; Edwards, 1999; Barter & Renold, 2004; Reeler, 2005). They tell us in detail about the type of impact that is possible. Stories elucidate the relevance and meaning behind quantitative data. They also direct us to those quantitative data that have relevance and meaning (Davies & Dart, 2005). Stories form the foundation of grounded

evaluation. Once we have the stories, it becomes possible to rationally define criteria for impact.

Stories also elicit sophisticated and complex self-awareness and organisational awareness. This provides contextualised, holistic and exchanged understanding towards more informed and responsive management (Wilder & Walpole, 2008; Dart & Davies, 2003; McClintock, 2004; Seel, 2006).

Gasper (2000), however, urges caution in the use of stories and anecdotes as research data. Stories are generally selected to illustrate a point, whether from the personal interests of the teller or in response to the interests of the researcher. They can be used to manipulate. They are a form of rhetoric (Gibson, 2007). They risk simplifying complex situations to a superficial, quick-fix analysis. Data are not neutral.

Bryant and Cox (2004) acknowledge the subjectivity of narratives but regard this subjectivity itself as an asset. Stories are a valuable vehicle for understanding the underlying significance of social processes. All stories, whether supposedly factual or not, are essentially fiction told through the selective lens of the story teller (Gibson, 2007). Many accounts in an evaluation setting follow habitual paths and ritualised anecdotes towards cultivating an unfolding 'urban mythology'. Myths in themselves, whether ancient or modern, are the window to understanding norms, expectations and social benchmarks (Quinn Patton, 1999; Dart & Davies, 2003).

These risks are reduced when many different stories are gathered, shared and analysed together representing the complexity that enables the situation to be understood (Bryant & Cox, 2004). The collective analysis of narratives requires additional facilitation (Dart & Davies, 2003). This may involve i) highlighting and interpreting the peculiar and complex, ii) drawing out themes and generalisation, or iii) understanding sequences of events and causal links in a particular account. Any of these forms of interpretation can be used in facilitating organisational evaluation and drawing conclusions with relevance to practice.

3.4.2.3. Metaphor

Metaphors describe one concept in terms of another (Bornstein 2006b). They provide a means of capturing difficult, abstract and perhaps elusive concepts into the concrete and familiar.

Metaphors are powerful, complex and layered opportunities for creating meaning (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 505). In this study, metaphor is used in the inward-looking

organisational evaluation as a grounded, emergent container and structure for self-analysis and self-evaluation. People interpret the world through metaphor (Grisham, 2006). They are used not only to describe an organisation, but also to construct new theories about how that organisation might grow (Bornstein, 2006b; Chettiparamb, 2006). In the outward-looking MSC process, this analysis was attempted using discussion on stories of most significance, with only a cursory incursion into metaphor.

Metaphor is a form of language, integrated with characterisation, and all the inherent meaning of that character to a community of people. More powerful than language itself, metaphor supports communication, but also represents and attaches meaning and associations (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 504, Chettiparamb, 2006). The intuitive, non-language connotations of a metaphor convey far more meaning than can be captured in words (Bornstein, 2006b; Grisham, 2006). Metaphors enable a shared understanding and a common language for the concepts within a conversation.

Dey (2007) describes metaphor as 'cognitive models that open up new ways of thinking'. Where discussion tends to ramble and leave clear conclusions elusive, metaphor provides a personalised road down which thinking may be lead into fresh areas and new insights.

Metaphor is richly used in methods research in support of thinking about our observations and their meaning (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 123; Charmaz 2006, p. 172; Grisham, 2006). Chaos in complexity is compared with physics and human systems with natural biological systems.

Subtle, detailed, verbal communication needs a degree of facilitated direction. Checklists and predefined criteria might provide a direction in a positivist context. Collectively chosen and described metaphors can provide this direction and flow in emergent, grounded processes. They offer a window into the institutional, structural and normative qualities of an organisation (Bornstein, 2006b).

Metaphors used to communicate between different communities of people risk losing their original meaning, and perhaps even offending, because of the strong attachments and associations that images have for us (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 505). This, using a sort of converse logic, connects those *in the club* more closely to a metaphor that they devise and share, and to their collective associations (Bornstein, 2006b).

The main risk associated with the use of metaphor in interpretation is that it loses touch with groundedness. Data may be arranged to suit the metaphor, rather than the metaphor being adapted to accommodate reality (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 505). Alluring

as the perfect metaphor might be, researchers and participants needs to remain grounded enough to also contrast their experiences with the metaphor. A metaphor is not real. Many metaphors may suit a situation, and none will provide a complete, uncontradictory description (Chettiparamb, 2006; Grisham, 2006). Indeed, the power of metaphor lies in the tension between the similarities and the differences (Oswick & Montgomery, 1999). If the metaphor is too similar to the comparator the concept is no longer metaphorical; too different and it has no meaning. As with all methods, moderation and pragmatism are crucial to relevance.

More insidiously, as metaphors can transform the complex and the abstract into the comfortable and familiar, so too can they be used to either dilute or intensify meaning (Bornstein, 2006b). An intolerable situation may become merely interesting when captured in metaphor, and an irritant can be conveyed in the rhetoric of revolution. In given a concept the meaning of association, we risk creating more or less than we originally had.

Metaphor is used in this study as a vehicle for interpreting the qualities of an organisation, and its merits. Far from being an approach for low literacy settings, similar work has been published on the use of this approach in multi-national corporations (Oswick & Montgomery, 1999).

The results of the meta-methods study include the strong evaluation of an approach around the use of metaphor, its application, value and limitations. Metaphor is selected as a methodological starting point in order to compliment the verbal communication of stories, with a visual medium.

3.4.2.4.   Stories of Most Significant Change

MSC provides a formalised process for the collection, analysis and application of stories (Dart & Davies, 2003; Willets & Crawford, 2007; Wilder & Walpole, 2008). The approach, sometimes referred to as 'monitoring without indicators', uses narrative as the primary source of data (Dart, *et al.,* 2000).

MSC has been developed by Rick Davies and Jessica Dart, mainly in the agriculture sector of developed settings (Dart, 2000; Dart & Davies, 2003; Davies & Dart 2005). It is a grounded methodology, asking us to develop theory from an open inquiry into the perspectives and situation of community clients. MSC uses stories drawn from community members, followed by a process of story analysis, also by community members. It is intended to identify changes that have been most significant, and present the reason for their greater importance.

The method is designed to reflect complex adaptive systems. It acknowledges the holistic nature of community and individuals' situations. Development programmes are not received in isolation from the wider life, ambitions and challenges of individuals who participate. MSC uses stories, narratives and images in all their complexity, told by those most closely involved, to help an agency understand itself and its role. When we ask for a story, we ask for the whole story, as it surrounds the development intervention.

The approach stands in direct contrast to approaches which attempt to predict the outcomes of development interventions, and then view the intervention through the blinkers of a development agency's predefined perspective. It is a reaction from the same source of concern as the origins of this study: that of the undevelopmental, illogical, positivist assumptions that dominate conventional evaluation thinking.

The content (World 1) of the MSC study has been published through Oxfam America (Konstant, 2009a). This thesis is concerned with an analysis of the methodological implications of applying MSC in this context (World 2).

3.4.2.5. Qualitative evaluation

This study aims to develop guidelines for a qualitative evaluation system, in a context where quantitative, positivist evaluation is traditionally applied (Table 3). Development studies and organisations are better suited to theories of chaos than to structure, hypothesis or prediction (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 169). Qualitative methods in the context of social development need to be subtle enough to capture the evolutionary, transformational forces of development and organisational behaviour (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 2). Applied research and organisational management ask not only for information, but also for wisdom.

Creswell (2007, p. 38) raises several relevant generalisations on the use of qualitative research. Qualitative data are generally shared in the participants' own environment, take various forms, and may come from a number of sources. Observations, words, images, impressions, metaphors and stories may all combine in a qualitative description.

Table 3. *Characteristics and application of qualitative and quantitative research sort out font etc*

QUALITATIVE EVALUTION	QUANTITATAVE EVALUTION
CONCEPTS	
• Concepts can be interpreted in a number of ways • Concepts sensitise or have abstract meaning • Labelled through intuitive experience	• Concepts are unambiguous • Terms are precisely identified • Employs a measuring instrument
HYPOTHESIS	
• Undeclared or stated as a broad research goal • Emerges through the investigation • Can often not be rejected	• Stated explicitly, at least as a research question • Formulated beforehand • Can be rejected
DESIGN *Fouché, 2005, p. 269; Creswell, 2007, p. 38)*	
• The researchers' choices and actions determine the design or strategy • Inductive, recursive, interactive analysis • Holistic view of social phenomena	• The research design determines the researcher's choices and actions. • Primarily deductive analysis • Reductionist view of social phenomena
OBSERVATION	
• Personally experienced • Researcher involved in events • Spontaneity and serendipity contribute • Semi-structured • Unexpected events can be recorded • The context is taken into account	• Subject is objectified • Researcher remains aloof • Pre-planned research schedule followed • Structured • Structure pre-defines observations • The context is controlled
APPROPRIATE CONTEXT	
PURSUIT OF DEPTH : GOAL- To understand	**PURSUIT OF HEIGHT :** GOAL: To explain **PURSUIT OF BREADTH :** GOAL: To describe
REQUIRES OF THE RESEARCHER	
• Researcher involvement • Placing the research in context • Use comparison • Sensitivity to concepts	• Justified structure and process • Controlled • Reliable

Source: Unless otherwise indicated, adapted from Mouton & Marais (1990, p. 176-186)

While bias is present in both quantitative and qualitative research it has profound implication for qualitative research (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 62). Interpretation, intent, assumptions and ideology all fundamentally mould qualitative results. Participants' perspectives, interpretations and subjective views all contribute to data. Qualitative research acknowledges the complexity and dynamic social, political and historical context of human and organisational behaviour.

Researchers need to understand the implications of qualitative research bias and subjectivity. Qualitative research must be reflexive (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 64). The

subjective lenses of both participants and facilitators need to be raised for scrutiny as an inherent part to the research process. Action research and action learning provide mechanisms for this reflection and self-evaluation.

Insight into the qualitative:quantitative debate in evaluation arose at length in the result of this study. For the purposes of methodology, the evaluations use qualitative research, while remaining sensitive to learning around quantitative data issues.

In summary, principles of action research will be applied to development of alternative methods and principles for applying those methods. Since objectivity and subjectivity are tensions in using qualitative approaches, iteration, peer review and participant reflection will all be used to debate the conclusions, and to support data trustworthiness.

3.5   Research setting

This research has been conducted in close collaboration with the AIDS Consortium[9]. Founded in Gauteng Province, the AIDS Consortium is a CBO and NGO membership organisation. It has recently expanded its services to Limpopo and North West provinces. The majority of its member CBOs are in Gauteng, and many have been part of its capacity building programme. This is the membership base from which participating CBOs volunteered.

Selection criteria included completion of capacity building training. Organisations will be those that are established and active and registered as NPOs or in the process of doing so. Criteria did not select or stratify for the organisations' settings. Several different settings were therefore represented in the sample. These are most simply defined as informal settlement and low-income suburbs for the Gauteng Stories and Metaphor process, and a rural village for the MSC process. Within and between these settings, organisations also ranged in size and sophistication.

3.5.1.   Informal settlements

Two of the organisations that participated in the Gauteng Stories and Metaphor study were based in the informal settlements of Orange Farm and Lawley in the Vaal area, south of Soweto. This is an extremely difficult environment. Most people house themselves in corrugated iron shacks. Unemployment is the norm, with few households having any form of earned income. Families depend on child-support grants, pensions

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[9] www.aidsconsortium.org.za

and disability allowances to support all the members of the household. The nearest clinic is an expensive taxi ride away. The nearest hospital is a prohibitively expensive distance, and there is no ambulance or patient transport system at all. Whether poor, ill or disabled, minibus taxis[10] are the only means of reaching medical services, or any other facility. Residents spoke of sharing two social workers across a distance around 50 km across. Many had never seen a social worker. Food is by no means assured and social welfare's food parcel and supplement systems to not reach these remote areas. The social welfare allowances are meagre, and the cost of transport to buy food adds greatly to the cost. Even donated food from supermarkets costs too much to transport on a regular basis to these areas. Most households attempt to grow food and maintain fruit trees, but these relatively recently settled areas have no history, skill, equipment or culture for subsistence farming.

Schools, municipal water, pit latrines and electricity are provided. The Orange Farm organisation was part of an RDP[11] housing scheme, and a permanent structure was being constructed on its premises and those of other residents in the area. While this constitutes an improvement to fire safety, hygiene and shelter, these homes do not resolve the challenges of income insecurity and basic livelihood. These peri-urban slums are the most deprived possible setting. There is considerable dependency on *ubuntu*[12], distributing coping mechanisms among several households (Bahre, 2007).
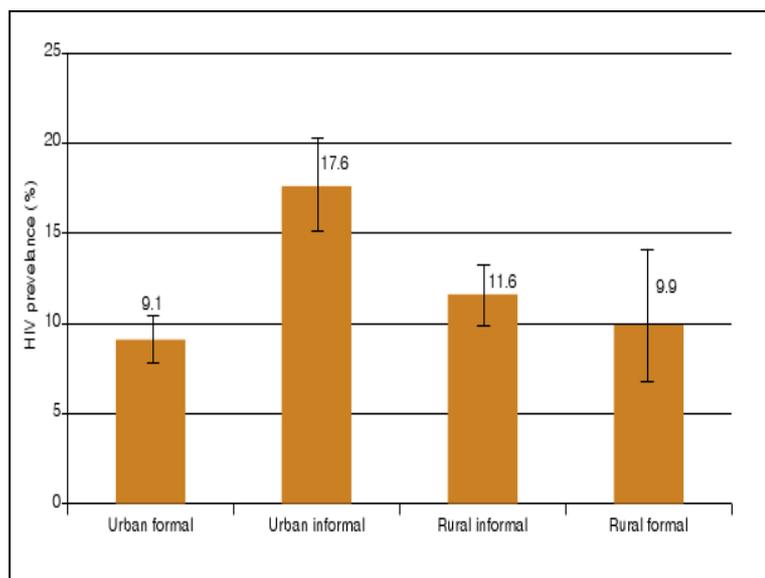
These are also the settings where HIV prevalence is

Figure 7 *HIV prevalence rates in relation to setting*

Source: Booth, 2008

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[10] The African standard public transport system of informal sector 9–14 seater "buses".

[11] State Reconstruction and Development Programme – a low cost or free housing and tenure system for resource-poor settings

[12] The ethic of humanity: "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" Zulu for the widely translated maxim, "a person is a person through other persons", is often translated into sharing resources when they are available, and expecting reciprocation when the opportunities arise.

highest (Figure 7). HIV is essentially a social disease, with severe health implications. It is driven by social fragmentation, deprivation, denialism and hopelessness. Organisations working with HIV, or any other chronic disease, in this setting are faced with intractable problems. People in life-threatening need of medication are unable to reach it, despite the health system offering its services free of charge. Where medication is obtained, it usually needs to be taken with food, which cannot be consistently supplied. Conditions in informal housing with scant protection from the elements are not conducive to their recovery.

In the face of these challenges, CBOs have little to offer. They do not have the means to provide the basic needs of transport and food. Their role tends to revolve around basic home-based hygiene, care and counselling, while they remain largely helpless to meet their clients' real and urgent needs.

The emotional stresses, legitimacy and strategies of these organisations are all inextricable from the challenges of their environment.

3.5.2. Low-income suburbs

The city of Soweto is large, varied and long-established. Suburbs range from some of the poorest urban settings, to the wealthy areas of the homes of Sowetan celebrities. Soweto has a history steeped in the South African anti-apartheid struggle. Under the apartheid system of racial separation, Soweto was a black township at the heart of the political opposition. It has a long history of civil society activism and collective conscience. Although racial separation has been abolished for two decades, the population remains an ethnically varied, cosmopolitan mix of Johannesburg-commuting, predominantly black South Africans, many of whom are descended from generations rooted in Soweto.

This study was conducted in the relatively low income areas of Pimville and Meadowlands. These are densely populated, vast residential areas, with little local industry or business. Based on impressions, unemployment is far less severe than in either rural areas or in informal settlements, and access to basic services is far greater. Clinics, social services and hospital are walking distance for many, and organisations have both the access and the contact to refer their clients. As well as local supermarkets donating food to CBOs, there are opportunities for CBOs to form relationships and operate referral networks that allow them to meet their clients' needs far better than in informal settlements.

This may contribute to a vibrant and active NGO community, with a great many NGOs and CBOs operating in these areas. Those that participated in this study varied in their origin, style and purpose (Table 4).

3.5.3.   Rural village

The MSC process was conducted in the small, rural village of Mabeskraal in Bojanala District of North West Province, around 70km north of Rustenburg. North West is a rural agricultural and mining province, with a spread of small urban centres and country towns, such as Mabeskraal. In common with much of rural South Africa, poor education outcomes, unemployment and lack of access to services combine to create a setting of pervasive poverty and limited progress.

North West Province has an active and engaged system of hereditary traditional authorities, providing traditional leadership with far more significant than in many urban areas. Mabekraal traditional leadership and local CBOs had been partners in a programme funded by Oxfam America and coordinated by the AIDS Consortium, focusing on communication around gender, culture and HIV. One of the distinguishing features of the programme was the enthusiasm, motivation, support and leadership of Kgosi Mabe, King of Mabeskraal, and his wife, Kgosigadi Mabe.

In other respects the village was not dissimilar to those in similar settings. The village has a basic health centre, a number of high schools and primary schools, an abundance of churches, the Kgosi's administrative centre, a somewhat competing municipal cluster of Ward Councillors, and virtually no jobs or local industry. Small livestock, rare kitchen gardens, shebeens[13] and work outside the village seemed to be the main sources of livelihood. While female unemployment across North West is around 50%, a higher proportion of men work in neighbouring towns or mines. Nevertheless, many were unemployed, particularly young adults and the elderly.

Several CBOs provide a variety of services in Mabeskraal. Far less deprived than informal urban areas, these generally have premises, a functional referral system, access to medical and social services, a functional local municipality and traditional leadership.

This work was conducted with three local CBOs, and three national NGOs, as well as a CBO based in a neighbouring area.

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[13] South African local bar or tavern

3.6   Sampling

3.6.1.   Sampling strategy

In theory the study was to use theoretical sampling (people who can help to build a theory) combined with purposive sampling (people who meet selection criteria) (Henning, 2004, p. 71). Theoretical sampling is typical of grounded theory work (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). It assumes that interactions are selected for their contribution to enriching the grounded theory, rather than for offering broad, random, representative cases (Dey, 2004). What was required for this study, were organisations willing to participate in an action learning process, and enthusiastic about being the subjects for experimental methods development. The sample was less a sample of organisations or individuals, than of the experience or event of a collective evaluation process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

In practice, participants were selected using volunteer sampling, in that only six organisations requested inclusion at the outset of the Stories and Metaphor process. Neither selection nor exclusion was therefore necessary. All those who volunteered at the outset met the entry requirements, and all were included in the study. Several more were interested later, but the data saturation point had been reached. The saturation of learning is regarded as a trademark of grounded approaches (Hood, 2007).

The need for a different approach emerged from the Stories and Metaphor process. Oxfam America and its partners were introduced by the AIDS Consortium with an interest in collaborating on an MSC process in Mabeskraal. The single case of the Most Significant Change process might therefore be described as a snowball, convenience, volunteer sample.

A consequence of volunteer sampling was that another inclusion criterion was organisations being willing to invest time in reflection, unthreatened by talking about themselves, and unlikely to have anything to hide. A selector like this is likely to have had direct impact on the results. The experiences related in this study must be regarded as a best case scenario for CBOs. CBOs that are asked to participate, rather than volunteering, may agree to an evaluation but may be less forthcoming as participants. Organisations that are obliged to participate will be even more difficult to facilitate. This observation relates to concerns around ownership of evaluation raised in the discussion chapter.

3.6.2. Sample population

A sample is drawn from a defined sub-population, according to certain criteria for inclusion (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 41). The AIDS Consortium's members are individuals, groups or organisations that have an interest in accessing its services or participating in its events. The sample was drawn from those AIDS Consortium members that meet a set of entry requirements.

Around 160 Gauteng organisations that have participated in the AC's capacity building training courses were potential research participants for the Stories and Metaphor process. While overall membership of the AC is very open, there are selection criteria for these training courses, which were therefore also enjoyed by the research study. These include: active existence for at least one year, being registered or in the process of registration as an NPO , full-time organisational activity in community, and a relatively stable staff and leadership.

Affiliates of the AIDS Consortium

How can we learn and grow through reflecting on our organisations?

Opportunity
What are your stories of impact?
What does success mean for your organisation?
How do you see your contribution in the community?
What can you do to reach your organisation's full potential?

Organisations who would like to volunteer to participate will receive a 1-day facilitation session on your organisation's strengths and achievements.

It aims to be a reflection session that helps organisations to build their power from within.
We have space for about 6 organisations in the next few months

What is involved?
Between 3 and 10 active staff members or volunteers of your organisation, including Managers or Directors, to spend 1 day in a workshop, at your site.

What will you get out of it?
Training through experience on learning and organisation reflection.

Figure 8 *Flier distributed to AIDS Consortium trainee organisations to recruit volunteers into the study.*

It was the alumni of this training programme who constituted the population for this study.

The AC's trainees were invited to participate in the research study as a learning and reflection opportunity. The invitation was extended through a brief announcement and description of the study at the training venue, and through distribution of a leaflet (Figure 8). The invitation offered the opportunity for a facilitated day of organisational reflection. Organisations were asked to provide their time and the engaged participation of senior management and staff, up to a maximum of approximately 15 participants.

They were also asked to provide the use of their work site for the process. This is assumed to confer ownership and an atmosphere of organisation-centredness and

respect. It also made me, as facilitator, less dependent on participant travel and punctuality arrangements, giving me slightly greater control over start and end times, and encouraging organisation members to attend.

The AIDS Consortium provided valuable support in gathering the contact details and names of those organisations that wished to participate.

The MSC phase in North West Province emanated from the Stories and Metaphor process. Participating organisations were predefined by virtue of having been members of the partnership in the Mabeskraal Gender, Culture and HIV Programme. Their attendance was coordinated by the AIDS Consortium, and funded by Oxfam America. The Mabeskraal CBOs involved were AC members which had also completed its capacity building curriculum, and met the same criteria as those in the Gauteng study.

3.6.3.   Sample size

Qualitative sample size is more meaningfully visualised as volume, than number. This is because a qualitative sample is a product of both breadth and depth of study (Quinn-Patton, 2002, p. 227). There are no rules, statistical or otherwise, in deciding on qualitative sample size. Quinn-Patton (2002, p. 244) describes sample size decisions as depending on "*what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources*". Sample fullness is reached with a complete and satisfactory answer to the research problem and/or a cul de sac. For the purposes of this study, the sample size refers to the number of iterations of the process required until a plateau of learning or a natural concluding point is achieved.

3.6.3.1.   Gauteng Stories and Metaphor process

Six organisations volunteers for the Gauteng phase (Table 4). The iterations of the method with these organisations yielded insights and principles, and tested the method to the point of saturation. Although there was interest from additional organisations, the process was deemed sufficient. Due to the sensitive nature of these inward-looking evaluations, the identities of these organisations are not disclosed.

Table 4.   *Demographics of the sample of 6 methods iterations with Gauteng CBOs for the Stories and Metaphor phase*

Identifier	Core business	Location	Description	Participants	
				Women	Men
Case Study 1 (TT)	Home-Based Care and Vulnerable Children	Orange Farm (informal settlement)	Organisation housed in a shack. Lead by 5 managers. Staffed by 40 carers. All unpaid volunteers. Evidence of basic systems following training at AC, e.g. mission and vision, organogram and strategy displayed. Filing system exists.	8	1
Case Study 2 (DC) and	Home-Based Care	Meadow-lands (low income suburb of Soweto)	Offices shared on premises managed by JJ. Staff of 4 stipended or salaried members.	1	3
(JJ) Two organisations	Vulnerable Children		Large, established offices. More than 15 paid staff, some on market-related salaries. Volunteers on stipends. Several sources of funding and a budget exceeding R1 million. The Director's participation was interrupted.	4	1
Case Study 3 (QN)	Home-Based Care	Pimville (low income suburb of Soweto)	Access to premises at the church. 25 Volunteers and 5 managers. All on stipends.	4	1
Case Study 4 (DG)	Hospice, shelter and Home-Based Care	Pimville (low income suburb of Soweto)	Premises provided by a primary school. 25 volunteers and 8 managers. Several staff resident on premises. Salaries and stipends provided. Participants included Director, a Board Member, and most of the nursing staff.	11	2
Case Study 5 (BN)	gender awareness	Meadow-lands (low income, Soweto)	Premises provided by municipality, shared with various NGOs. 5 Staff, all unpaid volunteers.	1	2
Case Study 6 (DM)	Counseling chronically ill	Lawley (informal settlement)	Housed in a shack, with access to the shade clothed gathering area of the church. 3 managers and 8 carers, all unpaid volunteers.	10	1
			TOTAL	**39**	**11**

3.6.3.2. North West MSC

In the North West MSC phase, the organisations and participants were publicly engaged, and are acknowledged by name (Table 5). Three local CBOs from the programme partnership in Mabeskraal participated. Another CBO from a neighbouring community also provided team members. In addition, participants included members of Oxfam America, the AIDS Consortium and another two national NGOs.

Table 5. *Sample demographics of the North West Most Significant Change phase*

Repre-senting	Participating organisations or individuals	Core Business	Description of role in the research	Participants Women	Men
Local CBOS	Bacha ba Kopane**	Youth and substance abuse	Fieldworkers and local coordination	2	1
	Botho Jwa Rona Home Base Care**	Home-based care CBO from Mabeskraal	Fieldworker	1	0
	Botho Jwa Rona OVC**	CBO from Mabeskraal working with vulnerable children	Fieldworker	1	0
Neighbour-ing CBO	Pholo Modi wa Sechaba	CBO working with vulnerable children and home-based care	Fieldworkers	1	1
Local Authority	The office of the local traditional authority	Support to the office of Kgosi Mabe	Fieldworker and local coordination	1	0
4 CBOs, OF WHICH 3 LOCAL, PROVIDED 7 RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS, WITH ACTIVE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT BY A STAFF MEMBER OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S OFFICE					
National and international NGOs	Oxfam America	International NGO on human rights	Funding agency and coordination	2	0
	AIDS Consortium	National NGO and CBO umbrella agency.	Fieldworker and coordinators	3	1
	Sonke Gender Justice	National NGO Gender and human rights awareness and advocacy	Fieldworker	0	1
	Lovelife	National youth NGO	Fieldworker	1	0
1 INTERNATIONAL NGO FUNDING AND LOGISTICAL SUPPORT, A TOTAL OF 8 FIELD TEAM MEMBERS FROM NATIONAL NGOs.					
			TOTAL FIELD TEAM	**12**	**4**
Community interview respondents	Community members	Many representing interest groups such as CBOs, teachers, traditional leaders, religious leaders, ward councillors, health professionals	Stories of change interviews	57 stories	
			Story analysis focus groups	5 FGDs ±35 participants	
			Community feedback	±50 participants	
APPROXIMATE TOTAL PARTICIPANTS				**158**	

3.6.4. Case Studies

Mouton (2001) provides a brief and useful overview of the characteristics of Case Study research:

- It is useful for exploratory and descriptive questions

- It is inductive, without a pre-formed hypothesis, but with the guidance for boundaries of interest

- Data are analysed using induction and a grounded theory approach

- Its strengths include high construct validity, in-depth insight and strong rapport

- The main source of error is researcher bias

- Its main limitation is that results are non-generalisable and non-standardised[14].

The outline supports the application of a Case Study approach for this study.

A case is a unit of analysis. It has clear and specific boundaries. These are defined in the research approach and become the basis for purposeful sampling (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 447; Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The case parameters for the first phase of the study are defined as constituting a one-day evaluation process with the leaders and staff of an organisation. This phase of the study was considered complete when learning reached a natural conclusion.

The seventh case emerged from the action research analysis and learning from the first six, and took on a very different form. It constituted a far larger, extended MSC process, with 3 Mabeskraal CBOs, 3 supporting NGOs and a sample of community members. This seventh case was intended to test a different approach, contrasting methods, and a different set of respondents, towards answering the challenges of evaluating community impact that had arisen in the research by that point. Case study sampling acknowledges the purposeful selection of contrasting cases to show different perspectives in an issue (Creswell, 2007, p. 74).

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[14] With respect to the last of these points, however, evaluation is not, and need not be, generalisable between organisations. Its primary purpose is learning and developing effectiveness for each organsation. Where generalisation is important in this study is in terms of drawing out evaluation practice and principles that support uniqueness and learning in other organisations to which these might be applied.

As cases accumulate in an action research process, grounded data contributes to reasoning and analysis. This culminates in complimentary inductive and deductive reasoning. Using multiple sources of information, the cases are described against a set of themes as they emerged from the data. This sequence of events and the accumulation of learning are represented in Figure 9
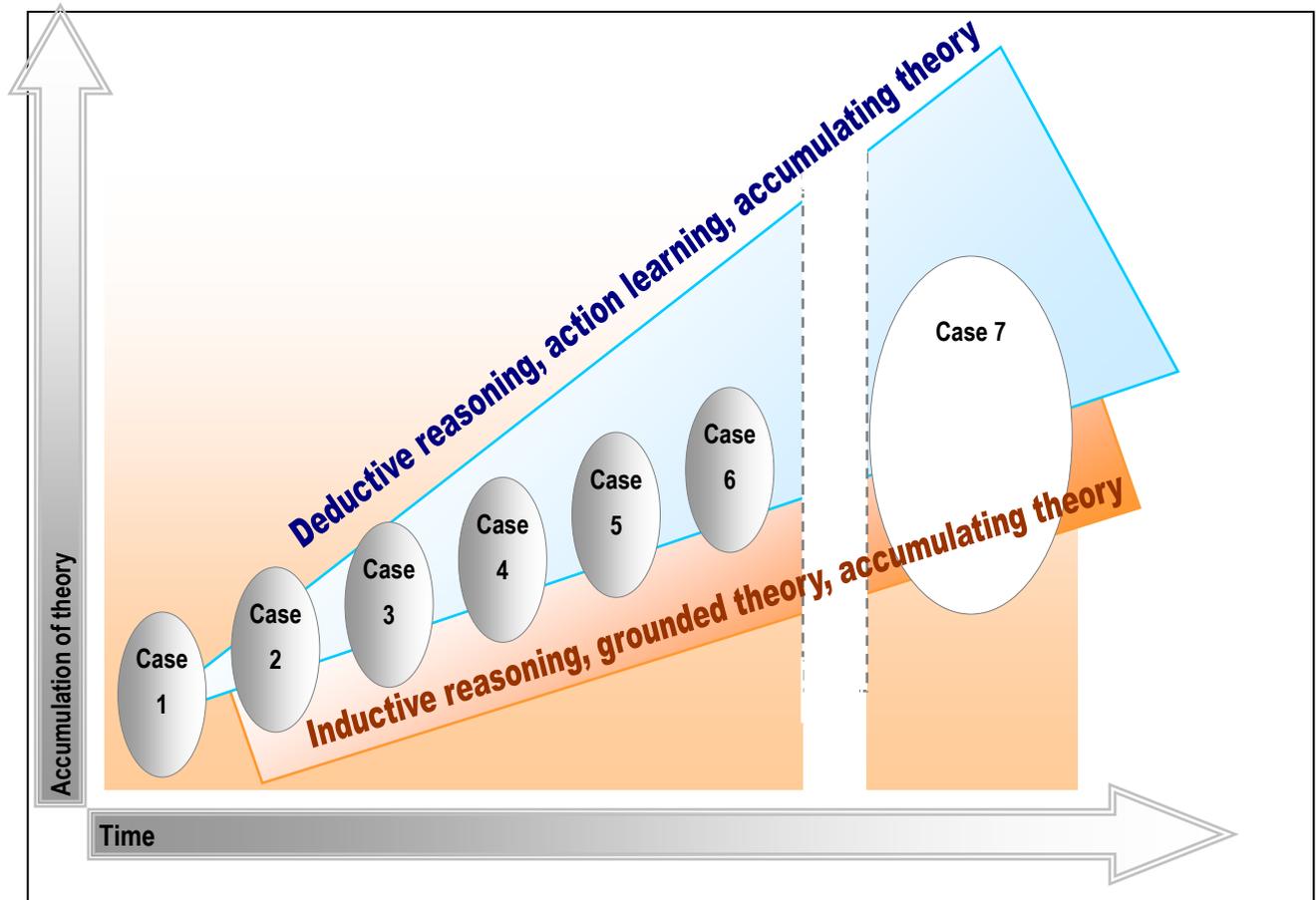
Figure 9 *Case studies in an iterative action learning process, drawing new grounded data into theory accumulation*

3.7   Research process

Data collection methods were based on principles of emergence, grounding, narrative study and utilisation-based evaluation. These began with a starting point of a basic methodology as an exploratory attempt at an alternative. This inception structure is briefly described below. The results chapter captures the evolution and learning that begin with this inception process.

The process steps themselves are loosely structured. They are all grounded and emergent, with latitude of interpretation and responsiveness to the needs of their client organisations.

Two styles of evaluation were applied for comparison and complement:

- **Gauteng Stories and Metaphor process**. Organisation-based and internally-focused, a narrative and metaphor facilitated processes. An iterative action learning approach with six participating organisations, each entailing a one-day facilitated learning process.

- **North West MSC process**. Community-based, externally focused, narrative research processes in a single, larger Case Study.

3.7.1. Gauteng: Stories and Metaphor

The base process included the following steps:

i) **Preparation of a grounded emergent evaluation process** and logistics communication with participant organisation.

ii) **Facilitation of an evaluation and organisational learning process with participants.** A learning and evaluation process was conducted using a loose outline. This took the form of a one-day organisation-centred learning and team reflection session, the exact format of which evolved between iterations. It is this methodological evolution, as well as the principles emanating from each organisation, that constitutes the main output.

iii) **Data recording.** Data, including process observations, were recorded using notes, flipchart exercises, photography and voice recording of sessions.

iv) **Participant reflection** and feedback during the closing session for each Case Study offered participants' impressions of the process.

v) **Personal reflection**. My own critical reflection on the process followed immediately after each interaction. This was captured through voice recorded reflection and systematic journaling.

In addition to reflecting on process and seeking out improvements to a facilitation design, there was the more important matter of reflecting on principles. Each iteration was a unique community experience, and each provided food for thought on the principles for developmental practice. These principles provide a more

broadly generalisable output on effective development practice captured in the results and discussion chapters.

vi) **Mentorship**. Action research, captured in the results and discussion chapters, is a team activity, and cannot be effectively conducted in isolation. The use of participant feedback was important in this regard. Also essential were a series of reflective conversations with peer mentors who were all experienced development practitioners, facilitators and CBO organisation development specialists (Appendix 1). A total of four mentorship sessions were provided, with four different mentors. Peer discussion and review was also provided through participation in seven development evaluation conference engagements during the course of study, both as presenter and attendee.

vii) **Learning and preparation of the next evaluation process** for application in the next iteration of the cycle. Together participant review, reflection and mentorship informed the redesigning of the evaluation system between each action learning cycle repetition.

viii) **Iterations (Returned to i for six cycles)**. The process from inception to learning was repeated until it reached a natural conclusion.

ix) **Closure**. In the 6th iteration of the Gauteng phase the flow of method and principles met a natural end point, and the lessons could then be drawn together for discussion and conclusions.

One of the major outcomes of the Gauteng phase was that the Story and Metaphor process had not satisfactorily addressed evaluation of outward-looking impact, although it had very effectively addressed the neglected area of inward-looking organisational responsibility. This lead into the MSC process in North West

x) **Stories of Most Significant Change**. The opportunity to partner with Oxfam America and the AC team in North West Province was gratefully accepted. The MSC process was implemented and analysed using a similar action research reflective process, to determine the process and principles for outward-looking evaluation.

3.7.2. North West: Stories of Most Significant Change

One of the key challenges in the Stories and Metaphor process was capturing service impacts and outcomes, as opposed to organisation development and learning outcomes. The principles of grounded, story-based, participatory methods had been upheld during

the first phase of fieldwork, and had been effective for inward-looking evaluation. The Case Studies thus far had not convincingly answered questions of community impact evaluation.

The Mabekraal partners were interested in understanding early outcomes of their efforts in stimulating communication of gender, culture and HIV.

The team was interested in a communicative, participatory evaluation process.

In valuable synergy, I was interested in a comparative method for a more outward-looking process that was grounded, emergent and systems oriented. The MSC approach was identified as achieving both sets of objectives.

The evaluation was conducted by community and staff members from the programmes' local and national partner organisations (Table 5). My role was that of trainer, mentor, facilitator and report collator. It was also, from the perspective of this PhD, that of process observer and action researcher. Oxfam America funded the process, and partner organisations released their staff for three weeks of intensive fieldwork.

While MSC is an established, published, acknowledged method, the approach has not been tested or adapted to the setting of rural development in Africa with CBOs, or around issues as sensitive as HIV and AIDS support. It is used in this study to engage the community perspective, enriching processes of Stories and Metaphor which focus on the organisations perspective.

The guidelines offered by Davies and Dart (2005) were adapted in a three week exercise in the North West Province village of Mabeskraal. The process on which the study was based included the following elements:

i) **Field team preparation**. One of the principles of MSC is that it should be implemented by community members themselves (Davies & Dart, 2005). With the leadership of Oxfam America and the AIDS Consortium, all of the organisations that had been participating in the North

DAVIES AND DART (2005) STEPS
STEP 1. Starting and raising interest
STEP 2. Defining the domains of change, and
STEP 3. Defining the reporting period
STEP 4. Collecting Significant Change stories
STEP 5. Selecting the most significant of the stories
STEP 6. Feeding back results of story selection
STEP 7. Verification of stories
STEP 10. Revising the system: recommendations
STEP 9. Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring
STEP 8. Quantification

West Gender, Culture and HIV programme were invited to participate in the evaluation process as a field team. Each organisation allocated one or more of its staff to an intensive three week training evaluation process.

ii) **Community preparation and sensitisation**. Kgosi Mabe, traditional leader of Mabeskraal, and firm supporter of the Gender, Culture and HIV Programme was consulted. He gave permission for the evaluation, and alerted community members to the upcoming interviews.

iii) **Training, learning and process design**. In two training sessions over 4 days, the field team of 14 was introduced to MSC and the required skills.

iv) **Field interviews**. The team was deployed in Mabeskraal with regular facilitated debriefing sessions, to collect Stories of Most Significant Change. A total of around 57 stories was collected.

v) **Community story analysis**. Through a process of attrition and discussion in focus groups, 10 stories of Most Significant Change were selected.

The focus group results were discussed among the research team, and conclusions of impact and themes were drawn. Four themes and several major areas of recommendation were highlighted

vi) **Community feedback and analysis**. Four stories were selected as being most significant within the thematic areas. These were related to a community meeting of around 50 participants. Responses from the audience elaborated on the significance of these accounts. The process provided a discussion around confirming and disconfirming stories and themes.

vii) **Closure and recommendations**. I drew the recommendations from the team discussion, analysis and community session into a project evaluation report (Konstant, 2009a).

viii) **Secondary analysis**. The purpose of this thesis is methodological review and meta-evaluation. My own reflection provided a final review of the appropriateness and potential of MSC in a CBO and community development context.

ix) **Steps not conducted in this process**. The Davies and Dart (2005) method allows for quantification of relevant criteria for impact that arise from the process. This step would be achievable for some of the themes and variables that arose, but was not implemented in this study.

The *content* results of the MSC process have been published and distributed, and are available online (Konstant, 2009a). My purpose here is to analyse the *method* as it was applied and adapted, and reflect on its strengths, weaknesses and potential as a contribution to alternative approaches to understanding impact in communities. This analysis has not been disseminated as yet.

3.8   Data recording

Data, reflection and collective conclusions were captured in several formats:

- Notes taken by the researcher

- Flipcharts prepared by participants and facilitator

- Notes from stories captured by the MSC field team during interviews

- Mind maps generated during analysis with MSC field team and organisation members

- Photographs and DVD

- Voice recorded interviews and facilitated sessions

- Voice recording of post-session personal reflection

- Notes from mentorship meetings

- Excel capture of the responses to the emailed questionnaire on emerging conclusions sent out to peer reviewers. This was part of the analytical reflective process, and is described below.

3.9   Data analysis

3.9.1.   Analysis in action research and constructivist grounded theory

While the distinction between data collection and analysis may be very clear in surveys or standardised tests, this separation is far less absolute in 'naturalistic inquiry' (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 436).

Data collection and analysis are continuous and synchronised (Fawcett, et al., 1994), such that the intervention evolves to produce the intended design. Patterns, themes and possibilities arise continuously in qualitative research. Emergence is a central force (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Analysis therefore may begin during fieldwork, and continue throughout the process of reporting, and into the pursuit of the threads that emanate after completion of the thesis and publications.

In addition to being unbounded by time and order, analytical insight is also drawn from many different sources, some of which may be unplanned and serendipitous. Insights are drawn into the core theme of grounded, data-centred analysis (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 436).

Analysis of these data followed the action learning cycle of reflecting on the process, extracting lessons, and designing and justifying an adjusted repetition of the action learning cycle (0). In this study, a great deal of the analysis took place in conversations with peers at conferences and workshops for development evaluators. Action research analysis is more about interrogating and making sense of the data, than the data itself revealing new 'truths' on a platter.

Reflexivity is essential to grounded analysis (Dey, 2007). This refers to documenting the critical steps towards reaching an (interim) conclusion.

ACTION / DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCES IN APPLYING ALTERNATIVE METHODOLOGIES

During the evaluation, what questions did I ask? Who participated?
How did participants respond? What style of probing was effective?
What were the verbal and non-verbal cues from participants?

PLANNING

What will be done differently for the next case study?
What process will be followed in the next iteration?
Describe the changes in the approach.
What process and principle guidelines in the methodology are emerging?

REFLECTION

How did the respondents react to the evaluation experience?
Were they enthusiastic or reluctant?
How did they express interest in learning?
Were there any epiphanies for them?
How did this lead to expressed intentions to work differently in the future?
What effects did the style of conversation have on participants?

LEARNING

What type of interaction produced the most convincing information on outcomes?
What type of interaction produced the most positive response from participants?
What new understanding do I have on alternative forms of evaluation?

Figure 10   *The Action Learning Cycle as applied in the non-empirical analysis for developing guidelines and principles for a more developmental evaluation approach.*

Source: Adapted from Taylor, et al., (1997)

Mentorship, participatory analysis and peer exchange are core sources of data interrogation and analysis. In order to achieve this independent interrogation emerging conclusions were sent to 50 professional working in M&E, facilitation and development, of whom 18 responded (Table 6, Appendix 1). The questionnaire template can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 6.   *Mentor and peer review demographics for action learning reflective data analysis*

	Where is the person employed in the industry					Primary interests with respect to this thesis			Gender		TOTAL
	Consultant	Donor sector	NGO sector	Public sector	Private Sector	Evaluation	Civil Society	Other	Female	Male	
Mentors	2	1	3			3	3		6		**6**
Questionnaire respondents	7		5	1	5	7	5	6	10	8	**18**
Conferences[15]	n/a					5	2		n/a		**7**

3.9.2.   Participant analysis

Action research assumes and requires that analysis and conclusions be drawn out through the research process with participant input supported by facilitation (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 224, 269). In both the Stories and Metaphor iterations and the MSC study, story and self-analysis by participants were central to the participatory process.

3.9.3.   Mentorship and peer review as collective analysis

Action research depends on and assumes a collective learning process. For an individual research student, this requires conscious manoeuvring. Sessions ended with participants' reflection and feedback. Additional perspectives were important, however, since I generally drew conclusion during personal reflection after each session (Table 6).

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[15] Details of contributions listed in the reference under Konstant or Konstant and Stanz; and in Appendix 1.

Mentorship - Conclusions and advice were exchanged for coffee with professionals associated with evaluation or civil society at regular intervals during the analysis process. They provided insight, questioning and interrogation of my emerging conclusions.

Questionnaire – As a concrete perspective began to emerge in my mind from the data, this was captured into a questionnaire which gave a series of logic steps and scenarios for experts in the field to comment on (Appendix 2). Participants were explicitly chosen to represent a range of perspectives, as anticipated, some that would hold divergent and sometimes directly opposing views from my own. Dey (2007) raises the value of divergent voices and rich presentation of debate.

Their input was coded using Atlas-ti, and served to enrich the thematic areas (axial codes) that emerged from the results. Together these themes are structured into the discussion chapter. Given that this questionnaire was essentially a discussion tool, rather than data per sé, their comments are integrated into the discussion chapter of this thesis in a series of discussion boxes. I agreed with some and not with others. All viewpoints are presented as a source of reflective material for the reader, and reminders of the perspectives in the debate for myself.

Conferencing and online publishing – The national and international evaluation and civil society development communities have a vibrant and active circuit of professional sharing, learning and debate (Appendix 1). I attended as many of these events as was feasible during the data inception, collection and analysis phases of this study. I presented emergent thinking at each of these events, and received the questions and feedback from audiences. The content of parallel research and thinking of colleagues in the field was also highly informative at these events.

In addition, the content of the MSC study (Konstant, 2009a) and emerging conclusions on CBO systems and participation (Konstant and Stanz, 2009a) were published online for exposure to debate. These lead to various conversations with other professionals engaged in similar work.

3.9.4. Case Study analysis

Case studies are encapsulated into case records. These are thorough, detailed and faithful condensations of the case data (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 449). The structuring of these case records depends on the purpose of the study. In this study case records are structured to reflect the iterative action research process of observing, reflecting, learning and intent in order to guide the reader through the accumulation of learning

and analysis which lead to the study's conclusions. The results are presented as an opportunity for the reader to accompany the researcher in an unfolding learning and reflection process.

3.9.5. Criteria for analysis

"It all depends on the criteria. Judging quality requires criteria." (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 542; Mullen, 1994). A process may be analysed in terms of cost-benefit, consistency, risk, negative or positive impacts, participant experience, or a possibly endless list of lenses. The first step in the analysis process is therefore to isolate the basic criteria against which data are to be synthesised.

For action research and grounded methods this is an iterative process, and a series of evolving criteria enables the data to be viewed from increasingly relevant perspectives, similar to zooming in and focusing a photograph.

3.9.6. Deductive and inductive analysis

Deductive analysis involves the testing of a predefined concept or hypothesis. Inductive analysis begins from a loosely structured framework and considers conclusions from data as they emerge (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 119). Researchers in a deductive approach select their variables in advance. Inductive research requires that we identify variables as they arise from the data (Babbie, 2005, p. 90). In their purest forms, hypothesis testing is an example of deductive analysis, while pure grounded theory is inductive (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

In the case of methodological design the initial point of departure is a practical problem or methodological concern, rather than a theory or hypothesis for testing (Thomas & Rothman, 1994). In a process of grounded theory development induction and deduction alternate in an action research cycle (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 67). New applications are attempted with a minimum of preconceptions (induction). The lessons from this process are applied in order to test some of the emerging ideas (deduction). The next iteration, although it is in part a test, also requires conscious openness to unconceived theory emanating from experience (induction) Kelly (1999, p. 414) (Figure 9).

3.9.7. Coding, themes and patterns

Repetition is the essence of pattern (Kelly, 1999, p. 414). We identify a structure when we see it occurring in slightly different forms, from different perspectives, through different data collection experiences. By describing a theme as we see it repeated, the pattern becomes more concrete and more strongly defined. This can be achieved

through a series of defined steps focusing on codes and groups of codes, in an attempt to categorise and simplify the data, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (Dey, 2004). Alternatively, where Glaser remained a proponent, data can continue to enrich and broaden our understanding in increasing complexity and reality. Most broadly, Dey (2007) describes codes or categories as theoretical, explanatory and metaphorical rather than rule-bound.

The analysis in this research draws on both styles. Several parallel themes (or codes), are identified and elaborated though repetition of a learning cycle in a form of sequential triangulation. Every line of data or every interchange in a process is analysed for new meaning and fresh themes (Dey, 2004). This analysis process is clearly reflected by the use of icons in the results chapter.

It is probably artificial to attempt to describe the process of cumulatively building a Theory of Change using grounded theory coding terminology, although certain parallels are possible. Cumulative open coding forms the essence of analysis, and looks at the unfolding experience line-by-line, or exchange-by-exchange. Axial coding accumulates in the progression of ideas along the research timeline, rather than during a single analytical event of a critical mass of data, at one point in time. Selective coding might be regarded as the process by which the emerging theories from the data meet the ontology of the study, to produce a compatible philosophy for change. This cumulative nature of emergent, action research findings is clearly illustrated in the analysis shown in the results chapters below. While I loosely refer to coding as a form of simple action analysis, the narrative of exploration is far more meaningful as a lens for analysis (Dey, 2007).

As a methodological study the analysis of this study was an unfolding and incremental process, in which each iteration contributed to a slightly different incarnation of method. As such, repetitions were not seen as equivalent members of a sample. There were successive points in the crystallisation of ideas, insights and conclusions.

While the content could, and may yet, be analysed using qualitative data analysis software, the methodology development process was not conductive to software- based analysis. Each observation contributed to testing, confirming and disconfirming the process.

Codes and themes did emerge in the elucidation of principles. These evaluation principle themes are highlighted in the results chapter as they emerge from observation, and form the core content of the discussion chapter that follows.

In an action research process, the patterns are the basis of an evolving theory. Interpretation and pattern interrogation follow a documented, disciplined action learning cycle of description, reflection, learning and adjustment. These data types are presented in a loosely followed structure that reflects the action research cycle for method development (0). Icons are given to each of the phases of this action learning cycle, with the following icon interpretation:

- *Action or description*: *the process that was followed, observations on the events and interactions.*

- *Reflection*: *The implications and interpretation of the experience.*

- *Learning*: *Where relevant, the new insights and conclusions that emerged from this particular interaction.*

- *Planning* *of two possible forms: i) decisions for action in the next iteration of the action learning cycle, i.e. in the next Case Study'; and ii) emerging conclusions, recommendations and principles for developmental evaluation*

Another icon used in the results chapter highlights major themes that are carried into the discussion and conclusions chapters that follow. This icon is used to indicate where the action, reflection, learning and planning sequence culminates in conclusions or issues for deeper interpretation.

3.10   Dissemination and Proceduralisation

The final step in methods design and development is that of institutionalising or proceduralising new methods and principles into mainstream practice (Thomas, 1994, p. 289). This is the social, sectoral or political confrontation stage of critical change research. It is essential to achieving critical change outcomes. In the course of this study, the problem statements and emerging results were placed into the public evaluation and development domain through six conference presentations (Konstant, 2007, 2008, 2009b; Konstant & Stanz 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) and a training workshop on action learning. The presentations and supporting material to these events, as well as the written publication for Konstant (2009a) are provided on a CD attached to this thesis (Appendix).

In addition, parts of this thesis that support a piece on the Paris Declaration on AID effectiveness in relation to CBO evaluation were placed into the public domain as an invitation for comment (Konstant & Stanz 2009a). The MSC booklet was distributed and

placed online by Oxfam America (Konstant 2009a). All of these have lead to opportunities for ongoing discussions with colleagues in contribution to a community of practice around these themes, which has had great value in forming my own ideas.

During these exchanges it was particularly interesting to observe other practitioners responding similarly to concerns around non-development evaluation. The groundswell of concern since the 1990s (Chambers, 1995), continues to confront the inadequacies of convention (Dart, 2009; Rogers, 2009). Despite this collective effort, proceduralisation of change, like all advocacy work is slow, largely unrewarding, but ultimately, with perseverance, transformative.

3.11 Ensuring quality

3.11.1. Rigour and trustworthiness

Rigour asks that any 'truth claim or knowledge claim' be substantiated: "If I say that this is true, how do I know it is true?" Academia holds itself responsible for truth claims that are fair and for its role in society as influencing social transformation through such claims (McNiff, 2002). It also acknowledges however, that truth is an elusive state, which is never reached but which we attempt to approach more closely with each claim (Quinn Patton 2002, p. 542).

Qualitative data analysis is based on principles, consciousness and approach. Structures, methods and rigid guidelines are less relevant. An important principle in qualitative analysis is that the researcher resists seeking out the conclusions she has imagined in the data, either biasing the analysis, or excluding other reasonable conclusions (Kelly, 1999, p. 411). A related principle is that the researcher may ask questions, but the data should provide the answers. However obvious this may seem, the temptation exists to imagine answers into the data which seem elegant and logical. Rigorous interrogation of conclusions must be sensitive to this temptation.

Trustworthiness in grounded theory has been raised as a concern, since Case Studies are selected rather than randomly sampled, and each informs the data from a unique, evolving perspective. Although divided into several stages, with representation by a variety of participants, the sample size for an action research process is actually only 'one' (Dey, 2004). It is one evolving, unreplicated unfolding process of method development.

Although it is not replicated, or perhaps even replicable, it is not untriangulated or non-rigorous. Action research uses iterative cycles of testing and triangulating emerging

claims, and of observing knowledge and theory in different contexts to provide this rigour. It asks that claims also be reflected with a circle of peers and mentors and that the trustworthiness of the logical arguments be tested.

Important in all research, including grounded and exploratory research, is the rigour of interrogating data for disconfirming evidence, as well as confirming evidence (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 239). It is important to stand back from assumptions in each action learning iteration, and consider the evidence that disconfirms our emerging suspicions.

Table 7 outlines the strategies for optimising trustworthiness in this study.

Table 7.   *Measures in this study for optimising Internal and external trustworthiness.*

INTERNAL TRUSTWORTHINESS		
Conceptual / Theoretical trustworthiness	Do we trust the research framework?	This study is concerned with applying grounded theory into a context where positivist theory tends to dominate. Theories of grounded research, action learning and process-use are well documented, and accepted as being scientifically trustworthy.
Operational / Measurement trustworthiness	Do the chosen measures reflect reality?	Several different processes of triangulation have been applied. Action research is designed as a process of repeated confirmation and theory interrogation. It also acknowledges, however, than truth claims are hemmed by context, approach and human variables. *"Truth? … Truth is like the Buddha. When met on the road it should be killed. … Your confusion is simple. To 'interpret' and to 'state truths' are two quite different things." …Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 542*
Data-Collection / Reliability	Will research participants say what they really believe to be true?	Every attempt was made to prevent participants from feeling encouraged to manipulate their participation. Participation in the study held only the advantages of organisation learning and reflection. Other motivations were perhaps the natural politeness and warmth of community members. The MSC team and I had to be sensitive to influencing what respondents said by conveying our own views. This was challenging for para-researchers, and is discussed in the results chapter.
Analysis and interpretation / inferential trustworthiness	Does my conclusion emerge with trustworthiness from the data?	Researcher preconception, bias and imagination can draw a great deal from the data that might not, in reality, be there. In exploratory research the development of theory requires leaps of interpretation and experimentation, which the data bear out. Insights, principles and method were drawn from the data, and were tested for fantasy with mentors and peer reviewers, as well as through the iterations of the action learning cycle. It is likely, even inevitable, that another researcher might have drawn different conclusion from similar experiences. In terms of distilling insights, principles and method I don't doubt that there is far more to learn from these experiences than I have learned, and that other different conclusions are also legitimate. Equally, the conclusions drawn are based on an interpretation that could well be contested and debated by those who approach these matters from different perspectives or with different values or assumptions. Ontology meets interpretation to create the debate and tensions which range across development evaluation circles.

EXTERNAL TRUSTWORTHINESS		
Are my findings representative outside of my sample, and generalisable in a broader population?		The outcome of this study includes a well-reasoned principle and method contribution to the international debate on evaluation, especially for CBOs, but also for the general development context. As critical change research, it is intended that the principles, particularly, and the methods where relevant, be applied in situations where they would constitute an improvement to practice. Exploratory studies are concerned with stimulating debate, offering fresh perspectives, and contributing insights that the broader population may or may not draw on.

Source: Adapted from Mouton & Marais (1990, p. 67)

3.11.2. Boundaries, challenges and possible sources of error

Several sources of limitation, bias and error were identified for awareness at the outset of this study:

BIAS - The risk that the researcher's preconceptions influence the results. Exploratory research, grounded theory and critical change research ask the researcher to be open, aware and sensitive to new ideas and new interpretations. Preconceptions must be questioned, and the process must be porous to insights that might not be obvious, or even palatable. Every research process emerges in response to an observed perspective or situation, about which the researcher is likely to have opinions, impressions and beliefs. In exploratory, qualitative research, objectivity is defined by confronting these assumptions as opposed to denying their existence.

ASSUMPTIONS - The risk that a new evaluation method may be no more effective if the basic assumptions of funders and CBOs do not change. The root differences between traditional predictive evaluation system and grounded evaluation lie in assumptions about development and power. A new methodology applied with the old power mindset is likely to be equally flawed. For this reason, the principles provided in this study, and emerging in the wider development debate, are even more relevant than method and process.

EFFECTIVE EVALUATION - The risk that the emerging method will not be able to attribute a causal link between the efforts of CBOs and the outcomes of community development. All evaluation studies face the challenge of establishing causal links: to what extent did *this* CBO help, in the context of other interventions, negative and positive forces, and the life situations of individual clients? Beyond direct and clear links drawn by the respondents where a causal link might be obvious, an approach around "probable partial cause" is assumed. The methodology is based on the principle that efforts of CBOs make a contribution to outcomes, rather than causal attribution, where

this seems reasonable. In complex dynamic systems, assumptions of direct cause and effect are likely to be delusional (McAdam, 2008).

DETERMINISTIC - The risk that applying evaluation as intervention (utilisation-based) produces biased and deterministic results. Do we get the results we plan for? It is accepted in critical theory and process-use thinking that the intent behind research impacts on the results. Awareness of these assumptions and conscious reflection is needed in confronting these biases and qualifying conclusions. Peer review adds greatly to running a gauntlet of proving oneself right, and the inclusion of divergent views in the discussion chapter keeps the debate purposefully unresolved.

PARTICIPATORY - The chicken and egg of participatory method development. Ironically, apart from relatively little reflective input from the organisations sampled as participants, the process of developing new participatory methodology is not particularly participatory in this approach. Other relevant stakeholders in methods development include donor agencies and CBO networks (Fawcett, 1994). Consultation with these groups is limited to exposure through various conference engagements, which are attended by all stakeholders and selection of a range of stakeholders as questionnaire participants (Table 6). These conversations should continue to be part of the dissemination and proceduralisation of improving approaches.

LANGUAGE – As a consequence of my own linguistic limits, the risk of loss of content and meaning through interpretation into English, or communication in English by non-native speakers - Unfortunately I do not speak the mother tongues of the great majority of the respondents. In my experience of using interpreters, the loss of information has been considerable, and the deviation between the original question and the final answer has been frustrating. Furthermore, ethics and confidentiality become an issue where an additional external person participates in these conversations.

This was a weakness in the Stories and Metaphor process, where a strongly verbal experience would have been far more powerful had participants been communicating in their mother tongue. They generously agreed to the sessions being conducted in English, which was no doubt detrimental to the content, but effectively supported the process.

Language was also a challenge in the MSC process, but for different reasons. Many of the field team offered the advantage of being fluent in Setswana. For some, however, their fluency and literacy for translation into written English was limited, although they were all excellent English speakers. Again a lack of linguistic ability on my part meant that a great deal of content data was lost in the capture and translation process.

3.11.3. Ethics

The matter of ethics permeates every aspect of this research. It is set in a critical change paradigm, levelling criticism at conventional evaluation approaches with regard to their developmental ethics. Ethical considerations are at the heart of the ontology of this study.

The research problem asserts that conventional, linear, predictive, highly structured, outsider-driven, power imbalanced evaluation needs to be revised. The reasons: that these practices dilute power, distort development, undermine self realisation and intensify inequitable power distribution (Bebbington, 1997; Miraftab, 1997; Lewis & Sobhan, 1999; Hailey, 2000; Jaime Joseph, 2000; Ebrahim, 2003; Bornstein, 2006a; Kilby, 2006). The essence of this argument is that conventional practices are not only ineffective from a data quality perspective, but unethical from a development perspective.

A critical change paradigm recognises evaluation as intervention (Quinn-Patton, 2002, p. 405). In acknowledging this we also need to recognise the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of that situation, and our own limitations. The discussion below talks about the ethical imperative of an evaluator to be a constructive organisational development practitioner. This does not, however, imply that a facilitator is a counsellor, an industrial relations broker or a lawyer (Quinn-Patton, 2002, p. 405). The judgement of boundaries, rights and responsibilities in an evaluation intervention is a central component to ethics.

In attempting to find alternatives, participatory community-based research was undertaken. This has compelling ethical considerations, which are outlined in detail in Table 8. These ethical guidelines were discussed and agreed by the research team members for the MSC process.

Table 8. *Ethics Issues Checklist*

Ethics issue	Approach in the Gauteng Stories and Metaphor process	Approach in the North West MSC process
Explain the purpose	The volunteer flier (Figure 8) outlined the purpose of the process, although this was usually limited to the Director. Session opening and contracting provided the purpose to all participants.	Field workers were trained to explain the purpose of interviews.
Promises and reciprocity	Apart from a learning day itself, no other incentives were offered. It was made clear during contracting at the opening of each session that the issues of the organisation remain theirs to resolve. Even notes from the process were the responsibility of the organisations. The AIDS Consortium will receive a copy of the thesis, and is branded in all except the most controversial conference presentations.	In explaining the purpose it was clear that learning about gender, culture and HIV was for communal good, and that there should be no individual expectations. The participants received copies of the booklet printed from this process through Oxfam America.
Risk Assessment	The organisational risk in self-evaluation is considerable. There is potential for escalation of conflict or internal fracture. A facilitator is responsible for holding this risk well, and constructively managing the process. (See the results and discussion chapters for experiences in this regard.)	Risks to breaches of confidentiality in public interviews, using amateur researchers, with community connections were considerable. Field workers were trained and mentored in mitigation of this concern. (See the results and discussion chapters for experiences in this regard.)
Confidentiality	The identities or individuals and organisations are concealed in this thesis, given the sensitivity of organisational development engagement. Group process, however, are not locally confidential. This was clear to participants, and they were encouraged to share only where they felt comfortable. Where there was engagement with the public, all respondents were anonymous. (See the results and discussion chapters for experiences in this regard.)	The identities of all community respondents were kept anonymous. (See the results and discussion chapters for experiences in this regard.)
Data access and ownership	The thesis will be provided to the AIDS Consortium, as well as any articles and presentations emanating from this study. All original work has been left with the CBOs, and recorded digitally for my purposes.	The Oxfam America publication is in the public domain. Copies of the booklet have been distributed in Mabeskraal. It is nevertheless unlikely that many of those who participate as interviewees or focus group members will see the product.
Interviewer mental health	I will engage with mentors at intervals during the process for regular debriefing.	It was my role as team leader to hold the emotional state of the team. (Interviewers found the process difficult in many respects, not least in terms of team relations. Several coaching sessions were held with individual team members, and the final session was an organisational and team debrief.)

Ethics issue	Approach in the Gauteng Stories and Metaphor process	Approach in the North West MSC process
Informed consent	Organisations were sampled through voluntary *opt-in.* CBOs were invited to contact me if they were interested in participating. Organisations and staff were volunteered by their Directors. Permission for the evaluation, and a description of process was then repeated for all participants at the start of each session, with assurance that they were not obliged to participate in any process with which they felt uncomfortable. (In one organisation where participants expressed dissatisfaction at having been volunteered, the option to cancel the session was offered without hard feelings or obligation).	Participants were approached and invited to be interviewed, Respondents were given the clear choice to be interviewed or not. At any point they had the option of halting the process. (Given sensitivities around HIV, interview consent was not universal. Several of those approached firmly declined. Focus groups also dispersed at their own convenience.)
Advice for the evaluator	Regular mentorship, conference exchange and the peer review questionnaire provided external perspectives and advice	Oxfam America, the AIDS Consortium and a personal mentor were available to provide advice. (Their coaching was greatly appreciated particularly around team management issues).
Data collection boundaries (How hard will	I probably don't push hard enough. My normal limits are very participant-led, and rely more on reflective, rolling questions than on anything resembling interrogation.	Interviewers were trained in a series of "stepping stone" questions to reach a story of change. (The relatively low proportion of interviews that produced a concrete story of change suggests that they did not push hard at all).
Children	n/a	Children under 18 were not interviewed through group discussion or confidential essay writing, in the formal setting of school or after school educational facilities.

Checklist drawn from Quinn-Patton (2002, p. 408)

Despite these policies and precautions, ethical issues in evaluation, HIV and qualitative research are difficult to predict and control (Quinn-Patton, 2002, p. 407). Experiences around ethics are raised in the results, discussion and conclusion chapters below.

3.12 Conclusion to the methods chapter

The methods chapter has outlined a grounded, action learning based approach. It has clarified the nested layers of data and experience that constitute this study. It has then outlined the setting and samples for two major research processes: Gauteng Stories and Metaphor and North West MSC. A brief overview of the starting point for these two

evaluation interventions is applied. The evolution of the two approaches in practice, and the lessons that arose from them, are the subject for the results chapter that follows. These are presented as a narrative account of the action research process of experience, analysis and conclusion.