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Method

Every group is like all other groups in some respects, like some - perhaps even most - groups in some respects, and like no groups in other respects. (Cissna, 1984 in Gildenhuys, 1989, p. 1)

2.1   Introduction

As discussed in chapter 1, this research project set out to explore the forces involved in being a member of a small group. Embedded in this stated purpose of the research is also the implicit objective of either choosing or developing a research methodology that would enable me, as the researcher, to realise the main purpose of the research (Hofstee, 2006; Babbie& Mouton, 2001).

For the purposes of this dissertation the decision was made to represent the research methodology that was followed not as a predesigned process that was merely applied to the research problem, but as a process that grew and developed as the research unfolded. The reason for this decision was, firstly, to provide a more accurate and honest account of the entire research process, but also to provide an insight into the continuous critical reflection that formed part of the research process. It is hoped that this will not only allow more insight into the actual research process that was followed, but that it will also deepen the understanding of the way in which the basic research design (grounded theory) can be adapted and modified to suit the unique requirements of a specific research project.

One disadvantage of representing the method as a "research-design-in-progress", rather than as a pre-developed research design, is the difficulty of structuring this chapter in such a way that it did not become either confusing or cumbersome. However, this difficulty was overcome by structuring the chapter moreorless chronologically in order to illustrate the way in which the design unfolded over time. The chapter will commence with a meta-theoretical discussion of the ontological and epistemological position of the research. Constructivist grounded theory will then be

discussed as the basis on which the research design was developed. The way in which constructivist grounded theory was adapted and operationalised as the research design for this specific research project is discussed in two parts, namely, the initial adaptation and the revised adaptation. The initial adaptation, how it was applied as well as its shortcomings with regards to data analysis, forms part of this chapter, while the revised adaptation and application is discussed in chapter 5. The main difference between the initial and the revised research designs is the way in which the data analysis was conducted. After the need for a revised methodology for the data analysis has been explained, this chapter ends with a summary and conclusion that will enable the dissertation to proceed to chapters 3 and 4. In chapters 3 and 4, the theoretical lens is developed that is applied in chapter 5. In addition, issues pertaining to the quality of the research and the ethical considerations that formed part of this research study is dealt with in chapter 5.

The schema below provides an outline of the way in which the discussion of the research method has been structured:
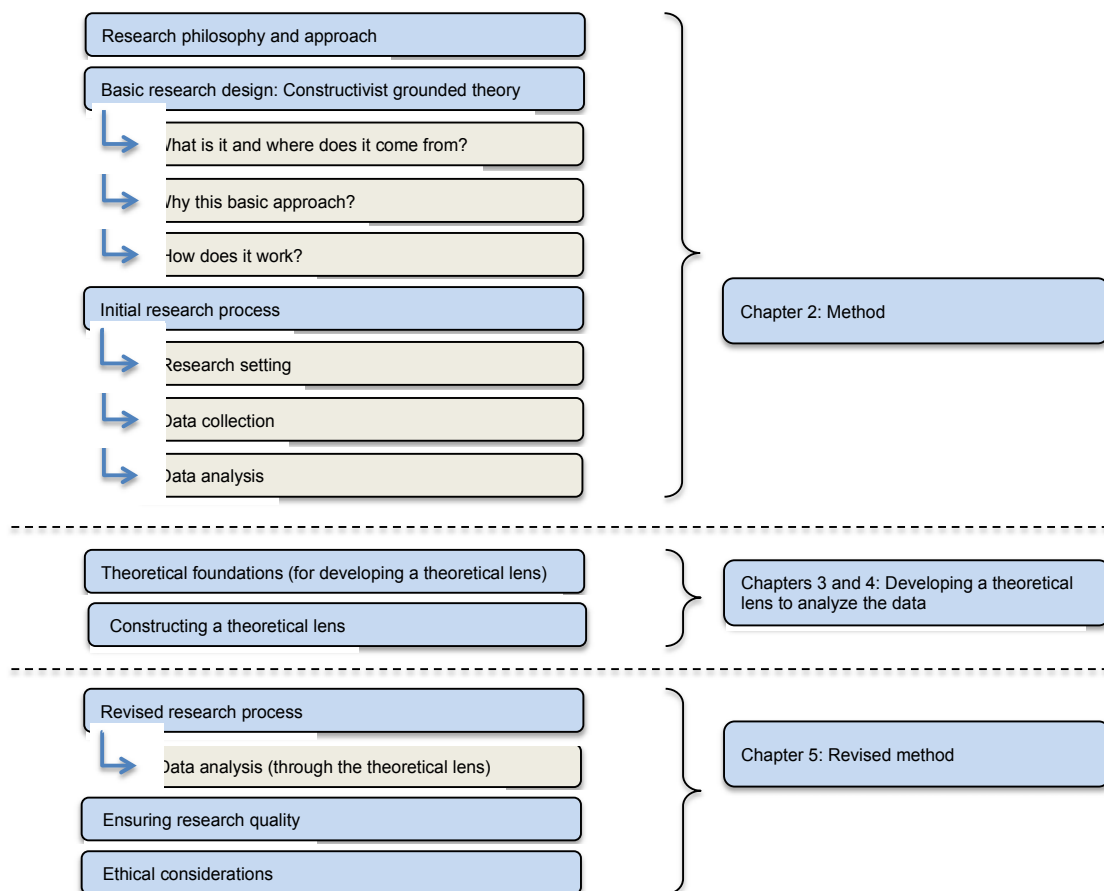
Figure 2.1: Outline of discussion on research methodology

2.2 Research philosophy and approach

2.2.1 Basic scientific beliefs

One's basic scientific beliefs are central to any social research project. In other words, what I believe about knowledge and reality will, undoubtedly, influence the kind of research questions I will ask as well as the way in which I will endeavour to answer them (Hofstee, 2006).

If, for example, I believe that there exists an external and objective reality and that the task of science is to uncover and explain that reality − as in the case of logical positivism − this will have a definite impact on the way in which I view my work as a researcher (Human, 2004). Firstly, it will be incumbent on me to assume the position of the objective researcher in order to ensure that my personal biases do not interfere with the value of my judgements. Secondly, I will derive much of my motivation from my ambition to discover more about how people work with such knowledge holding true regardless of time and place. Consequently, it will be essential that I pay meticulous attention to the variables operating in my research data as I will have to be able to justify and quantify my findings if they are to be reliable in all other contexts. In addition, I will have to report my research process and findings in such a way that it will be possible for any other scientist to repeat my research project and to come up with similar results, if my work was of an acceptable quality (Babbie& Mouton, 2001; Mouton, 2001). Logical positivism, which was first espoused by Comte,took its cue from the natural sciences and embarked on proving that it is possible for the social sciences to uncover rigorous, valid and true knowledge about the social world in very much the same way as the natural sciences uncover knowledge about the natural world(Babbie& Mouton, 2001).

However, during the mid-twentieth century, social scientists grew increasingly disenchanted with the positivist approach, thus opening the way for the rise of the phenomenologicalapproach[2] (Babbie& Mouton, 2001; Human 2004). The main reason for this move away from positivism was a growing unease with the assumption that it is possible to study both social phenomena and human behaviour in much the same way

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[2] Earl Babbie and Johan Mouton classify all qualitative research under the broad philosophical umbrella of the phenomenological approach. Of course, there are several qualitative methods that differ from phenomenology as a research method, although many of them do share the philosophical foundations of phenomenology.

as it is possible to study natural phenomena. The notion that people are different than animals in terms of emotions, free will and intellect gave way to a research paradigm that regarded people's perceptions, fears, aspirations and emotions in a serious light. However, the view that knowledge of the social world is something to which it is possible to gain access by taking the internal realities of peopleseriously implies that specific research strategies must be employed in order to gain an understanding of reality as experienced by individuals. Accordingly, where positivism searches for the truth "out there", phenomenology searches for the truth "in there" (Human, 2004). However, both of these approaches take for granted that the truth exists and that it is possible to discover the truth.

In reaction to the modernist ideals of discovering knowledge and, thus, "contribut(ing) to the making of a better world" (Seidman, in Babbie & Mouton,2001, p. 42), a whole range of positions and research methods arose under the broad umbrella of postmodernism. Postmodernism rejects any attempt at either discovering or uncovering "The Truth" with postmodernists asking "Whose truth?" According to postmodern thinking, truth is contextual and relative in nature. This clearly makes it impossible (or, at least, highly unlikely) for social scientists to make any claims about absolute truth. Accordingly, social reality is believed to be constructed while scientific knowledge is regarded as merely a construct of scientific enquiry. Thus, if I were toconductresearch from a postmodern position, I would have to admit that, as a researcher, I exercise some influence on the research process. I would also have to consider that whatever I find in the specific context in which my research is situated provides some indication about the way in which reality is being constructed within that context, but not about the reality in any other social context. Furthermore, postmodernism questions the power-relations in the construction of scientific knowledge. The question "Whose truth?" not only refers to the fact that what is true here might not be true there, but it also refers to the fact that knowledge is often validated by virtue of legitimate scientific methods, schools and authorities to the exclusion, and, often,at the expense, of those voices, discourses, methods, people, not regarded as legitimate (Human, 2004).

Accordingly, on the one hand, there are the quantitative and qualitative research approaches that flow from a modernist paradigm and, on the other, there are those − mostly qualitative − approaches that flow from the postmodernist paradigm, with the former emphasising the search for an existing truth (whether the truth is perceived as existing external to human beings and, thus,either yet to be discovered or else inside

people and yet to be uncovered) and the latter promoting the relativity and contextuality of truth as a social construct. [3] There are, however, disadvantages to both these approaches that this study will have to take into account – both in terms of the broad research topic (groups) and the specific objectives of this research study.

2.2.2   Considering the research topic and objectives

The broad topic encompassing this research project is that of groups. However, the problem arises that we are all members of various groups (Dalal,1998) and this, in turn, means that, as the researcher, I am faced with a dilemma − I am part of that which I wish to study. Accordingly, in view of the fact that I am always a member of groups myself, it is impossible for me to assume the position of the objective, external observer, seeking to discover ultimate truths about groups. However, there are two possible arguments that may contradict this statement. In terms of the first argument,the fact that I am always a member of groups does not automatically mean that I am a member of the specific group that I want to study and, this, in turn, can still enable me to assume an objective, external position from which to make truth claims about groups. The second argument pertains to the fact that, although I am always a group member,this need not necessarily constitute a stumbling block, but rather an opportunity to gain an even deeper understanding of groups. Both these arguments assume that there are general truths about groups and that it is possible either to discover (as in argument 1) or to uncover(as in argument 2) these truths. In addition, in order to qualify as "knowledge",it is essential that these truths are generalisable to different contexts.

With regard to the first argument, it must be remembered that the fact that the researcher is not a member of the group to be researched does not automatically imply objectivity. Even if the researcher sits apart from the group and watches the group interactions on a video, the researcher still needs to analyse and make sense of the data that emerge. It is impossible for this sense-making and analysis to be completely objective as the researcher is a subjective human being, with a history of group experiences that will, consciously or sub-consciously, influence the

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[3] A third popular research paradigm is that of Karl Marx's critical theory, which emphasises the social justice that needs to be brought about by the particular research. This paradigm is not so much interested in whether knowledge is to be discovered, uncovered or constructed, but in whether the knowledge has any direct and significant impact on rectifying the social order. This approach is usually used in studies with a strong political slant, which is not the case in this research.

thoughtprocesses involved in sifting, analysing and interpreting the data. It is, thus, impossible (or, at least, highly unlikely) to make objective, general truth claims about a phenomenon that one is part of oneself. Secondly, the fact that I am part of groups does not mean that my insiderstatus will ensure deep truths about groups. Whereas the first argument favoured the discovery of external truths, the second favours the internal truths about groups that should be uncovered. However, the problem arises as to how I would ever be able to prove that my internal realisations about a group are true representations about what actually took place in the group? It is, of course, possible to conduct in-depth interviews with group members and to search for trends and discrepancies, but would such interviews really uncover the truth about what happened in the group? In addition, would it be possible to extrapolate this truth to other groups in other settings? Whether one perceives the researcher as objective or subjective, and whether one sees the truth as existing outside of the group or inside the group members, as long as one views reality as fixed and the task of the researcher as having either to discover or uncover reality, one encounters difficulties when working in the field of groups. These difficulties are not only in terms of method (trying to ensure objectivity or trying to make total sense of subjectivity), but also with regard to truth claims – are we really able to claim that what we have discovered here, at this time, in this place, and under these conditions is applicable to all other groups, regardless of context? (Popper& Schilpp, 1974).

If it is the case that research in the field of groups should not hope to make absolute truth claims in the modernist fashion, then what is there to aim for? The postmodernist answer would be that there is no absolute truth and that knowledge can be regarded as such within a specific contextonly (Vaillancourt Rosenau, 1992). The problem, research-wise, is that a purely postmodern perspective limits knowledge to the group under investigation, and this leaves a relativism that renders attempts at accruing general knowledge about groups futile (Van Huyssteen, 1990).

This brings me to the meta-theoretical dilemma facing this research study: I am working with a phenomenon that can never be fully understood and this, in turn, renders a purely modernist pursuit − searching for absolutes − impossible. On the other hand, a purely relativist (or post-modern) pursuit will not allow any statements beyond the specific groups with which I am dealing empirically and, even then, such a paradigm would not allow me to make any certain claims about what had happened in the group. Nevertheless, in order to realise the purpose of this research study, I need to be able to allow both for the fact that I will never fully understand and for the fact

that there is a need for sufficient understanding to enable group members to use this understanding in order to reflect upon their membership of groups (Popper& Schilpp, 1974). Accordingly, a philosophical space is required in which the tension between the need to abstract and the need to contextualise is creatively embraced, and not juxtaposed. I found the postfoundationalist philosophy of scholars such as Van Huyssteen and Popper helpful in exploring these possibilities.

2.2.3   Postfoundationalism and the ontology and epistemology of this research

Before describing postfoundationalism as the meta-theoretical basis of this research, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of both foundationalism and nonfoundationalism. According to Van Huyssteen (1990), foundationalism refers to the supposition that it is possible to justify beliefs by appealing to some item of knowledge that is either self-evident or indubitable. Accordingly, foundationalism regards beliefs as knowledge only insofar as it is possible to justify knowledgeclaims through a chainlike process, ultimately invoking non-negotiable foundations upon which to construct the evidential support systems of the various convictional beliefs. These knowledge foundations are accepted as given, and, according toVan Huyssteen, are "… treated as a privileged class of aristocratic beliefs that serve as ultimate terminating points in the argumentative chains of justification for our views" (Van Huyssteen, 1990). The foundationalist arrives at these foundational beliefs either through reason or through the empirical study of daily experience. Nevertheless, both the rationalist, who believes that logic is sufficient to establish coherent, foundational truths, as well as the empiricist, who favours systematic empirical research for providing unquestionable truths upon which further knowledge-constructions can be built, are social scientists who take part in the foundationalist project of the modernist era, namely, the search for truths, or meta-narratives, that objectively and rationally explain human behaviour.[4]

In the philosophy of science, foundationalism is often rejected in favour of nonfoundationalism or anti-foundationalism. Nonfoundationalism is, philosophically speaking, one of the roots or resources of postmodernism (Van Huyssteen 1990). Where foundationalism argues for rationality and objectivity, nonfoundationalism argues for contextuality, thus rejecting any notion of foundational truths that hold

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[4] Most modernist qualitative and quantitative research is conducted from the foundationalist perspective, while most postmodern qualitative research is conducted from the nonfoundationalist perspective.

across contexts and communities (Popper& Schilpp, 1974). Nonfoundationalists, while rejecting the existence of any ultimate rational or empirical foundational truths, argue that all our beliefs together form a groundless web of interrelated beliefs, and that these can be tested only against the rationality of each community and context where they are being held. The nonfoundationalist project of social scientists in the postmodern era is, thus, not to find truths that explain human behaviour, but to understand human experience within context. Accordingly, there is a turning away from epistemology as the primary task of philosophy, to hermeneutics − the making sense of opinionated experience. However, the problem is that, in its most extreme form, nonfoundationalism leads to a relativism that renders impossible any attempt at either interdisciplinary or transcontextual communication (Van Huyssteen, 1990).

It is at this point that we turn towards postfoundationalism. Although post-foundationalism does not reject the ideals of truth, objectivity and rationality, it does acknowledge the provisional, contextual, and fallible nature of human reason. According to Van Huyssteen (1990), we can be rational as human beings only within our contexts. There is, thus, in postfoundationalism a simultaneous striving towards explanation and understanding, episteme and hermeneutic.

In order to elucidate the implications of working from a foundationalist, non-foundationalist or postfoundationalist perspective in the field of group dynamics, we shall turn to the popular theory of group development[5] of Bruce Tuckman. Tuckman identified five stages of group development, namely, forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Tuckman& Jensen, 1977). If I worked from a foundationalist perspective, I could, for example, take Tuckman's theory as a foundation upon which to construct further empirical knowledge about the obstacles which new group members encounter when entering an existing group which is already in the norming stage of group development. However, by carrying out such a study, I would, firstly, have to accept Tuckman's theory as true, otherwise my own research would be worthless. Accordingly, if I researched the empirical evidence underlying his work, and was satisfied that he had applied objective and logical research methods, I could be persuaded that his theory was valid and that my subsequent study would render useful results. Otherwise, still from a foundationalist perspective, I could set out to refute his theory by attempting to prove the theory wrong

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[5] Of course, there are various theories of group development, e.g. Bennis and Shepard (1956) and Beck (1981). I use Tuckman's theory here as an example, as Tuckman's theory is the most popular theory in the management sciences.

and, maybe, to replace it with an alterative theory of group development that would hold true for all groups in all contexts.[6]

On the other hand, if I worked from a nonfoundationalist orientation, I would reject any possibility of using Tuckman's theory on which to base my research. In such a case, my argument would be that each group is a unique and complex entity situated in its own specific context and that it is not possible to use any theory as a foundation upon which to construct knowledge about my specific group. I would question the very basis of the alleged rationality and objectivity underlying Tuckman's research, claiming that it is impossible to be objective when studying groups in the first place. I would, therefore, rather turn my attention away from trying to explain the restraining forces impacting on a new group member entering into an existing group in the norming stagetowards trying to understand the experience of a specific member, joining a specific group, at a specific point in time. The purpose would, thus, not be to provide any new, transferable knowledge regarding the way in which groups either work or develop, but to provide a tentative and honest attempt, during which I would be both critical and self-critical, at understanding the lonely and intensely subjective embodiment of an individual's personal group experience.[7]

However, if I work from a postfoundational perspective my position with regard to Tuckman's theory would be different. I would, firstly, accept that, although fallible, Tuckman's five-stage theory does reflect the attempt of one social scientist at providing a scientific description of group development. I would, further, take seriously the fact that Bruce Tuckman, while conducting his research, was a human being within a specific sociocultural context and that the groups he used were also context-bound. It is, thus, only against the backdrop of the context within which his theory was developed and the specific circumstances surrounding the data he used, that I would be able to make his findings useful and valuable to my own work. I would, however, also compare his work with other, context-influenced group development theories and, on this basis, construct tentative and provisional ideas regarding the groups in my research project and the way in which their development may impact on a new member joining the group. The purpose would, thus, be to explain tentatively, while

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[6] I would do this using either deductive (positivistic) or inductive (as found in most qualitative research) modes of logical reasoning.
[7] I would not use either deductive or inductive logic, for I would not try to prove or refute a general truth claim, nor would I try to infer generalisations about others' experiences based on this one experience that had been studied.

realising that I am open to correction. In addition, I would be making these explanations while taking seriously the specific, contextual circumstances in which both myself and the group are enmeshed.[8] In doing so, I would also be taking a critical and self-critical stance (as with a nonfoundational approach),although I would still be willing to make (albeit tentative) truth claims. Such is the nature of a postfoundational approach to research.

2.3 Research design

2.3.1 Constructivist grounded theory

2.3.1.1 History and development

In essence, grounded theory refers to qualitative research which is grounded in empirical data and which seeks to construct new theory based on what is observed in the data. Grounded theory was first introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss as an explicit method of developing middle-range sociological theory (Charmaz& Henwood, 2008). In their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967)*, Charmaz and Henwood describe the development of systematic qualitative enquiry as a move away from the then predominant, hypothetico-deductive, research logic which was prevalent in the social sciences. Since its introduction both objectivist and constructivist threads have emerged and have remained in the theory, with the constructivist thread being significantly influenced and developed by the works of Kathy Charmaz and Adele Clarke (Charmaz& Henwood 2008). "Grounded theory is fundamentally an interactive and interpretative method" (Charmaz, 2006a) with the constructivist thread emphasising the contextuality of knowledge as a co-construction between the researcher and the researched. However, grounded theory still contains both objectivist (emphasising rigorous systematic enquiry) and interpretive elements (emphasising the way in which people construct meaning).

Today grounded theory is widely used in a variety of fields and it has become a popular method of conducting research in psychology. In terms of a constructivist grounded theory approach grounded theory is viewed, not as a package or a set of recipes, but as a set of principles and practices that can act as guidelines for research. These principles and practices could and should then be adapted and worked with

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[8] I would make use of both deductive and inductive, thus, abductive reasoning. See footnote 9.

(and even applied in conjunction with other qualitative approaches) in order to suit the requirements of each unique study (Charmaz, 2006).

2.3.1.2 Reasons for using constructivist grounded theory

Constructivist grounded theory is an appropriate research design if it 1) is congruent with the research philosophy guiding the research and 2) offers a way of realising the research objectives.

As a result of its dual objectivist and interpretive heritage grounded theory contains all the elements of striving for scientific rigour whilst remaining cognisant of the contextual and tentative nature of human knowledge. As a research design within a postfoundational paradigm, the constructivist strand of grounded theory provides an easy fit, specifically in view of its emphasis on abductive research logic[9].

In terms of the fit between a constructivist grounded theory research design and the objectives of this research, the following is important. Firstly, this research project requires the development of a method in order to guide the research and it would appear that constructivist grounded theory is an ideal basis for the development of such a method. On the one hand, it has the advantage of being a well-known and established method and is, thus, suited for use as a foundation for further development. On the other hand, it explicitly provides space for the incorporation of various methodologies and adaptations to fit the specific research needs of each research project.

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[9] This is extremely important, especially in the context of working with groups, or rather: in developing a theoretical framework to assist leaders in their work with groups. Karl Popper was one of the major exponents of the difficulties experienced when working with inductive logic in research. In his attempts to distinguish between science and pseudo-science, Popper argued that inductive logic is not able to demonstrate the truth of laws, as human reason does not proceed from facts to theory, but through trial and error, i.e. refutation and falsification.Popper further argued that the weakness of inductive reasoning lies in a popular but false theory that human intellect starts from a blank slate, observes facts and generate theory (the tabula rasa-fallacy) (Popper & Schilpp, 1974). Popper's argument is aimed at a recognition of the fact that human reason does not start (as formulated by Bacon) with observation and then progress slowly to facts. Reality is always already interpreted (Muller, 2007; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000) which means that we make sense of the world by means of trial and error - the critical method (Popper & Schilpp, 1974). Gregory Bateson (Bateson, 1972) also warns against an overreliance on inductive logic and shows the importance of moving from inductive logic to testing against theory and then back to the data − abduction.

Secondly, with regards to the research objective pertaining to the exploration of the forces involved in being a member of a small group, there are several reasons why a constructivist grounded theory design seems appropriate.

a) The abductive mode of reasoning is very similar to the logic required when working with groups − a specific event or occurrence is observed and the leader connects the event with other events in the group, while searching for a pattern in the data. The emerging pattern is tested against a theoretical construct(s) which the leader has in mind with the theory requiring more data to confirm that that which is being observed is, in fact, that which the theory is describing. If not, the leader will have to return to the data but, if so, the leader will act in concurrence with the theoretical constructs, while sensing the outcome and making the necessary adaptations (Yalom 1985). Abductive reasoning is, thus, an ongoing critical process of trial and error in terms of which the researcher comes to tentative conclusions, tests these conclusions against the data, again draws tentative conclusions, tests these conclusions against the data, and so forth.

b) As a result of the fact that no theory currently exists that specifically describes the forces involved in being a group member, a constructivist grounded theory method will help to guide the exploration of the data in order to develop a tentative theory that could then be further tested and developed by future researchers.

c) Simultaneously, a constructivist grounded theory design will allow for the fact that, even though there is no specific theory with regard to the research topic, there do exist several different theories on groups and their internal processes. The use of existing theory is part of the constructivist grounded theory method.

d) Constructivist grounded theory can assist in conducting a systematic and rigorous collection and analysis of the data whilst allowing the contexts and intersubjective meanings within the group and between the group members to be taken seriously and explored as part of the research process.

2.3.1.3 How does constructivist grounded theory work?

It is important to understand that constructivist grounded theory is not a predefined package or a set of procedures and steps, but rather a set of principles or guidelines according to which qualitative research processes can be developed or organised. The following general principles for grounded theory were described by Charmaz (in Charmaz& Henwood, 2008):

a) Grounded theorists should engage simultaneously in data collection and data analysis in order to allow for early data analysis to inform subsequent data collection.

b) It is essential that constant comparative methods beinvoked in order to make comparisons at each level of analysis, including data with data, codes with codes, codes with categories, category with category and category with concept.

c) Emergent concepts are then developed by means of constructing successively more abstract concepts arising from the researcher's interactions with the data.

d) Researchers with a grounded theory orientation should adopt inductive-abductive logic by first analysing inductive cases, and then checking the emerging analysis with all possible theoretical explanations, confirming or disconfirming these explanations until the most plausible theoretical interpretation of the data has been constructed.

In practice, constructivist grounded theory studies generally comprise some or all or even variations of the following steps (Charmaz, 2006; Bartlett& Payne in Payne):

a) Collectand transcribe the data. Although any source of textual data may be used, semi-structured interviews and observational notes are the most common.

b) Start with initial coding while collecting data by asking the following question: "What is happening in the data?" Short, active, analytic codes are used. Qualitative data analysis computer software is often used to keep track of, compare and integrate codes and memos.

c) Move on to focused coding in terms of which the most significant initial codes are used to sort and study large amounts of data. These focused codes, in turn, become tentative categories to be explored and analysed.

d) Memowriting occurs throughout the research process to raise the analytic level of the emerging theory.

e) Theoretical sampling is the next step. In terms of theoretical sampling specific data is sought in order to develop the properties of the categories -the theory.

f) If the gathering of new data reveals no further insights into the evolving theory, then data saturation has occurred. This, in turn, means that there is no need to collect new data.

g) Theoretical sorting and integration is one of the final steps in the process. This entails weighting, ordering and connecting theoretical memos in order to demonstrate how the theory fits together and how it links with other, existing

theoretical formulations, to make the relationships between the theoretical categoriesexplicit, to specify the conditions under which these categories arise and to state the consequences of the theorised concepts.

h) The emergent theory is finally grounded by returning to the data and comparing and validating it against actual segments of text. Should gaps exist, more data is collected in order to try and fill the gaps.

2.4   The initial research process

2.4.1   Introduction

This section describes the way in which the constructivist grounded theory method has been adapted and applied to this research process. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, this section will describe the research as it was designed and executed initially. However, after this initial execution of the research design, adaptations were made − see discussion in Chapter 5: Revised method. At this point it is important to state that these adaptations were made only to the way in which the data was analysed while everything else pertaining to the initial research design remained exactly the same in the revised research design.

2.4.2   Research setting

The group from which the data for analysis emanated was not merely any group, nor were its members just any members. The group was a specific type of group, facilitated in a specific way as part of a specific post-graduate programme at a specific academic institution and the research was conducted by a specific individual, who stood in specific role relationships to both the group members and fellow researchers. In line with the postfoundational research philosophy, as well the guidelines for interpreting the data in a constructivist grounded theory research project, it is essential that these specific contexts be made explicit and explored if the research is to be intelligible to people situated in different contexts. While this research will not aim to discover an objective truth it will, nevertheless, aim to be both rigorous and honest in its attempt to construct knowledge within its specific context that can be of value to other researchers in other contexts.

There are various contexts to be explored:

a) The immediate, physical context of the training group as it existed in time and space;

b) The theoretical and professional contexts which informed the roles and approaches of the facilitators;

c) The context of the postgraduate programme within which the training group was situated and in respect of which the researcher played a role as lecturer to the group;

d) The institutional context of the group, namely, the academic department, faculty and university;

e) The broader context of experiential learning within academic environments, specifically with regards to group dynamics training;

f) The South African socio-political context as part of a broader, global context.

However, each of these contexts will be discussed in broad terms only in order to provide a succinct overview of the environment within which the group existed without attempting to offer an in-depth environmental analysis. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that every group, in addition to emanating from the various contexts described above, also creates its own context as it develops over time. Foulkes (1975) termed this co-created context the dynamic matrix with the contexts listed above serving as the foundational matrix. During the data analysis all these contexts were borne in mind.

2.4.2.1 The immediate, physical context of the training group

Physically, the group consisted of nine members, between the ages of 21 and 27, and who were enrolled for a Masters of Commerce degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology. One group member was male and the rest were female. In addition, they were all from diverse cultural backgrounds. The group was facilitated by two clinical psychologistsin one of the lecturing facilities of the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of Pretoria in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences building. The room was spacious, with the chairs arranged in a circle near the front the room. A video camera was set up in the corner of the room while a back-up audio-recording device was attached to a wall opposite to the wall where the video camera was located. In order to make the observation and recording process as unobtrusive as possiblethere were no additional microphones or lighting. I, the researcher, was located in an adjacent room from where I observed the group over a television monitor. The temperature in the room was regulated by an automatic air

conditioning system which, when in operation, resulted in a low background noise that, at times, made it difficult for the video and audio recording equipment to record the group conversations clearly[10]. Further down the hall from the room where the group sessions took place, there was a small auditorium that was used during the introduction and out-group sessions as well as the final closing session of the weekend. The group room, video-observation room and mini-auditorium were also the designated lecturing rooms that had been used for the students since their Honours year. In other words, the majority of the group had been attending all their lectures in these rooms for almost two years, while the remaining group members had been attending lectures in these rooms for almost a year.

The group was structured as a group dynamics training group. A training group refers to a group experience in terms of which the purpose of the group is to learn about groups by taking itself as a case study in the here and now situation (Anzieu, 1984; Ringer, 2002; Miller *et al.*, 2004; Shaffer& Galinsky, 1974). Such a group has relatively little structure (usually time and spaceonly) and the group leader offers little or no direction to the group. The group is not presented with any content from the facilitators and, thus, creates its own content as it progresses. This form of experiential learning has its origin in both the Lewinian National Training Labarotories and the Tavistock Group Relations Conferences (Gildenhuys, 1975). The concept of training groups is explored further in the literature review section but, in terms of the context, it suffices to understand that this group was an unstructured, or rather, a semi-structured, training group.

2.4.2.2 The theoretical and professional contexts which informed the roles and approach of the facilitators

As was mentioned above, both the group facilitators were clinical psychologists while the members in the group were all being trained to register as industrial psychologists. The significance of this fact will be discussed in the section on the results in chapter 6. In addition, the facilitators' approach to group work can best be described as analytical eclectic, as their approach, primarily, focuses on unconscious group processes on the various systemic levels of the individual, member, subgroup and group-as-a-whole, although it also incorporates constructs and practices from the interpersonal, systems-centred and group dynamics traditions. The analytical threads, which informed the

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[10]The recordings were still good enough for transcription purposes.

facilitators' mode of work, can be traced back to both the Tavistock and Group Analytical traditions. However, the main difference between the way in which the facilitators took up their roles and the way in which a consultant to a small study group in a group relations conference would take up his/her role is the fact that the facilitators did not only address the group-as-a-whole when they made interpretations, but they alternated between addressing the different systemic levels of the group. This approach corresponds to a significant degree with the Foulkesian way of seeing the group against the background of the individual and then the individual against the background of the group. The facilitators also did not position themselves more towards the'outside'of the group as is the case in the Bionian tradition and they also did not manage the time boundary of the group in the same rigid manner as in group relations conferences. However, other than this, the relative inactivity of the facilitators at the outset of the group and their style of allowing the group space to create its own dynamic context were very much in line with the Tavistock and Group Analytic approaches.

2.4.2.3 The context of the post-graduate programme and the role(s) of the researcher

Programme-wise this group experience was part of the I/O Psychology Practicemodule. There were 27 students enrolled for the programme and the students were randomly allocated to three training groups, which ran on three consecutive weekends. In terms of this module the students were required to attend the group and then to submit a 10-page reflection paper two weeks after the group experience. This was followed by a 1-day theoretical lecture a month after the group and,then two months after the group experience,the students were required to submit a 20-page paper in which they analysed an organisational case study of their own choice. The participation in the group and the reflection paper were not graded, although the 20-page case study analysis was graded. In this analysis they were required to integrate insights from both their group experience and group theory in order to make sense of a real-life case study.

I was in the dual position of being the lecturer responsible for the overall programme and final grading as well as being one of two researchers who was working with the data for academic purposes. The research team was structured in the following way: the two researchers acted as co-researchers for each other's research projects and were overseen by a research supervisor who was also the chair of the masters programme.

Group members were asked to give their consent for the video and audio material to be used for research purposes. Where this consent was not given, the data of that entire group was not included for the purposes of this study. One member in one of the three groupsrefused consent but was not penalised for this academically.

The group experience was structured as ten sessions over a block period of two and a half days. The group assembled in the mini-auditorium on a Thursday evening for an introduction to the programme, then moved to the group room for two sessions. On the Friday morning the group met for two more sessions in the group room before moving to the mini-auditorium for an out-group reflection on what had taken place in the group. During this out-group reflection session the two facilitators and I took on more active roles in terms of which we helped the group to see connections between the content they were discussing about and both the pattern of communication and the group process. This was followed by lunch as well as two more in-group sessions in the group room. On the Saturday morning the group attended two more sessions before another out-group reflection. This out-group reflection focused on roles and norms in the group as well as topics of the group members' own choice. This reflection session was followed by two more sessions before the group adjourned to the mini-auditorium for the final reflection and closure of the weekend programme.

It may also be helpful to add that this module was the firstmodulein terms of which experiential learning was central that these students were exposed to during their entire undergraduate and graduate programmes. In addition, until the commencement of this module, the students had not been exposed in any depth to psychodynamic thinking with the majority of their academic programme taking the view that decisionmaking constituted rational cognitive and economic processes.

2.4.2.4 The institutional context

Institutionally, the programmeformed part of the MCom I/O Psychology degree programme at the Department of Human Resources Management, which is in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria. The department was founded twenty years ago when there was a break away from the Psychology department in the Human Sciences faculty in order to start the Personnel Management department. As a result of the fact that their programmes eventually lead to these students attaining degrees in Commerce, several management and

economics modules are included in the programme, with the I/O Psychology component being significantly influenced by a Human Resource Management focus. At the end of their programme the students are awarded either a MCom Human Resources Management degree or a MCom I/O Psychology degree, depending on the focus of their final masters dissertations. However, each of these degree designations qualifies the students to register as both I/O Psychologists with the Professional Board of Psychology at the Health Professions Council of South Africaand as Certified Personnel Practitioners with the South African Council for Personnel Practice. The result is that students often find themselves uncertain with regard to their professional identity as psychologists.

2.4.2.5 *The broader context of experiential learning within the academic environment, specifically with regards to group dynamics training*

Although it has been alluded to above, it is, nevertheless, necessary to emphasise that there are certain general challenges where experiential training groups are used as part of formal academic programmes at universities. Infeedback that I have received from members of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations (ISPSO) who use some form of experiential training groups in the programmes they teach across the world, they all agreed that:

a) Students often experience anxiety as a result of the unfamiliar approach to learning in a context in which they have become used to being taught instead of having to create learning for themselves.

b) The competitiveness and individualistic behaviours that are fostered in a traditional academic setting affects the way in which the students experience the groups and they often experience groups as dangerous or threatening.

c) It is essential that the young age of the students entering into such groups and, thus, their ability for mature self-reflection, should be taken into account.

d) The fact that the students know each other before the group commences and will continue to be in the same programme after the termination of the group impacts on the degree to which they are willing to engage in the experiential learning process.

e) The fact of entering a training group as part of a formal programme often means that the students feel 'forced' or 'coerced' into something they have not chosen for themselves, whether or not they actually had a choice in the matter of attending.

f) Experiential training groups are often experienced as tough, difficult, or bizarre but most meaningful learning experiences that provide insights the students do not usually gain from their other academic programmes.

2.4.2.6 The South African socio-political context as part of a broader, global context

This group took place in the South African context, 15 years after the ending of apartheid. This means that, despite the fact that there has been much progress in South African society, there does still remain a plethora of cultural prejudices, not only between racial and language groups, but also between genders and religious groups. The majority of the group members, as well as the facilitators and the researcher, were Afrikaans first language speakers, although the group was conducted in English to accommodate those group members who were not very familiar with Afrikaans. The stigma of being the 'language of the oppressor' is still carried by Afrikaans and it is considered politically incorrect to speak Afrikaans in a social situation in which all those present arenot Afrikaans first language speakers. In addition, there are many power struggles taking place in South African society around the issues of language, morality, gender and religion. Also, at the time that these groups took place, and still today, South Africa was experiencing a significantly high rate of violent crime, as well as an increase in corruption among politicians and government officials.

2.4.3   Sampling and data collection methodologies

2.4.3.1 Training group

The primary data for analysis came from the training group itself, as it existed over the two and a half days. The training group chosen for analysis came from a total of five groups that were conducted and video-recorded. In view of the sheer volume of data per group (15 hours of recorded material), as well as the purpose of the research (to conduct an in-depth exploration of the forces involved in being members of a group), it was decided to use the data from one of the five groupsonly. Furthermore, as a result of the fact that two of the five groups had been conducted with the 2008cohort of students, it was decided rather to focus on the 2009cohort because these groups were still fresh in the minds of the research team. Of the three 2009 groups, the group that had been conducted on the second weekend was chosen. The first group was not selectedas a result of the fact that one of the group members had refused to give her consent for the data emanating from the group to be used for research purposes. This,

in turn, left the second and third groups as possible research subjects, with the second group being chosen. The reason for this particular choice was the fact that, by the time the third group was conducted, they had already heard several different stories about the group experience from their fellow students, and this would have complicated the matter of understanding the psychological context (expectations and anxieties) from which they entered the group. The sampling method was, thus, one of purposive sampling as the second group, which seemed to be the least problematic in terms of gathering post-group data, ethical concerns and 'contamination'[11] was chosen for the research.

Although the basic structure and nature of training groups were discussed as part of the discussion above on the research setting, one or two comments can be made at this point regarding the use of training groups as a data collection methodology for research purposes. Firstly, training groups provide an environment which is extremely conducive to collecting rich data as all the members of the group are present for the entire life of the group and the data collection can cover every minute of the group's existence (Anzieu, 1984). Secondly, the unstructured nature of the training group, plus the fact that the facilitatorsare not introducing any content, automatically emphasise the underlying dynamics in the group and this, of course, is the focus of this research study. In addition, training groups are set up and run in such a way that the very nature of such a group places the focus on studying the groupin the here and now as it unfolds over time. As compared to either project teams or sports teams, for example, there is no other purpose to a training group other than providing the members with an opportunity to learn about the way in which groups work by studying themselves as a group. Training groups have been used since the post-World War II period until today for the purpose of studying group dynamics and they are still regarded as the best way in which to learn about and study groups (Agazarian& Gantt, 2000).

In order to collect the data emanating from the group, video recordings, together with additional audio back-up recordings, were made. These recordings were captured onto videotape, and then converted into DVD format. Both the original videotapes, as well as the DVDs and the digitized recordings, are safely stored on three different hard drives. Nobody has access to the data apart from the members of the research team.

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[11]I know that 'contamination' is not an issue that one would normally be concerned with in a constructivist grounded theory study, but the feeling amongst the research team was that the mixed messages that affected the expectations of the Group 3 could further complicate an already highly complex challenge with regards to data analysis.

The video material was transcribed and pseudonyms were allocated to the group members before the textual material was imported into the AtlasTi software programme for analysis − this will be discussed in more detail in the section on data analysis below. Where the video recordings were unclear as a result of the noise from the air-conditioning system that was turned onperiodically, the audio recordings, which were recorded on a different recording device from a different position in the roomwere used to augment the material for transcription purposes. The transcriptions were carried out by a professional transcriptionist and were then checked line by line by both the researcher and the co-researcher separately and consecutively to ensure accuracy.

In addition to the video and audio recordings, I also made observational notes while the group was in session. The aim of these notes was to capture my thoughts and feelings as well as specific incidents Ihad observed as I watched the group from the adjacent room while the group was in session. These observational notes were consulted continuously throughout the coding process.

2.4.3.2 Written reflections

As a secondary source of data that was captured mainly for the purposes of triangulation and for further illumination of the transcribed video material, the personal reflections that the students were asked to submit as part of their academic programme, were also included as data for this research study. Despite the fact that there were the personal reflections of all the students from both the 2008 and 2009 cohorts, only the reflections of the nine members who had been part of the training group that was selected for research purposes were used for analytical purposes. The full wording of the assignment can be read as part of the study guide and study letters that are included as background information in Appendix A to this dissertation, but the section in which the task was described reads as follows:

"This assignment asks of you to write a critical reflection on the group experience. Specifically, reflect on the following:
   a) *Your own experience of becoming/being a member of the group (especially on a psychological level)*
      - *What made it easier for you to join the group? (reflect on specific incidents or situations);*

- *What made it difficult for you to join the group? (reflect on specific incidents or situations);*
- *How did you experience being a member of this group? (reflect on specific incidents or situations).*

b) *Significant moments in the group for the group-as-a-whole*

- *Reflect on one or two specific moments in the group that, according to you, were especially significant for the group as it moved through the 2 ½ days."*

2.4.4 Data analysis

2.4.4.1 Initial data analysis process followed

This section describes the way in which the data was analysedinitially. Analysing qualitative data is, certainly, one of the most challenging aspects of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2007), especially where various sources of data are used. The various data sources mentioned above had to be analysed as an integrated whole in order to realise the research objectives. In addition, it is essential that the way in which the data is analysed be congruent with the underlying philosophy of the specific research study, as well as with the ultimate purpose of the research (Charmaz, 2007). Furthermore, when working with groups, the focus should not be on learning about overt, measurable processes in the grouponly, but also on learning about the covert, unconscious processes (Prins, 2006). Another requirement of the data analysis, which is in line with the philosophy of postfoundationalism, is the fact that any results emanating from the analysis will be intelligible only if viewed within context –placing further emphasis on the importance both of interpreting data within context (Mueller-Vollmer, 1986) and taking into account the various discourses at play (Clarke, 2005).

During this initial data analysis process, the grounded theory guidelines that were followed were closer to those espoused by Glaser (1993, 2001) than those of Strauss and Corbin (1990a, 1990b) in that, in essence,the process actually started as a totally open coding process. Accordingly, the focus was initially purely on the inductive aspect of coding in terms of which the codes only reflect what happens in the data without referring to theory. According to this grounded theory principle, codes and categories are, initially, deeply rooted in the text only and it is only after categories have been abstracted from the open coding, that the codes and categories are compared with existing theory in the constructivistgrounded theoryfashion (in terms of

which various theories are compared in order to find the theoretical constructs that best describe what is happening in the data). It is important to take note of the tension which may arise between creating categories before the coding starts - as introduced by Straus & Corbin (1990a) - and the purely open-ended approach of Glaser (2001).With regard to the former one runs the risk of losing some insight into the data by being too focused on the pre-created theoretical dimensions while, with regard to the latter, one runs the risk of becoming so tangled up in the data that it becomes difficult to start abstracting from the data.

The following analytic steps were part of the initial plan for the data analysis:

a) The first step involved converting the video to DVD format in order to transcribe the data but also to enable me to watch the video as I went through the process of coding the data in AtlasTi[12]. The reason for this was that I did not want to work with textual transcriptions only, as I was not interested in the content of the words being spoken only, but also in the entire scene − words, gestures and tensions − which would beboth too deep and too multidimensional to transcribe.

b) The next step involved the chronological arrangement of all the video material in order to enhance the accuracy of the transcriptions but also to obtain another overview of the entire group experience.

c) I had, in conjunction with the previous steps, also made notes/memos of my own thoughts, feelings and conjectures about what was happening and what this could mean in terms of group membership and the forces involved in the process.

d) With regard to the specific behaviour by each group member, I planned to make suppositions, based on both theory and the data, about what could have given rise tothe behaviour. My focus would be on making conjectures about what the most plausible forces couldhave been that had impacted on the individual actions or behaviours of the group members.

e) At this point I planned to compose a firstdraft story/account of each of the participants' behaviourswithin the group.

f) Next, I planned to elaborate on the context by including the written course material and any other information that could provide a clearer understanding

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[12](AtlasTi is a qualitative data analysis computer programme that can be used for any type of qualitative research design, but which has been developed specifically in accordance with the underlying principles and logic of grounded theory. It provides an automated way to keep track of codes and memos that are devised throughout the analytic process).

of the specific case context. This would also include a theoretical understanding of training groups as all the actions interpreted in this case study should be viewed against existing knowledge about the behaviours and dynamics in training groups.

g) I then planned to compare these stories and make further connections between the actions, categories of actions and stages of the group membership of the participants.

h) The next step involved making comparisons between the individual 'stories' and the theoretical constructs emanating from the literature analysis, specifically with regards to the forces that appeared to have been involved.

i) At this stage I hoped to arrive at a first-order description/interpretation of the forces that had impacted on the process of being a group member as this process played out for the group members.

j) With regard to the theory, the question would arise as to the way in which the theory helpsin an understandingof the descriptions of the forces involved that had been observed in the data.It may have been that the theory was totally lacking or else it may have been that the theory had played a role in helping me to perceive the forces more clearly.

k) Finally, I planned to construct a force-field analysis in terms of which I would describe and interpret the forces involved, albeit in a tentative manner that allowed for imagining how the analysiscan be applied to other situational contexts.

With this data analysis plan intact I set out to analyse the behaviours of one of the nine members during the first session of the group with the aim of ascertaining the types of outcomes which this form of data analysis would provide.

2.4.4.2 The need for a revised data analysis methodology

The result of this initial analysis was a 36 page discussion of the behaviour of one group member during one session. In this discussion I intended to draw constant comparisons between the codes, categories and possible theoretical interpretations while there was no limit set on the depth of interpretation. The results of this initial analysis are not presented here but are included as Appendix B to the dissertation.

However, the main problem with this methodology of data analysis was that it was too open-ended in its aim of creating a to and fro interaction between data and theory in

such a way that it started with the data, moved to theory, and back to the data, etc. As a result of the fact that the research dissertation had to be written up in order to enable other researchers to be able to follow the research logic so that the results would, in true postfoundational fashion, be intelligible in their contexts, this approach required extensive descriptions of, inter alia, the interpretations made, the theories involved, and the reasons for not making different interpretations. If one adds to this the fact that the group context that is created as the group develops over time, becomes progressively more complex, as well as the fact that this represented an analysis of the behaviour of one member in one session only, and not the behaviours of the nine members in all ten sessions, then the sheer scope of this analytical procedure became impossible.

In addition to the vast scope and complexity of an ever-expanding, open-ended analysis of the various factors impacting one another on various systemic levels of meaning, there was also the issue of the quality of the research. This research study aimed to explore the forces involved in being a group member in such a way that was both rigorous and systematic on the one hand and also deep and focused on subjective meaning on the other. Despite the fact that this initial approach to data analysis did, undoubtedly, provide adequate space for the intersubjective and symbolic meanings in the group to be dealt with, it was not sufficiently systematic to prevent me from becoming lost in the welter of various meanings upon meanings upon meanings.

This, in turn, meant that I was confronted by the following choice: either focus the analysis on a section of the group's life only (e.g. one session or section of a session) or change the approach to analysing the data. As a result of the fact that I did not wish to lose the dynamic nature of the data as a progression over time, I was reluctant to discard most of the data and to focus on a small section of the group's life only. Accordingly, I decided to move closer to the Strauss and Corbin (1990b) approach to data analysis. This approach starts with a predefined theoretical structure which acts as a guide for the open coding process − a beacon that provides a fixed point of reference during the process of analysing a vast amount of data. I realised that this more structured approach could cost me some of the meanings that Imight miss because of the theoretical framework, but I also realised that I needed a theoretical lens through which to look at the data. Therefore, although this lens could have leftcertain details out of its focus, it could also bring others into focus that Imay have missed without the lens.

2.5   Conclusion

This chapter described how Iembarked on developing a method for realising the research objectives. The research philosophy, namely, postfoundationalism, which was deemed to be the most appropriate for the research, was discussed as well as the underlying principles of constructivist grounded theory as the research design upon which I aimed to base the specific design for this research. The research context and the various methodologies appliedin order to collect the data were discussed and this was followed by a discussion of the methodology for the analysis of the data that was initially developed and applied to the first session of the training group. However, it was shown that this data analysis methodology would not suffice to deliver satisfactory results pertaining to the research questions. Accordingly, the chapter went on to indicate the need to develop a theoretical lens to use as a departure point for a constructivist grounded theory data analysis. This approach lines up closely with the Straus and Corbin approach and was deemed more suitable to the unique circumstances of this research.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe the process of developing a theoretical lens to use in a revised methodology for analysing the data. Chapter 3 lays down the theoretical foundation while chapter 4 then proceeds to develop the theoretical lens. Chapter 5 discusses both the way in which the theoretical lens was operationalised for research purposes and also the way in which the data was finally analysed. Chapter 5, which is a continuation of the methodsection of the dissertation, also pays attention to issues pertaining to the quality of the research and the research ethics.