

## Chapter 5

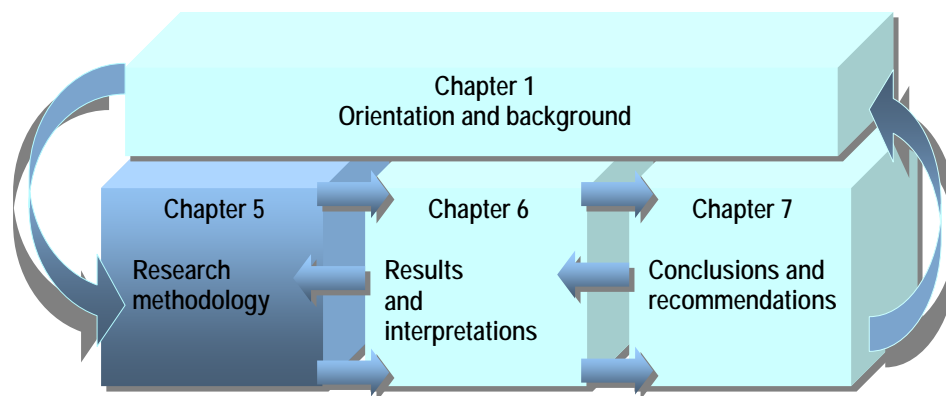
### Research methodology

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the motivation for the qualitative empirical approach, research design and methods within this exploratory study, as well as the most pertinent aspects of the pilot study. Figure 5.1 illustrates the positioning of this chapter in relation to other components of the empirical phase. This figure further emphasises the requirement for constant interplay between Chapters 1 and 5, as well as Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Figure 5.1

Chapter 5 in relation to other components of the empirical phase



The three components of the empirical phase that should enhance the internal validity of the findings are central to this chapter. Firstly, the criteria for and attempts to ensure the scientific quality of this study are presented. Secondly, the influence of the research question, goal and objectives on the choice of research approach is presented. Details regarding the research design form the third component of this phase.

A multiple case study design, consisting of three cases, was followed. This design did not only suit the needs of this particular study, but incidentally reflects some dimensions of the research design of previous research about the generic implementation of affirmative action, completed by both IDASA and the IPM during 1995.

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## 5.2 CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH APPROACH

Two factors influenced the choice of empirical approach in this study. The first is the researcher's interpretation of the nature of the research phenomenon and the second is the research question. Du Plooy (2001:20-21) suggests that both the ontological, epistemological and theoretical assumptions about communication should be considered in deciding which methodological assumptions would govern a study.

The researcher agrees with Du Plooy's (2001:40) description of contemporary ontological assumptions about communication and the value thereof for understanding the current research problem. Accordingly, the researcher views communication as purposive, complex, creative, developmental and contextual, and something which "... takes place in a social, interactive reality, interrelated, amongst others, with physical, psychological, cultural and social contexts" (Du Plooy, 2001:40)

The nature of the research question and the ontological and epistemological assumptions about transformational change management and communication in the South African organisational setting serve as motivation for following the qualitative empirical approach within this study.

## 5.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A DEFINITION

Babbie and Mouton (2001:270), Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2), Du Plooy (2001:29), Marshall and Rossman (1995:1-5), and Mason (2002:2-3) describe qualitative research as a paradigm that allows the researcher to get an "insider perspective on social action". Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) and Henning (2004:3) further describe the primary goal of this research approach as describing and then understanding ("Verstehen"), as opposed to merely explaining social action.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) summarise the characteristics of this approach as enabling the researcher to study phenomena in their natural settings, while attempting to interpret these phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Finally, Murphy (1995:1) views qualitative research within the management sciences as useful in "... articulating the range of scenarios which may occur under different circumstances". The last author's view has obvious relevance for the understanding of the research question and the potential significance of the findings of this study.

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## 5.4 CRITERIA FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Before specific details about the design for this study is discussed, attention should be given to the criteria for defending the logic of qualitative research in general, as well as applying it to this particular study.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995:142-143) two domains need to be considered when developing a qualitative research design: the criteria for soundness and demonstrating that the proposed work would be useful to the conceptual framework; and the initial research questions. The criteria for soundness (objectivity) of qualitative research are related to, but defined very differently from those used in the positivist research tradition. Babbie and Mouton (2001:276) provide a comparative table of such constructs that is presented below. Lincoln and Guba (quoted in Marshall & Rossmann, 1995:143-144) and Babbie and Mouton (2001:276) describe four main criteria for objectivity, i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

**Table 5.1**

**Quantitative and qualitative notions of objectivity**

Quantitative	Qualitative
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: Babbie and Mouton (2001:276)

**Credibility** refers to the accurate identification and description of the subject (phenomenon). Marshall and Rossmann (1995:143) argue that the strength of a qualitative study that aims to explore a problem or process, such as the focus of the research problem in this study, will be its internal validity. To ensure internal validity, the researcher should clearly state the parameters of the study, including those pertaining to the setting, population and theoretical framework.

**Transferability**, or the generalisability of a qualitative study to other settings may be problematic, according to Marshall and Rossmann (1995:144). Quantitative researchers view the lack of external validity as a major weakness of qualitative research. But Marshall and Rossmann (1995:144) suggest that researchers can overcome this problem by explaining the relationship between the original theoretical framework, evidence collection and analysis, as well as concepts and models. If this

relationship is adequately described, the parameters of the study would be regarded as being clearly defined. Other researchers (or practitioners), working within the same parameters, can then determine whether or not the cases described in the initial project, can be generalised and transferred to other settings such as their own. A researcher who is interested in research that was conducted under very specific conditions, may also gain insight about how the initial study contributes to a body of theory (Marshall & Rossmann, 1995: 144).

**Dependability**, according to Marshall and Rossmann (1995:145), provides the qualitative researcher with a solution for the positivist notion that the universe is not changing and that research could be replicated perfectly. The qualitative research tradition assumes that research occurs in an ever-changing social context. Dependability thus also accommodates the researcher's improved understanding of a research phenomenon and related changes to the empirical design to do justice to this new understanding of the research phenomenon.

Since the concepts (principles) of dependability and replicability are closely related, the latter needs further description. Marshall and Rossmann (1995:146) highlight **replicability** as a traditional concern for the social sciences. These authors suggest that qualitative researchers can overcome this concern with by following three steps:

- Arguing that qualitative research, by its very nature, cannot be replicated - this notion is related to the construct of dependability and recognition of changes within the real world.
- Keeping thorough notes that record each design decision and the rationale behind it – this will allow other researchers to inspect each procedure.
- Keeping all collected evidence in a well-organised format – this will enable the researcher to defend the findings, should they be challenged.

The last criterion for qualitative research is that of **confirmability**. Confirmability is the criterion of having another study confirming the findings of a particular study. Lincoln and Guba (in Marshall & Rossmann, 1995:145) argue that the focus in this process should be on the evidence itself and not some inherent characteristic of the researcher. Marshall and Rossmann (1995:145) formulate this criterion as the question of whether the evidence helps confirm the general findings of a study. Several options exist for presenting the description of the manner in which the researcher attempted to abide by these four criteria for soundness. The logic of first discussing the overall research design and

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specific empirical methods, dictates that such a discussion would appear toward the end of this chapter.

## 5.5 CASE STUDY RESEARCH

The exploratory nature of this study calls for an in-depth investigation and analysis of the research phenomenon. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:280-283), Du Plooy (2001:162-163) and Yin (1994:13) a case study research design would provide the researcher with an excellent opportunity to achieve the aforementioned objectives. Henning (2004:41) also contends that case studies focus on “discovery rather than confirmation”. A brief overview of advantages, as described by Du Plooy (2001:163) and Yin (1994:3-7) further illustrates the appropriateness of this research design within the context of this study – the second last and last advantages listed here, deserve special attention:

- Evidence from various sources can be used to build a “Gestalt” about a single case.
- Structuring case studies are more flexible in terms of resources such as money, time, subjects and social settings.
- Case studies can achieve maximum understanding when used in combination with theory. In this study, theory plays a critical role in defining and validating the initial research question, as well as the final research goal and objectives.
- Processes of development can also be described by means of case studies, e.g. the improvement of communication skills for teachers, or in this case improvement of the management of communication within the context of affirmative action.
- People’s experiences of making adjustments can be investigated by means of case studies, e.g. within South African organisations that implement affirmative action and employment equity measures. This example, as formulated by Du Plooy (2001:163), closely resembles the research question of this study, therefore confirming the appropriateness of the chosen research design.

The steps that were followed in operationalising this study are similar to the five steps described by Yin (1994), i.e. design, pilot study, evidence collection, evidence analysis and report writing. The application of the first three steps in this particular study is described in this chapter. The last two of these suggested steps are dealt with in Chapters 6. (The lessons that were learnt from the extensive pilot study are documented under section 5.10.)

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## 5.6 MULTIPLE CASE STUDY DESIGN

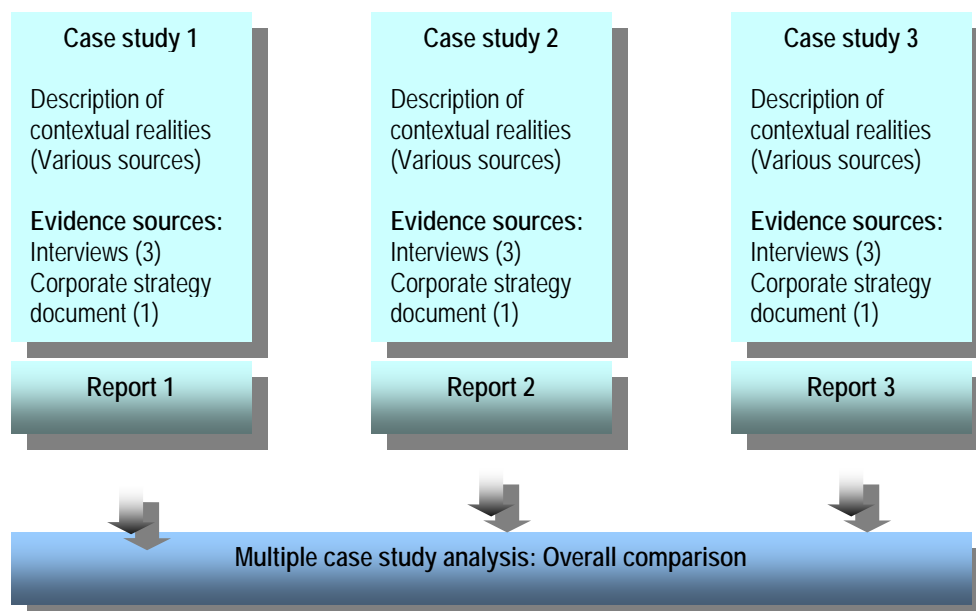
The possible depth of information that could be collected was the determining factor in adopting a multiple case study design. The exploratory nature of the research and the required depth of investigation were the deciding factors in determining that three cases should be investigated. Babbie and Mouton (2001:279) confirm that qualitative research designs generally focus on “a small number of cases to be studied”; as being open to the inclusion of multiple sources of evidence; and being “flexible in terms accommodating changes if necessary”.

Marshall and Rossman (1994:144) further validate the strategic choice for a multiple case study design by claiming that evidence from multiple cases, informants or evidence gathering methods could improve the study’s usefulness for other settings.

Yin (1994:48) also describes the replication of multiple cases as the appropriate design when the researcher wishes to investigate the “general existence of a phenomenon”. If three (or more) cases yield similar results, replication has occurred. Thus three case studies are compared in this study, as illustrated in figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2

### An application of a multiple case study design



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Three case studies, each representing a South African organisation, were included in the study. A deliberate decision was taken to include organisations from various sectors since the context for each case was important in terms of transferability. Transformation as a result of the EEA is assumed to be a reality all “designated employers” in South Africa have to grapple with. The manner in which organisations in different sectors deal with this, may differ because of conditions within the individual organisations or as a result of sector-specific qualities. In an attempt to prove the general existence of a phenomenon, organisations from three sectors or industries were included in the selection of case studies.

## 5.7 SAMPLING DESIGN

Mason (2002:120) warns qualitative researchers against the misnomer that rigorous and systematic sampling strategies are not important. The direct implications of sampling procedure decisions on the transferability (generalisation) of the results are equally important for qualitative and quantitative research.

### 5.7.1 Sampling technique

The soundness of sampling decisions regarding cases is an important consideration. The sampling technique for the cases is consistent with Babbie and Mouton’s (2001:287) description of theoretical sampling – categories are theoretically defined before conducting the fieldwork. Criteria for inclusion were formulated based on the literature review as well as the research goal. These criteria were:

- Organisations had to adhere to the criteria for the status as “designated employer”, as per the EEA.
- Organisations had to have a Corporate Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity function.

A related principle was applied to the selection of three interviewees per case study. As was indicated in Chapters 3 and 4, theory suggests that three key role players should be involved in the implementation of AA measures, i.e. the most senior Communication practitioner, the most senior Human Resource practitioner and the most senior Employment Equity practitioner.

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The Code for Good Practice for the EEA (1999) refers to the centrality of the senior Employment Equity practitioner. Corporate Communication theory (cf. Steyn & Puth, 2000) suggest that the most senior Communication practitioner would also be a central figure in this process. The involvement of the most senior Human Resource management practitioner in this process, was confirmed by Thomas and Robertshaw (cf. 1999).

Du Plooy (2001:114) refers to this type of sample as either a known-group or judgement sample since the researcher uses his/her judgement and deems the sample as useful in terms of the information that is needed for a study. The requirement of transferability was also adhered to by means of purposive sampling – a strategy suggested by Guba and Lincoln (quoted in Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277).

### 5.7.2 Case study realisation

A list of randomly selected names of organisations was compiled and details of the study, (a synopsis of the research goal and objectives, methods and the timeframe) were prepared. (The document containing details about the project appears as ANNEXURE 1.) Telephone calls to each of these companies were made to establish contact with the correct responsible department and or individual(s). The criteria for inclusion were also made clear during the initial contact. After expressing interest in participation, the project background was e-mailed to the appropriate individuals at different organisations. Almost 40 organisations were approached during the fieldwork stage.

Two noteworthy observations regarding the sampling process are that a considerable number of organisations were a bit apprehensive about participating in this study because of misunderstandings about the focus of the study, while getting approval for participation was a cumbersome process. The time-delay in decision-making about participation in research, specifically academic research, was an initial barrier to the completion of the fieldwork. Some organisations also suffer from research fatigue.

These observations highlight the initial need for a carefully developed project description and fieldwork plan. Such a fieldwork plan should ideally include contingency plans. Finally, a municipality, two international motor vehicle manufacturing firms and an institution of higher education participated in the study. One of these served as the pilot study. All participating organisations are listed on the Department of Labour's 2000 Employment Equity Registry on the Internet.



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## 5.8 EVIDENCE COLLECTION

Mason (2002:52) suggests that the term **method**, when used in the qualitative research context, refers to more than just the mere technique for collecting evidence. The same author holds the view that qualitative method includes activities that are “intellectual, analytical and interpretative”. In similar fashion to Marshall and Rossmann (1995:14), Mason (cf. 2002) further explains that the interplay between researcher, research question and research objectives should allow for flexibility in the design phase.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) also claim that “... [a] combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation”. Subsequently partially structured personal interviews and corporate strategy documents were chosen as appropriate sources of evidence. Yin's (1994:93) principle of convergence of evidence from different sources within a single case was followed in this study.

The decision to utilise two sources of evidence, stems from the research objectives described in Chapter 1. Objectives 2-10 are linked to the personal interviews, while objective 11 depends on corporate strategy documents. Finally, the external websites of the participating organisations were consulted for corporate profile details. Such details form the basis of Part 1 of each case study report, as illustrated in Table 5.5.

### 5.8.1 Partially structured personal interviews

Du Plooy (2001:177) describes this type of interview as containing standardised questions, but allowing the researcher the opportunity to deviate from these questions and to ask probing questions based on the respondent's responses. The exploratory nature of this study the research objectives, perceived strengths of this method, as well as the findings from the pilot study were the deciding factors in adopting a partially structured approach to the three interviews in each case study. Kvale (in Babbie and Mouton, 2001:290) describes the qualitative interview process as entailing seven steps, i.e. thematising, design, interviewing, transcription, analysis, verification and reporting.

At the start of each interview it was made clear that the interviewee could at any stage still decide not to participate should he/she feel the need thereto. This was done in accordance with Mason's

(2002:81) list of considerations about informed consent. All interviews were recorded electronically, while the interviewer (researcher) also made cryptic notes. Both forms of evidence are available from the researcher. Babbie and Mouton (2001:278) describe the latter as one of the steps to ensure confirmability of any qualitative study. The strengths and potential weaknesses of personal interviews are compared in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

**Strengths and weaknesses: Interviews**

Sources of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Targeted – focuses directly on case study topic</li> <li>❑ Insightful – provides perceived causal inferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Bias due to poorly constructed questions</li> <li>❑ Response bias</li> <li>❑ Inaccuracies due to poor recall</li> <li>❑ Reflexivity – interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear.</li> </ul>

Source: Yin (1994:80)

- ❑ **Strengths**

Each interview allowed focused investigation of the research objectives: the research problem was described within the specific case studies. The conversational nature of partially structured personal interviews further allowed for insight about the research phenomenon to emerge.

Interviewees cited examples of different dimensions of the research phenomenon, which contributed to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon. The conversational tone also allowed for follow-up questions.

- ❑ **Weaknesses**

The potential weaknesses of this source of evidence were explored in the extensive pilot study, whereafter adjustments were made and incorporated into the interviews of the cases of the main investigation. Bias resulting from poorly formulated questions, was overcome by the process of drafting several sets of questions, testing these during the pre-test and having these questions reviewed by outside experts. This process is described in more detail in section 5.9.

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The potential of response bias is regarded as a useful clue to the contextual realities in each case study. An interesting form of response bias occurred in this study. Some interviewees commented that they have both private and professional opinions about the research phenomenon. The researcher attempted to overcome this form of bias by reminding interviewees about the purpose and context of the study. In order to overcome the weakness of poor recall, all interviews were recorded electronically. These interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Finally, reflexivity from the interviewees' side could not be avoided entirely. (Reflexivity is viewed as being closely related to response bias within this context.) Reflexivity regarding interviewee's desired to provide ideal (or ideally-formulated) responses, seemed to have occurred rather obviously on one occasion. This interviewee had brought notes to the interview and gave extensive responses to all the questions. These responses still allowed for follow-up questions (the conversational tone) and were thus used in the same manner as all the other interviews.

The manner in which interviewees prepared for the interviews possibly contributed to the degree of reflexivity. All interviewees of the pilot study indicated that they have very little time for these interviews and would therefore like to have the relevant facts ready, should it be required of them. This was the most important reason for forwarding the interview schedule to them prior to the actual interviews. The request to receive the interview questions prior to interviews was expressed by all remaining interviewees and became the standard procedure for the study.

Finally, although the anonymity of organisations and interviewees was guaranteed at the outset of the process of contacting organisations, interviewees seem to have been apprehensive about entering the interview situation without perusing the interview questions. As was mentioned previously, interviewees may have wanted to be prepared, but they may also have wanted to ensure that the scope of the questions did not require them to share confidential information. Almost all interviewees expressed the concern about this aspect, despite assurances that their personal or organisational identity would not be revealed in any form in the research report.

### **5.8.2 Corporate strategy documents**

Marshall and Rossman (1995:85) describe organisational documents as potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in a particular setting. Yin (1994:82) further cautions researchers against a very narrow understanding of the value of such documents. Documents should be viewed as

a form of communication between parties in organisations intended to achieve specific organisational objectives.

Thus the Employment Equity Communication Strategy of each case study organisation was chosen as the document that would potentially yield the most appropriate evidence regarding Objective 11 (as formulated in Chapter 1). The strengths and weaknesses of documents are presented in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3**

**Strengths and weaknesses: Documents**

Sources of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Stable – can be reviewed repeatedly</li> <li>❑ Unobtrusive - not created as a result of the case study</li> <li>❑ Exact – contains the exact names, references and details of an event</li> <li>❑ Broad coverage – long span of time, many events and many settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Retrievability – can be low</li> <li>❑ Biased selectivity if collection is incomplete</li> <li>❑ Reporting bias – reflect (unknown) bias of author</li> <li>❑ Access – may be deliberately blocked</li> </ul>

Source: Yin (1994:80)

❑ **Strengths**

The stability of the chosen documents is an obvious advantage within the context of qualitative research: it would allow for numerous readings or opportunities for review. The chosen documents were either available or non-existent at the time of the empirical investigation. Thirdly, details pertaining to the compilation of structures involved in the management of communication about the EEA were made available via corporate strategy documents. These documents were also useful in constructing the description of the specific history/development of each chosen case study.

❑ **Weaknesses**

Low retrievability and access to documents were not factors to contend with in this study. Only one organisation in the main investigation had the required corporate strategy document available and this information was shared directly after the first interview.

Biased selectivity regarding the specific documents to be used did occur within the evidence collection phase. Interviewees were probed about the most appropriate document(s) pertaining to Objective 11.

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The researcher was only interested in a communication strategy for Employment Equity. And, as was anticipated in the initial research design, such a corporate strategy document either did not exist, was in development or was shared with the researcher. The unknown biases of the author(s) of these documents were recorded as part of the contextual reality of a particular case.

## 5.9 DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A partially structured personal interview schedule, as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994:84) was developed for all interviews. The purpose of partially structured interviews was to allow more flexibility for exploration of unexpected topics or themes. This decision was necessitated by the exploratory purpose of the study. The results from the pilot study necessitated major changes to the interview schedule, including the elimination of a number of unnecessary questions, finalising the order of items, the elimination of complex questions, including Corporate Communication Management terminology. The 18 initial items, including eight structured probing options, were based on the research question and theoretical perspectives. (The original interview schedule appears as ANNEXURE 2.)

### 5.9.1 Researcher experience

Following the researcher's progress in terms of experience with personal interviews, the content and format of the interviews were changed. Whereas the researcher was initially too dependent on the interview schedule and the probing (follow-up) questions, this situation changed toward the second and third interviews of the pilot study. This learning experience contributed to the focus on questions that are included in the final interview schedule. (This process reflects the principle of dependability, as described in section 5.4.)

### 5.9.2 The final interview schedule in relation to the research objectives

Table 5.4 illustrates the relationship between the research objectives (as formulated in Chapter 1) and the questions included in the final interview schedule. The rationale for each question is apparent from this description.

The last question is aimed at both concluding the interview and allowing interviewees to discuss any aspect that they had previously not mentioned, or wanted to emphasise again. The final interview

schedule comprises nine items. Probing questions depended entirely on the nature of each interview and are not documented here. (The final interview schedule appears as ANNEXURE 3.)

Table 5.4

## The research objectives in relation to the final interview questions

Research objective	Interview question
<b>Objective 2</b> To describe the purpose of affirmative action in three South African organisations.	Question 1
<b>Objective 3</b> To compare the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners within each of the three South African organisations about the strategic value of communication in the management of Affirmative Action.	Question 2
<b>Objective 4</b> To compare the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners about the strategic value of communication in the management of Affirmative Action across three South African organisations.	Question 2
<b>Objective 5</b> To identify the key role players (both departments and designated individuals) responsible for managing communication about Affirmative Action in three South African organisations.	Question 3
<b>Objective 6</b> To identify key responsibilities of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners in managing communication about Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.	Question 4
<b>Objective 7</b> To compare the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners about the specific contribution of the corporate communication function in managing communication about Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.	Question 5
<b>Objective 8</b> To identify communication management responsibilities of departmental leaders, other than the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners, in managing communicating about Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.	Question 6
<b>Objective 9</b> To identify what each of the three South African organisations, represented by the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners, regard as the most important content about Affirmative Action that is communicated to internal stakeholders.	Question 7
<b>Objective 10</b> To identify what each of the three South African organisations, represented by the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners, regard as the most important content about Affirmative Action that is communicated to external stakeholders.	Question 8
<b>Conclusion of interview</b>	Question 9

After presenting the final interview schedule, the description of the pilot study seems appropriate. Several lessons were learnt from the pilot study and are thus described. This process should contribute to the future replication of this study.

## 5.10 PILOT STUDY

The exploratory nature of this study necessitated the completion of an extensive pilot study. Key aspects of the pilot study are the sampling strategy, development of the evidence collection instrument, the development of the researcher's fieldwork skills and experimentation with evidence analysis and reporting.

### 5.10.1 Pilot study profile and summary of findings

The pilot study organisation was an institution of higher education. This organisation is popularly known as a "historically white university" and accommodates about 30 000 students. The institution provides tuition in both Afrikaans and English. When the student enrolment is broken down to numbers per race group, this institution is also one of the largest "black" universities in the country.

This fact was central to the responses from all three interviewees: according to these individuals, this organisation has arguably undergone "much more transformation" than other universities or technikons. The demographics of the student population at many other institutions of higher education are not much different from the statistics prior to 1998.

These realities need to be reflected in the value system of the institution, as well as the change in staff profile. Thus the organisation had established a fund for the development of staff and specific positions. But, according to all the interviewees, the existing pool of expertise in some fields of study is very small, which complicates (delays) the appointment of individuals from designated groups. Appointments at middle or senior management, even in the purely academic side of the organisation, proves to be stumbling block in the path to a workforce that reflects the demographics of South Africa more accurately than what is currently the case.

Finally, the organisation does not subscribe to the notion of appointing persons of colour for external "window-dressing". Appointments at the most senior executive level are made on merit, but with an

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emphasis on diversity: whereas this institution was previously only managed by white Afrikaans males, a number women, English-speaking individuals and people of colour are included in this structure.

### 5.10.2 Research experience

The pilot study provided a trial-run opportunity for the researcher in terms of managing the research process and honing the specific skills for evidence collection and analysis. As was indicated previously, the logistics of finding organisations to participate in the study and setting up of interviews were challenging. Two organisations had also initially agreed to participation in this study, but did not follow through on this decision. This left the researcher in a peculiar situation, but again highlighted the need for managing this type of research like any other business project.

The pilot study also allowed for experimentation with interview transcription and analysis. This process occurred concurrently with the development of the questions for the final interview schedule, as described in the previous section.

### 5.10.3 Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy regarding both the criteria for inclusion of cases and interviewees were proven to be accurate. No adjustments were made as a result of the pilot study.

### 5.10.4 Research design

The pilot study yielded one major finding as well as a challenge to the initial research design, namely the non-existence of the organisational document originally chosen for analysis. Since the pilot case study had no formal communication strategy for EE at the time (and AA specifically), the researcher was referred to this organisation's EE Report for 2003-4 that was accessible on the Internet to both internal and external stakeholders. This implied that the process of content analysis of a communication strategy could not be conducted. The EE Report is not a corporate communication strategy *per se* and was thus not appropriate for analysis.



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### 5.10.5 Improvement of evidence collection instruments

As was indicated under section 5.8, the interview schedule was also finalised as a result of the pilot study. A cover letter explained the process of recording interviews on micro cassette and ensured the anonymity of both the individuals and their organisations. It is important to note that the interview questions changed as a result of the pilot study, but not the details of the project in the cover letter. (This cover letter appears as part of ANNEXURE 3.)

### 5.10.6 Experimentation with evidence analysis techniques

The transcription of interviews was the first step in evidence analysis. The researcher also had to experiment with different analysis techniques and display formats in order to finalise the technique to be utilised in the main investigation.

Furthermore, a checklist for comparing the interviews and corporate strategy documents with Thomas and Robertshaw's (1999) framework for an Employment Equity communication strategy, was developed. However, this could not be tested in the pilot study since the pilot case study did not yield the appropriate corporate strategy documents.

## 5.11 THE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

For the purpose of this study, the unit of analysis is the management of communication about affirmative action within each case study. The interaction between the research phenomenon and research context, is thus the focal point. This conceptualisation is congruent with Henning's (2004:41) view on this matter. A broad case description analytical strategy, as described by Yin (1994:103-104), was followed.

The broad categories for reporting each case are described in Table 5.5 (on the next page). This framework for analysis helps to organise the study both analytically and in terms of reporting the findings. In order to achieve these goals, embedded units of analysis within each case need to be considered. These embedded units are the two sources of evidence that were described in previous sections, namely partially structured personal interviews and corporate strategy document analysis.

All attempts were made to adhere to Yin's (1994:123-124) four criteria for high-quality analysis, i.e. inclusion and reliance on all evidence, consideration of all rival interpretations, focus on the most significant aspects of each case and reliance on prior/expert knowledge.

Table 5.5

**Structure for individual case study reports****Part 1: Organisational profile**

- Core business
- Overview of history and nature of ownership
- Number of employees
- Scope of operations

**Part 2: Reporting and analysis of evidence**

- Interviews: Reported and interpreted per theme (interview question and research objective).
- Corporate strategy document: Summary of themes in comparison with the theoretical framework for a Communication Strategy by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999)
- Interpretation of comparison with theoretical framework

**5.11.1 Interview analysis**

The analysis process for interviews started directly after the completion of transcribing all recordings. The analysis was also preceded by the development of various possible display formats – these two processes are intrinsically linked. Each interview question formed a theme in relation to the research objectives to be discussed in the overall case study report. The analysis of responses relied on post-coded themes, as described below. Henning (2004:104-109) refers to this as open coding. The same author further describes the logic that was applied during the analysis of interviews, as an interplay between reality, coding and recontextualisation. Themes (or chunks of reality) are reconstructed to form an argument about the research phenomenon.

The complete response to each question, for each interview, was read at least four times. The first time for completeness and to check for typing errors, the second time to encircle pertinent issues, which could ultimately serve as themes. The third reading entailed the numbering of these issues and separating themes from examples. The fourth reading occurred when themes and examples were reported in the process of reconstructing reality from the perspective of the interviewees.

The nature of each research objective dictates the logic to be followed in the process of analysing the evidence from the interviews in each case study or across case studies. These are presented visually in Tables 5.6 – 5.9 (on the following pages).

#### □ Logic of analysis 1

Responses pertaining to interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 required the integration **within each case**. This process is illustrated in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6

#### Logic of analysis 1: Collective themes

Case study 1	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Case study 2	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Case study 3	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3

#### □ Logic of analysis 2

Another analysis logic was applied to the responses pertaining to objectives 4 and 6-9 in order to highlight similarities and differences **between the perspectives of the interviewees and the different cases**. This analysis logic is illustrated in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7

#### Logic of analysis 2: Comparison of one interview across three case studies

Case study 1	Case study 2	Case study 3	Interpretation
Interview 1	Interview 1	Interview 1	Interpretation: Interview 1
Interview 2	Interview 2	Interview 2	Interpretation: Interview 2
Interview 3	Interview 3	Interview 3	Interpretation: Interview 3

#### 5.11.2 Corporate strategy document analysis

Qualitative content analysis was applied to the communication strategy document within each case. The purpose of the analysis process was to operationalise research objective 11.

The analysis of such documents was completed at the hand of pre-coded themes from Thomas and Robertshaw's (1999) framework for an Employment Equity communication strategy. This analysis was

achieved by means of a grid, consisting of the different elements of the aforementioned framework, as illustrated in Table 5.8 (on the next page).

Table 5.8

## Content analysis regarding Thomas and Robertshaw's framework

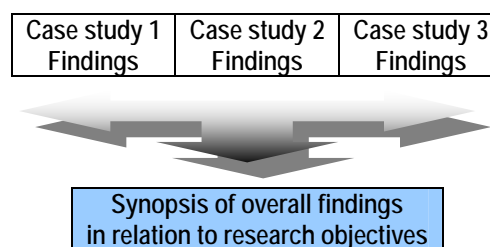
Elements from Thomas and Robertshaw's (1999) framework for an Employment Equity Communication Strategy	Document(s) Yes / No

## 5.11.3 Overall comparison

The last research objective guided the analysis logic at **case study level**. The overall findings per case study pertaining to research objectives 2-11 are compared. The analyses logic that are described in both section 5.11.2, contributed to the overall case comparisons. This case comparison process is illustrated in Table 5.9. Finally, the overall case comparison forms the basis for the conclusions about the study that are presented in Chapter 7.

Table 5.9

## Multiple case study comparison



## 5.12 APPLYING THE CRITERIA FOR SOUNDNESS

As was explained toward the beginning of this chapter, the manner in which this study was compared to the criteria for soundness, needs to be described.

## 5.12.1 Credibility

Suggestions from both Marshall and Rossmann (1995:143) and Babbie and Mouton (2001:277) were employed to ensure the credibility (internal validity) of the study. The parameters of three dimensions of the study were clearly defined, i.e. the setting, population and theoretical framework. Furthermore,

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different types of interpretation were pursued, discussions with peers occurred and all materials pertaining to the documentation of findings are still available from the researcher.

### 5.12.2 Transferability

Marshall and Rossman's (1995:145) and Babbie and Mouton's (2001:277-278) suggestions regarding transferability (external validity) were also followed. The parameters of the study were defined by means of indicating the relationship between the theoretical framework, concepts and frameworks, evidence collection and analysis.

The degree of detail in the description of cases should allow the reader to judge the transferability of this study. Finally, the choice of organisations to be included in this study was not only based on availability, but on the richness of evidence that different sectors could yield.

### 5.12.3 Dependability

Babbie and Mouton (2001:278) contend that the demonstration of dependability would also imply the demonstration of confirmability since these qualities are inseparable. But for the purpose of this study, these will be discussed separately.

The academic research context of this study ensured that the suggestion of an inquiry audit (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278) was followed. This process entails constant revision of the inquiry process and documentation. Within the academic research context, a study supervisor acts as inquiry auditor who considers the internal coherence of a study. The last aspect related to dependability of this study pertains to the validity and reliability of the interview and document analysis.

#### 5.12.3.1 Coding validity

Stacks and Hockings (1999:179) suggest that three possible sources of invalidity should be considered, i.e. definition, category and sample. The categories/themes used for document analysis, adhere to the criteria of exhaustiveness, mutual exclusivity and equivalence. Finally, the sampling strategy reflects the aim of the research, as formulated in Chapter 1.

### 5.12.3.2 Inter-coder reliability

An independent, second coder was used to test the reliability of the coding pertaining to the interviews and documents. Using a second coder involved two stages, i.e. a briefing session regarding the context of the study and an explanation of the specific needs of this project.

Henning (2004:109) emphasises the importance of orienting/training a second coder thoroughly since he/she must understand the context of the study. In this study, the second coder holds a Ph.D. in Corporate Communication and has a well-established academic record. This individual has no vested interest in this study, thus his objectivity was guaranteed.

Holsti's reliability formula, as described by Stacks and Hockings (1999:178) and Miles and Huberman (cf. 1984) was applied to two sets of evidence, i.e. that of the researcher and that of the second coder:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

**M** refers to the number of coded units about which the coders agree. **N<sub>1</sub>** and **N<sub>2</sub>** represent the total number of units coded by the two coders. This reliability formula was applied to all the evidence from the three case studies. The relatively small number of cases necessitated the second coder's coding of all interview transcriptions and the communication strategy from Case Study 3. The formula yielded a reliability level of 97,5% about the 192 themes, sub-themes and examples. The high level of reliability confirms that the researcher's categorisation of responses into themes, sub-themes and examples was not the result of a purely subjective process.

### 5.12.4 Confirmability

Guba and Lincoln (in Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278) suggestion regarding a "confirmability audit trail", was followed. This process entails the revision of six classes of evidence, i.e. raw evidence, evidence reduction and analysis products, evidence reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, notes pertaining to intentions and dispositions, as well as instrument development information. All of these classes of evidence are available from the researcher. The rationale for this audit trail is to ensure that the findings emerge from the evidence and not from the researcher's bias.

### 5.13 CONCLUSION

Qualitative research focuses on the understanding of a research phenomenon and the consideration of all contextual realities. This principle also governs case study research. A different vocabulary exists within the qualitative research tradition. This chapter served the purpose of allowing the researcher to indicate how the qualitative vocabulary will be applied to this study and what underlying logic determined how the evidence pertaining to the overarching research question, is presented in the next chapter.