

Two decades of qualitative research in Psychology, Industrial and Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management within South Africa: A critical review

**Authors:**

Sumari O'Neil¹
Eileen Koekemoer¹

Affiliations:

¹Department of Human Resource Management, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Eileen Koekemoer,
eileen.koekemoer@up.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 04 Feb. 2016

Accepted: 29 Apr. 2016

Published: 29 July 2016

How to cite this article:

O'Neil, S., & Koekemoer, E. (2016). Two decades of qualitative research in Psychology, Industrial and Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management within South Africa: A critical review. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde*, 42(1), a1350. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v42i1.1350>

Copyright:

© 2016. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Orientation: Qualitative research is marked by phenomenal growth and development over the years.

Research purpose: This article aims to offer insight into the emerging qualitative methodologies used in the fields of Psychology, Industrial and Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management.

Motivation for the study: The value of qualitative organisational research has been recognised since the 1970s. Regardless of its perceived value, national and international trends show a greater tendency for quantitative research.

Research design, approach and method: This article investigates qualitative articles ($n = 242$) published over two decades in the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (SAJIP), *South African Journal of Psychology* (SAJP), and the *South African Journal of Human Resource Management* (SAJHRM). More specifically, a content analysis was conducted to highlight the trends of paradigms, designs and analysis methods employed in the studies.

Main findings: Although there seems to be a slight increase in qualitative publications over the years, qualitative studies show a lower volume than its counterparts. The SAJIP published the least qualitative articles when compared to the SAJP and SAJHRM. There is a pattern of preference for specific paradigms and methods in all the journals. Overall, all the journals carry a large number of articles that do not specifically state their paradigmatic alignment or the designs they used, while some articles omits the methodology used in the studies altogether.

Practical/managerial implications: The results indicate a clear need for increased exposure to qualitative methodology, both by publishing more qualitative studies in local journals and by providing formal training opportunities. A publication does not solely rely on authorship, but also on a review process. Therefore certain adjustments in this process may lead to more and better qualitative publications in future.

Contribution/value-add: This article provides a critical analysis of the current trends and developments in qualitative research conducted in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) research in South Africa. The study identifies dominant methodologies in use, and thereby identifies possible opportunities to expand the 'methodological menu' of IOP research.

Introduction

Qualitative research underwent phenomenal growth in the fields of psychology (Madill & Gough, 2008) as well as management and organisational studies (Guercini, 2014; Johnson, Buehring, Cassell & Symon, 2007). Since the 1970's this form of research has infiltrated mostly all social sciences and applied fields of practice (Merriam, 2002). Already in 1979, there was a call for increased qualitative research in studies related to work and organisations (Van Maanen, 1979). More recently, this invitation was echoed in the call for qualitative research to play a more central role in organisational studies both internationally (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005; Conger, 1998; Lee, Mitchell & Sablynski, 1999; Ponterotto, 2005; Stead *et al.*, 2011; Watson, 2011b) and nationally (McMahon & Watson, 2009; Schurink, 2003). A possible reason for this is that qualitative research provides insights that are difficult to produce with quantitative methods (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). Particularly in organisational research, qualitative studies may have optimal results due to the following factors: (1) providing nuanced data, which cannot be obtained

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

through quantitative means; (2) delivering depth in data that ensures credibility in results, regardless of small sample sizes; (3) using less resources; (4) providing a voice for the participants in marginalised contexts and from less driven, preconceived research theories and literature; and (5) highlighting the complexities of the phenomenon (Blustein *et al.*, 2005; Conger, 1998; Halbesleben, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 1999; Ponterotto, 2005; Stead *et al.*, 2011). Over the years, consensus has been reached that qualitative research is pivotal in expanding the horizons of issues and problems regarding psychology at the workplace (Pratt, 2009). Especially related to organisational studies, qualitative research informs about the subjective life within organisations that is often overlooked (Cassell, Symon, Buehring, & Johnson, 2006).

Over the past 100 years, the tradition and practices of qualitative methodology have evolved to such an extent that in the 1980s and 1990s certain scholars referred to the 'quiet methodological revolution' and predicted an overall change in conducting research in the social sciences (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Schurink, 2003). Today, qualitative research is published increasingly in mainstream journals (Bansal & Corley, 2011; Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). A number of reviews has been published in international journals to explore the methodological involvement and development of qualitative publications over the years and within specific subject fields (see Bryman, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 1999; Stead *et al.*, 2011; Werner, 2002). In South Africa, however, little is known about the trends of publication of qualitative studies in the journals of which industrial and organisational psychologists are likely to publish. Recent reviews provide a synopsis of the general thematic trends in the scholarship of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) (Shreuder & Coetzee, 2010), and the future direction of empirical research in work psychology (McMahon & Watson, 2009; Rothmann & Cilliers, 2007). While Coetzee and Van Zyl (2014) provided a descriptive overview of both themes as well as methodology in the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (SAJIP), their review did not focus in-depth on qualitative methodology as such. The present article reflects on the qualitative research that was published over the past two decades in the scholarly community of IOP, Psychology and Human Resource Management (HRM) in South Africa.

Although the original focus of the researchers was on IOP specifically, the overlap in the fields of IOP with psychology and HRM necessitates the inclusion of local journals in these fields. Since IOP is a division of psychology (Strumpfer, 2007), albeit psychology in the work context, the inclusion of local publication outlets in psychology is included in the current study. In terms of HRM, a distinction can be made between HRM and IOP on a theoretical level, but in practice, that distinction is blurred (Barnard & Fourie, 2007). For instance, IOP sub-disciplines such as personnel psychology shows this overlap (Shreuder & Coetzee, 2010). As a result, this study focussed on the trends of qualitative publications in SAJIP, the *South African Journal of Psychology* (SAJP), as well as the *South African Journal of Human Resource Management* (SAJHRM). By considering methodological development

over time, it helps to improve qualitative scholars' understanding of the predominant profile and trends of qualitative studies, and provides a range of methodological possibilities within the realm of qualitative inquiry. As a result, such a review may also strengthen methodological sophistication and encourage innovation among qualitative scholars.

Research purpose and objectives

The main purpose of this study was to explore the prevalence and trends of qualitative research studies published in three South African journals focusing on IOP, HRM and Psychology. The selected journals were SAJIP, SAJHRM and SAJP, as they are the prominent South African journals in which IOP, HRM and psychology research is published.

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

- Identify the number of *qualitative* research publications versus the number of *other* (i.e. mixed methods, conceptual and quantitative research) publication within each of the journals.
- Determine the prevalence and trends in the use of certain descriptions of paradigms, research designs and methods of data analyses in qualitative research publications over the past two decades (since 1995) in these three journals.
- Investigate involvement of scholars and institutions in publications on qualitative research over the past two decades.

A compact overview of qualitative methodology

Presently, qualitative research is known for its methodological pluralism and diversity (Parker, 2014). The expansion of qualitative methodology over the years lead to the development of a 'fuzzy set' of methods with no definite typology in the 21st century (Madill & Gough, 2008). As early as 1979, Van Maanen described this research as having 'no precise meaning in any of the social sciences' and is at best 'an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques' (p. 520). Over the years, it has evolved into a 'baffling array' of inquiry strategies, tradition, approaches and design types (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark & Morales, 2007). It is a fact that all forms of qualitative research use a naturalistic and interpretive stance and holistically investigate naturally occurring processes and meanings in emergent and flexible ways. Nevertheless, it is difficult to specify the exact elements that qualitative inquiry includes (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004).

This review especially examined qualitative paradigms, designs and methods of data analysis used in qualitative publications. The following section does not pretend to give a comprehensive overview of qualitative methodology but rather to highlight the major trends in qualitative texts and to define the qualitative methodologies most commonly used in psychology-related fields as highlighted in popular

qualitative textbooks and previous reviews of qualitative studies related to psychology and management.

Research paradigms

The term 'research paradigm' is used in accordance with Kuhn's view to denote a particular worldview that constitutes a researcher's values, beliefs and methodological assumptions (Kuhn, 1962; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002). There were numerous debates on the similarities, differences, and the incommensurability between paradigms, and whether the actual notion of paradigm should still exist (see Sheperd & Challenger, 2013). Nevertheless, the concept of paradigm is still in use in qualitative research in psychology and most other fields in the social sciences. For instance, as a guideline for more rigorous qualitative research and sound methodological selection, it is advised that qualitative researchers start out their inquiry by identifying their philosophical assumptions. The selected paradigm should then also guide the selection of the research methodology. It is important for the quality of the process that there is coherence throughout the research between the paradigm and method (Creswell *et al.*, 2007).

Paradigmatic assumptions relate to researchers' ontology (What is the nature of reality?), epistemology (How can the researcher come to know this reality?), axiology (What is the role of researcher's values in this quest?) and methodology (What is the nature of the research?) (Eriksson & Koalainen, 2008). Uniformity is lacking in various textbooks and scholarly work on the different paradigms in use, as well as the philosophical nature of its origins. Therefore, many researchers find discussions on paradigms difficult to follow and understand. According to the literature various researchers have their own interpretation or classification of paradigms. A few examples will suffice:

- Rynes and Gephardt (2004) refer to positivism, postpositivist, interpretive paradigms and critical postmodernism.
- Creswell *et al.* (2007) point to the positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical and feminist-post structural approaches.
- Blustein *et al.* (2005) refer to logical positivism (denoting positivism), postpositivism, and social constructionism.
- Ponterotto (2005) categorises to positivism, postpositivism, constructivism-interpretivism, and critical theory or the critical ideological stance.

This article does not intend a comprehensive discussion of similarities, differences and history between paradigms. However, owing to the lack of a uniform classification, the basic premise of each of the paradigms is explained here. For the purpose of this study, the major paradigms related to social sciences research under discussion are positivism, postpositivism, interpretivism, constructivism, critical theory, postmodernism and pragmatism.

The positivist paradigm is associated with realism, objectivism and the aim of uncovering a single truth. It is

closely related to the hypothetico-deductive method in which most psychologists are trained at some stage (Ponterotto, 2005). The aim of such research is to uncover underlying laws that account for the *how* and *why* of certain behaviours and events, and is, therefore, useful in developing predictive models of behaviour. Positivists also believe scientists can accurately portray the truth that is 'out there' (Willig, 2013). However, scholars increasingly realised the influence of the context on behaviour, a notion that was not accounted for by this paradigm. Methodology aligned with the positivist tradition did not allow the sufficient exploration of the richness and complexities of human experience (Blustein *et al.*, 2005). From this realisation postpositivist thought emerged. The fact is that currently few psychologists will claim to believe 'pure' positivist assumptions (Willig, 2013).

Postpositivism differs from positivism by its view that the truth lies only in probability that is not verifiable, which results in the falsification of the hypothesis (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). Similar to the pure positivist assumptions, this approach is deterministic (logically linking effects and outcomes) and reductionist (reduces phenomena to small, testable sets) (Creswell, 2014).

Typically, positivist and postpositivist research is often equated with quantitative research and qualitative research is linked to any non-positivistic paradigm. However, qualitative research can also be conducted through precision, objectivity, replicability and generalisability that may implicate a positivistic epistemology (Madill & Gough, 2008; Watson, 2011a). Rynes and Gephardt (2004) point out that '[w]ell developed postpositivist qualitative methods can uncover facts and compare facts to hypotheses or prior findings in an attempt to falsify prior hypotheses or to contradict previous knowledge' (p. 456). Qualitative research through this approach is also sometimes referred to as 'modernist' qualitative research (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002).

Interpretivism, (sometimes referred to as anti-positivism, implying that it developed as a reaction to the inadequacies of postpositivism) does not focus on falsification or identification of variables, but rather on uncovering perceived meaning as ascribed by the participants. Truth is viewed as relative; therefore, multiple realities may exist. The outcome of the interpretive research is to describe the realities while keeping its complexity intact. Subjective interpretations of the informants as well as their perceptions of the world are the starting point to understand phenomena. The researcher is interpreter of the truth and the research can, therefore, not be value-free and objective. The researcher, with his or her own perceptions and interpretations, becomes an active agent in the research process (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Some authors include the constructivist research approaches under the interpretive paradigm (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Ponterotto, 2005), while others differentiate constructivist from interpretivist worldviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

Constructivism, or social constructivism, concurs that reality is constructed in the social and cultural context and is almost

impossible to discern (Blustein *et al.*, 2005). People consciously and unconsciously want to understand their world, and in this search they develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2014). Since these meanings are complex and present a multidimensional and varied nature, the researcher can only understand and describe these realities if it is presented within the complexities, rather than being reduced to simplistic linear relationships. Researchers working from this view, seek to establish close and empathetic relationships with participants in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their subjective experiences. The aim of such a research is to understand how people make sense of their world and, thereby, construct meaning (Willig, 2013). When studying the world of work, the constructionist paradigm is especially relevant since 'work is embedded in complex layers of social, cultural and political meanings' (Blustein *et al.*, 2005, p. 356).

Critical theory is not always mentioned in qualitative texts, and may reside either under discussions of constructionism (Blustein *et al.*, 2005) or in discussions of more focussed critical theories such as feminism. Qualitative research conducted from this perspective, takes on a transformative worldview. According to this view, science seeks to uncover relationships of dominance and exploitation, and by sensitisation aims to transform the social order and allow for emancipation from the unwanted structures (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). Critical theories include radical humanism, radical functionalism, structuralism and poststructuralist tendencies (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Among the assumptions that differentiate critical theory from the constructivist notion, is the belief that social power shapes reality and the action agenda needed for its reform (Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2016). From the critical stance, research is used to challenge traditions, power structures and the status quo (Blustein *et al.*, 2005).

Postmodernism is rooted in the understanding that knowledge is constructed, culturally situated, and the lives of participants is ultimately incomprehensible. This leads to a view of multiple realities. Researchers are posited as constructors of both themselves as well as the phenomena they study. Both the participant, the researcher and the reader of the research is involved in constructing the reality of the phenomenon in question (Wertz *et al.*, 2011). Research can, therefore, not be objective, or value-free as it is set in the frame of culture, history, politics and other situational values (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002). This similarity to the critical theory may be the reason why some scholars do not refer to postmodernism as such, but include it in the field of critical theories. It is significant that researchers from a postmodern worldview may not represent a single paradigm, although certain features are similar for postmodern research (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). These features entail: (1) challenging the conventional; (2) mixing styles; (3) tolerating ambiguity; (4) emphasising diversity; (5) accepting innovation and change; and (6) focusing on multiple realities that is socially constructed (p. 4). Postmodernism is often associated with creative approaches of representation, for instance

organisational autoethnography and art based-research (Wertz *et al.*, 2011).

Pragmatism is not always referred to as a paradigm or philosophy of science since is not committed to a single philosophy. It is rather concerned with the best practical way to answer a research question (Frost, 2011). As such the research question is the pivotal point for the selection of method. As a result, methods from different, often opposing, traditions are deemed acceptable to answer a research question. Although pragmatism is mostly associated with mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014), it is also common to the bricolage approach to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This approach advances the adapting and combining of different ontologies and qualitative methods to answer research questions from various perspectives, and thus giving way to methodological pluralism (Frost, 2011; Willig, 2013).

Qualitative research designs

The terms 'approach', 'design' and 'strategy' are used interchangeably in the literature to denote what is traditionally known as a research design. Creswell *et al.* (2007) mention that the selection of a design is based firstly on the stated research question, secondly on the audience's acceptance and their familiarity with the design, and thirdly, on the researcher's training and experience with the different available designs. Creswell *et al.* (2007) further highlights five designs that are commonly used by, and appropriated to, counselling psychologists, namely narrative inquiry, case study designs, grounded theory, phenomenology and participatory action research (PAR). In the same vein, Locke and Golden-Biddle (2002) refer to action research (AR which includes PAR), case studies, ethnography and grounded theory particularly relevant for IOP research. Blustein *et al.* (2005) list relevant designs to study career psychology and other work-related topics, as consensual qualitative research, grounded theory and narrative methods. Textbooks presenting qualitative research methodology for psychology students include the following aspects: grounded theory, phenomenological studies, discourse analytic studies, and narrative inquiry as relevant designs (Frost, 2011; Willig, 2013).

When consulting textbooks and publications on methodology, it is also difficult to discern the difference between a qualitative research design and method. The reason is that the designs are often equated with the general steps taken during the research process (data collection and data-analysis methods). Matters are complicated further by the fact that some methods can be treated as methods (e.g. interviews for data collection), yet they can also be used to describe the design as such (e.g. an interview study). However, considering the findings of previous research on trends in qualitative research in psychology and related fields (Blustein *et al.*, 2005; Coetzee & Van Zyl, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 1999; Stead *et al.*, 2011), the most popular designs could be identified, including case study, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, discourse analysis, phenomenology, AR and ethnography.

Case studies' research focus varies considerably but is typically employed when the research question is aligned with a specific time or place, or bounded group or number of groups (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002). It entails an in-depth analysis of an individual case, individual person, or a collective entity such as a community or organisation (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Almost any method of data collection and analysis can be used in case study designs, as long as it entails an intensive investigation, which may span over time and includes multiple methods of data collection combined (Willig, 2013).

Whereas the outcome of the case study is a detailed description and sometimes comparison between cases, the outcome of a grounded theory study should be to provide a theory or a conceptual framework of processes, actions, or interactions that are grounded in the research participant's view (Creswell, 2014). The motivation for a grounded theory study is that existing theories have proved to be non-existing or inadequate (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). Grounded theory can be conducted within a modernistic paradigm (i.e. classic grounded theory as advocated by Glazer & Strauss, 1967) or as constructivist grounded theory (as advocated by Charmaz, 2006).

Narrative enquiry aims to uncover participants' life experiences by applying life stories (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Such a study may also include one or more individuals (Creswell *et al.*, 2007).

While narrative inquiry assumes that the life stories of individuals can shed light on specific research problems, discourse analysis assumes that cultural meanings are attached to artefacts, events or experiences. The aim is to expose the implicit values and hidden assumptions presented in cultural phenomena by studying the discourses that becomes visible through language (Eriksson & Koalainen, 2008; Holt, 2011).

Phenomenology describes individuals' lived experiences in order to uncover the meaning these experiences hold for them (Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2016). This design employs multiple respondents and the outcome is an in-depth description of participants' common experiences, to reveal the essence of these phenomena (Creswell *et al.*, 2007).

In the field of IOP, AR is commonly associated with the development and change within an organisation. As a research design, it focuses on the changes that have occurred within a community (e.g. organisation) through a participatory action process which includes the entire community or a subset of volunteers and the researcher (Creswell *et al.*, 2007).

Ethnography is one of the most widely known qualitative research designs (Lee *et al.*, 1999). Its primary focus is to uncover intact cultural groups' shared patterns of behaviour, language, and actions (Creswell, 2014). Such an approach relies mostly on observational methods, ranging from

complete observer to complete participant, as well as on interviews and field notes, to gather data over an extended period. The outcome of this research is a detailed and contextually specified impression of the culture or the inhabitants' behaviour (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002). Ehigie and Ehigie (2005) advocate the use of ethnography, particularly for IOP research, in order to uncover aspects such as organisational culture and worker's behavioural patterns in a social ensemble.

Narrative, grounded theory and phenomenological designs use qualitative data exclusively, whereas both case studies and AR designs may employ both quantitative data and qualitative data (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Locke and Golden-Biddle, 2002). Grounded theory, discourse analysis, phenomenology and narrative inquiry are linked to specific methods of data analysis, although these approaches are not always employed due to the flexibility of qualitative designs. Some analytical methods common in psychology and related fields are discussed in the following subsection.

Qualitative methods of data analysis

There are various ways to conduct a qualitative data analysis. Madill and Gough (2008) provide a comprehensive list of data-analysing methods used in psychology. Although there are many texts that explain data analysis methods, Madill and Gough provide a typology according to which the popular methods are categorised according to the following procedures: discursive, thematic, structured and instrumental.

Discursive methods focus on the detail of the text and apply varying forms of discourse theory (i.e. conversation, discourse, metaphoric, psychoanalytically informed and semiotic analysis). Some scholars include psychoanalytic approaches under discursive analysis, whereas others do not consider the discursive and psychoanalytic approaches to be compatible (Edley, 2006).

Thematic analyses procedures describe any form of analysis that employs clustering and thematising (e.g. analytic induction, framework analysis, grounded theory, interpretive phenomenological analysis, template analysis, thematic analysis and theory-led thematic analysis.)

Structural methods refers to analysis following priori coding and transforming qualitative data into counts (e.g. content analysis, Q-methodology, repertory grid techniques). The most common structural method is content analysis. Although Madill and Gough categorise content analysis as a structural method, the amount of structure in question as well as the use of a priori or open coding will depend on the researcher. Traditionally, content analysis led to some form of quantification or the counting of categories. Therefore, scholars debate whether content analysis should be viewed as a qualitative or quantitative method. It can, however, have a more interpretive aim (Jordaan, Wiese, Amade & De Clercq, 2013), and thus indicate a stronger qualitative tendency.

The last category, instrumental methods, include methods driven by and committed to a philosophical perspective and/or theoretical framework. This framework enables them to distinguish, for instance, different forms of narrative analysis or phenomenological methods. The instrumental category, as clustered by Madill and Gough (2008), includes certain forms of AR, ethnography, feminist research, as well as indications of narrative and phenomenological analysis, to name but a few.

Although the pluralism in qualitative methodology allows for many tailor-made designs and methods, there are many not discussed in this section. The discussions did however highlight the most popular designs and methods used in psychology and related fields. The following section will provide a description of the methodology used in this study.

Research design

Research approach

West (2007) categorises studies of scholarly literature into six dimensions, namely: publishing productivity; comprehensive reviews; meta-analyses; specific journal investigations; methodological investigations; and citation analyses. The present study can be categorised as a methodological investigation, seeing that its focus was on the utilisation of qualitative studies in IOP research. Since the research compared qualitative publications of three specific journals, this study can also be classified as a specific journal investigation.

Research strategy

Following the example of previous researchers (Coetzee & Van Zyl, 2014; Ngulube & Ngulube, 2015), content analysis was chosen as the strategy to establish basic patterns of research and scholarly communication, focusing especially on publications of qualitative research in SAJIP, SAJHRM and SAJP.

Content analysis is an unobtrusive observational research method that evaluates the content of publications by identifying and categorising certain characteristics of messages relayed in written or spoken material (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). By using content analyses in the present review, the researchers were able to provide a quantitative clustering of information linked to the different paradigms, research designs and data-analysing methods that are employed in qualitative publications. Such an analysis can also give scholars an indication of the extent to which journal editors and authors prioritise research methods, and whether there have been changes in the application of the research paradigms, methodologies and methods over time (Stead *et al.*, 2011).

Research method

Research setting and sampling methods

Three prominent SA journals presenting IOP research were targeted to identify published empirically, qualitative articles.

For the present study, the researchers focused on trends in qualitative research. Hutchinson and Lovell (2004) suggest that methodological approaches tend to be stable over a five year period, therefore articles included in this study needed to span over more than five years. All qualitative articles published within these journals over two decades (1995–2015, November) were analysed and included in the study. The following materials were, however, excluded: editorials, book reviews, introductions, errata and notes, owing to the fact that it was not empirical qualitative studies.

Data collection methods and recording

A systematic search was conducted to identify qualitative articles within each of the three journals. The researchers used the search function on the respective journals' websites, utilising the following specific keywords: 'qualitative', 'qualitative research', 'qualitative inquiry', 'qualitative methods', and 'qualitative methodology'. The fact that these were all open access journals (available online) made the task easier. Searches were undertaken during the period May to October 2015. Articles for the content analyses were identified by applying specific inclusion criteria, such as the use of only primary empirical qualitative research studies published from 1995 to 2015.

The initial searches delivered 1920 hits, but after replication and obvious irrelevant articles were eliminated, only 247 articles were identified as relevant. After examining these articles closely, using the exclusion criteria of studies employing mixed methods, systematic reviews or conceptual papers, various articles were excluded. During the search, some articles did contain elements of qualitative research (e.g. studies which used mixed methods), but as they were actually not qualitative empirical studies alone these articles were excluded for the purpose of the present study's content analyses. The remaining articles (thus articles only comprising empirically qualitative material) were treated as the final sources of data ($n = 242$) and were individually downloaded and stored electronically (a reference list of all these articles are available from the authors upon request). Hard copies of all these articles were filed separately for the three journals, and the articles labelled and numbered according to each specific journal (e.g. SAJIP01, HRM01 and SAJP01). The final sources of data for the content analyses comprised 58 SAJIP, 120 SAJP and 64 SAJHRM articles.

Data analyses

Data analyses were done in four distinct phases. However, as it was an interactive process some phases overlapped and others were repeated.

Phase 1: Comprised the development and completion of templates for the articles. A template was created in which specific areas of interest of qualitative research could be summarised (e.g. authors, institutions involved, paradigms, research designs and data analyses). These areas of interests were in accordance with the specific objectives of the study. The researchers completed the templates independently by

using open coding for the various areas of interest (closely examining and analysing the content of each article). It is important to note that an inductive method of coding implies that no typology was imposed in the classification of the paradigms and designs. The researchers focused on following the authors of the articles' own description of their methodology, rather than superimposing own interpretation regarding the methods they used.

Phase 2: Cross-checking the coding of Phase 1, until consensus was reached between the two researchers with regard to the classification of the methodology described within each article.

Phase 3: Commenced when the templates for all the articles from the three journals were captured into one Excel datasheet. Since open coding was used in the initial coding phase (phases 1-2), a large number of categories remained at the beginning of the third phase. The researchers refined and reduced the categories for the various areas of interest through peer discussion until consensus was reached. During this phase, various literature sources and prior knowledge of qualitative research methodology were utilised in order to reduce codes, particularly for descriptions of the paradigms and methods (for example less prevalent analysing methods were grouped under the 'other' category such as ethnographic, Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA), semiotic, as well as analysis within the framework of transcendental realism and various versions of phenomenological analysis). Due to the complexity of qualitative research and the lack of specific classification criteria, this was no easy task. It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between, for instance, methods of data collection and analysis, or between a paradigm and approach. As indicated by Madill and Gough (2008) any system of classification requires a certain amount of judgement on the part of the authors.

Phase 4: Comprised the actual process where frequency analyses were done by using Microsoft Excel and SPSS (Version 23).

Strategies to ensure quality data

During the present study, clearly defined research objectives and strategies were employed to collect and analyse data, thus ensuring the quality and integrity of the data (Creswell, 2014). The two researchers were closely involved during the process of collecting and analysing the data. During the data collection, both researchers were involved in obtaining the data and assuring that only qualitative articles were included for the content analyses. The data of this study were also coded independently by the researchers involved, after which cross-check coding was done as part of the data analyses. In addition, the initial open coding was refined and categories reduced. To increase the trustworthiness and credibility of this part of the coding process, the refinement took place during an open communication session between the two researchers. During this session, agreement was reached on the new categorisation of the various codes for

the specific areas of interests by using literature on methodology (Creswell, 2014; Frost, 2011; Willig, 2013). All the data were retained for possible future investigation. Ethical clearance was firstly obtained from the institution of the authors for the research project from which this paper stems. Secondly, ethical clearance was also obtained from the editors of the three specific journals to use the articles published in these journals.

Reporting

The findings are presented in line with the specific research objectives of the study:

- Trends of qualitative publications between 1995 and 2015 in terms of the number of qualitative publications versus other publications per journal.
- Determine the prevalence of certain paradigm perspectives, research designs and data-analysing methods in the selected qualitative publications.
- Investigate the involvement of scholars and institutions in qualitative publications.

Findings

Trends over the past two decades

Aligned with the first objective stated above, the number of qualitative articles published in each respective journal was identified and compared to the number of other articles in the same journal. Figure 1 and Table 1 illustrate the percentage of qualitative research articles published per journal each year.

From the trend lines as depicted in Figure 1, it is evident that there is an annual variation in the amount of qualitative articles across all the publications under research. Articles in SAJHRM only commenced in 2003, when the journal was first established. However, since then SAJHRM has published qualitative articles throughout. This is in contrast to SAJP and SAJIP that did indicate a number of years in which no qualitative articles were published. Regarding SAJIP no qualitative articles appeared in the volumes of 1996, 1999 up to and including 2002, as well as in the volumes appearing in 2009. For SAJP, no qualitative articles appeared in the volumes published in 2001.

Except for the articles published in SAJIP in 2012, the amount of qualitative articles in all three journals was less than 50% of the total articles per annum. Especially in SAJIP and SAJP, qualitative articles remained below 30% of the publications per year, with only one exception in 2012 where 58.07% of the articles published in SAJIP were qualitative.

Overall, the percentages of qualitative articles compared to the total number of articles published are much higher in SAJHRM. In 2003, the first year of publication for this journal, the percentage of qualitative articles were 34.62%, and later in 2005 and 2009, the percentages of qualitative articles were found to be as high as 42.31% and 37.50%. Although this indicates a low percentage of qualitative articles published

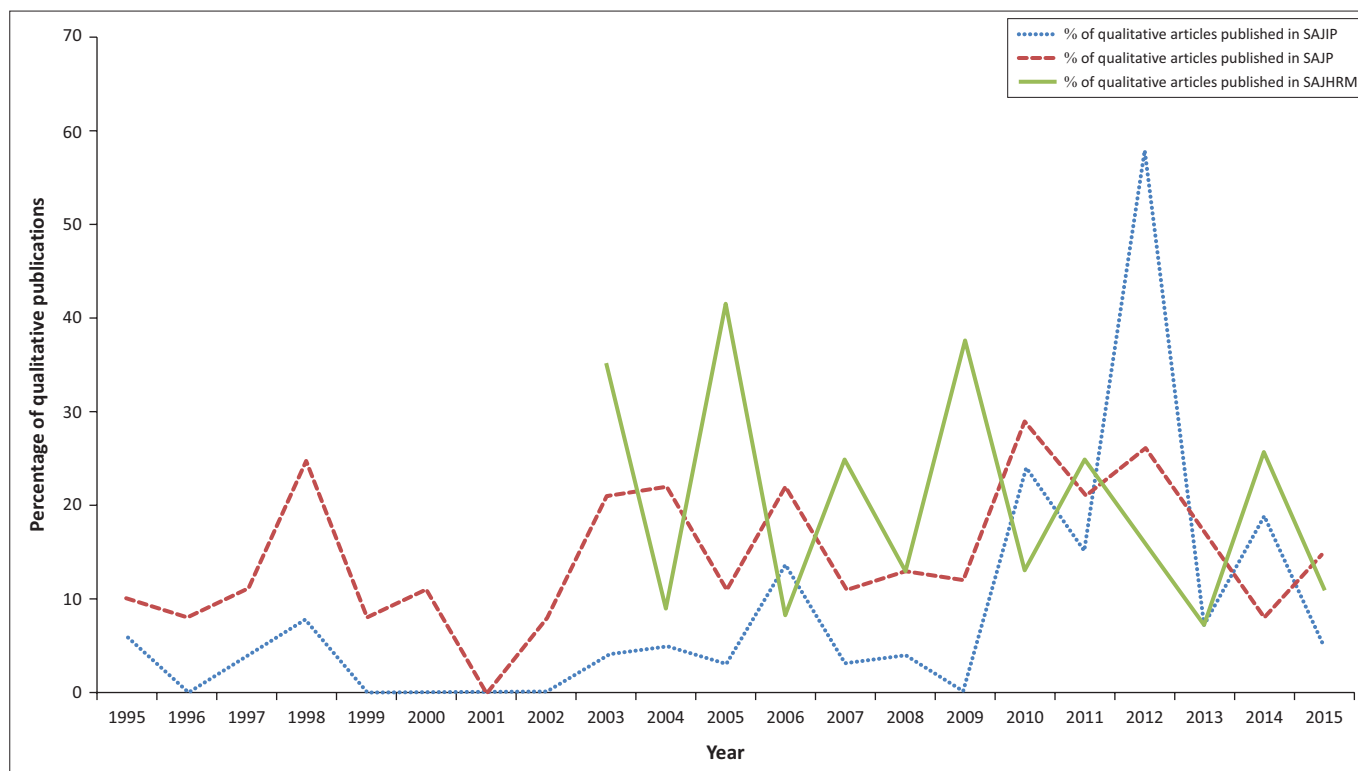


FIGURE 1: Trends over the years in the percentage of qualitative publications per journal.

per annum, there is definite evidence of an increase in qualitative articles over the past two decades (1995 to 2015). Interestingly, the overall percentage of qualitative publications in SAJIP is much lower (9%) compared to the other two journals (15% in SAJP and SAJHRM publishing 21% qualitative articles).

Prevalence of elements indicating qualitative research

The content analysis revealed the prevalence of the following research elements in the selected articles from the three groups of journals.

Research paradigms

Regarding prevalent descriptions of specific research elements, various paradigms were reported from the articles. During the data analyses these examples were reduced to only ten paradigm descriptions (examples of articles using each of the paradigm descriptions can be viewed in Appendix 1). The prevalence of these paradigms (in the total sample of articles) is illustrated in Figure 2.

As illustrated in Figure 2, although specific paradigms were reported, a large number of articles did not specify any paradigm but referred to the use of a general qualitative approach (33.88%). In Figure 2, the term 'general qualitative approach' denotes a category created for articles in which their authors did not specify a paradigm but would, for instance, describe the nature of qualitative research and why it is appropriate for their specific research study. The second largest category (15.29%) indicates that the authors did not

include any information on the paradigm from which they conducted their research.

Of those specified, Figure 2 shows that the most prevalent paradigms were: interpretive (13.22%), constructivist (9.92%) and hermeneutic phenomenological approaches, the latter in which an author would mention hermeneutic or phenomenological – or a combination of both – as paradigms (8.68%). Some scholars refer to the interpretive paradigm as an umbrella worldview, which includes constructivism (see Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). For the purpose of this research, however, the interpretive category is viewed as including only articles that specifically referred to interpretivism. A few articles did refer to a blend of social constructivism and interpretive paradigms (2.48%).

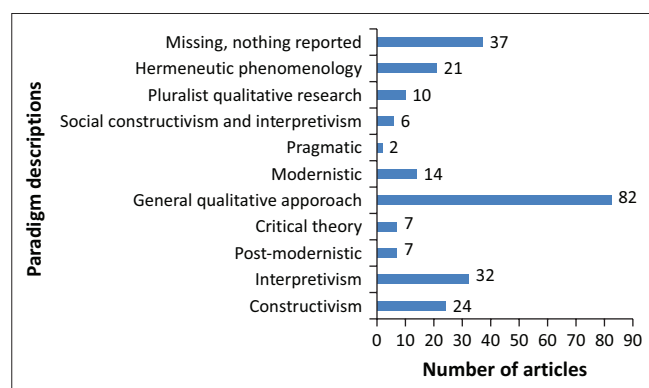
Traditionally, hermeneutic phenomenology is not considered as a paradigm, rather a qualitative design. Yet, Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) indicate this approach as one of various philosophies guiding psychological research. In light of this insight, hermeneutic phenomenology was included as a paradigm. This is due to the large amount of articles using the description of a worldview and not merely a design. Descriptions which authors used ranged from depth hermeneutics, hermeneutic phenomenology, double hermeneutics, to phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology.

Modernist approaches denote positivist and postpositivist paradigms (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002). Figure 2 indicates that a small number of the articles (6%) did specifically mention using the modernist approach.

TABLE 1: Trends over the years in the number of qualitative publications per journals.

Year	SA Journal of Industrial Psychology			SA Journal of Psychology			SA Journal of Human Resource Management		
	Total number of articles published	Number of qualitative articles	%	Total number of articles published	Number of qualitative articles	%	Total number of articles published	Number of qualitative articles	%
1995	16	1	6	30	3	10	-	-	-
1996	20	0	0	36	3	8	-	-	-
1997	24	1	4	28	3	11	-	-	-
1998	24	2	8	28	7	25	-	-	-
1999	16	0	0	26	2	8	-	-	-
2000	28	0	0	27	3	11	-	-	-
2001	37	0	0	33	0	0	-	-	-
2002	45	0	0	24	2	8	-	-	-
2003	47	2	4	33	7	21	26	9	35
2004	44	2	5	36	8	22	23	2	9
2005	38	1	3	44	5	11	26	11	42
2006	44	6	14	49	11	22	25	2	8
2007	32	1	3	55	6	11	20	5	25
2008	27	1	4	48	6	13	16	2	13
2009	23	0	0	42	5	12	24	9	38
2010	38	9	24	41	12	29	24	3	13
2011	27	4	15	47	10	21	24	6	25
2012	31	18	58	53	14	26	30	5	17
2013	41	3	7	35	6	17	27	2	7
2014	32	6	19	40	3	8	23	6	26
2015	21	1	5	27	4	15	19	2	11
Total	655	58	9	782	120	15	307	64	21

Note: Bold values indicate the significant high percentages of articles.

**FIGURE 2:** The different paradigm descriptions featuring in the total sample of articles ($n = 242$).

In the present study, the category 'pluralist qualitative research' was used to denote articles in which a variety of worldviews were noted. These views were sometimes incompatible in traditional terms (e.g. constructivist, positivist and postpositivist, and postmodern used together). Figure 2 shows that (4%) of the articles fell into this category pluralist qualitative research. Only two articles (1%) were shown to be linked to the particular pragmatic paradigm.

The critical worldviews included, among others, the feminist and critical race theory as well as transformative theory. In total, only seven of the articles (3%) could be grouped into this category, and only seven (3%) as well with regard to the postmodern worldview.

When comparing the descriptions of paradigms for the three journals, it is evident that some paradigms are more prevalent in certain journals. Table 2 summarises these findings.

It is evident from Table 2 that the paradigm, constructivism, was more prevalent in SAJP's articles, whereas the hermeneutic phenomenology had a higher incidence in articles of SAJIP. Most of the latter articles were attributed to a specific author (namely, Frans Cilliers). It seems that articles utilising the modernistic approach was mostly published in SAJHRM and the critical theory approach was only presented in SAJP articles. Interestingly, the majority of the articles which did not describe or report any information on the paradigms that were used are found in SAJP. This may be attributed to quite specific template guidelines for authors that SAJIP and SAHRM provide on their official websites.

Although all of the journals published articles from a variety of paradigms, publications in SAJHRM appear to be the least diverse with no indication of the postmodern, pragmatic and critical worldviews. It was found that more management-oriented research on organisations was published in the mentioned journal. Therefore, especially research from a critical perspective would attribute to this field as it uncovers issues of power relations and injustices. It is surprising that in South Africa to date no research was published from this stance, seeing that it is a common theme in the discourse within this socio-political context. However, this is similar to international trends of publications in this field (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004).

A closer analysis of the trends in paradigm use over the years made it clear that, in the first five years (1995 to 1999), the paradigms included general qualitative paradigm ($n = 5$), constructivism ($n = 2$), interpretivism ($n = 1$), postmodernism ($n = 1$) and hermeneutic phenomenology ($n = 1$). From the period 2000 to 2004, the same paradigms were utilised, with

TABLE 2: Comparison of paradigm descriptions for the respective journals.

Paradigms descriptions	Number of articles			Total
	SA Journal of Industrial Psychology	SA Journal of Psychology	SA Journal of Human Resource Management	
General qualitative approach	19	41	22	82
Interpretive	10	7	15	32
Constructivism	4	17	3	24
Hermeneutic phenomenology	12	4	5	21
Modernistic	2	1	11	14
Pluralist qualitative research	3	4	3	10
Postmodernism	1	6	0	7
Critical theory	0	7	0	7
Social constructivism and interpretive	3	1	2	6
Pragmatic	1	1	0	2
Missing and/or nothing reported	3	31	3	37

Note: Bold values indicate the trends which are significant.

the addition of the critical theory ($n = 11$). Although the prevalence of the general qualitative research remains high throughout the years, the amount of constructivist and interpretivist paradigms did increase as well. From 2005 to 2010, modernistic qualitative research ($n = 8$) was added as well as a blend of different paradigms, referred to as pluralists ($n = 5$). In the past 5 years, the pragmatic paradigm was mentioned for the first time ($n = 2$), while all the other paradigms still remained in use. It is, therefore, evident that, over the years there was an increase in the variety of paradigms applied in articles on qualitative research.

Research designs

Regarding the prevalence of research designs, it was found that various designs were used in the studies presented in the articles, as Figure 3 indicates.

As indicated in Figure 3, most of the articles (30.58%) did not specify a design (grouped here under 'General qualitative design'). Unspecified designs are not uncommon in qualitative methodology due to the flexible methods employed. Some qualitative scholars refer to this approach as generic qualitative research (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Cooper & Endacott, 2007; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). In this category, authors would state, for instance, that they followed a qualitative design, and further specified the methods used. The unspecified category, however, does not include studies in which no methodological properties whatsoever were mentioned. These studies were grouped under 'Missing/no information reported'. It was possible to categorise as many as 13% of the studies in the latter category.

Of the specified designs, the case study is the most prevalent one (25.62%). Case studies in this sense refer to multiple, single, comparative or ecological studies of specific cases. Internationally, case studies are also a popular design used in psychology (Creswell *et al.*, 2007; Madill & Gough, 2008) and in the management sciences (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). Cassell *et al.* (2006) as well as Stead *et al.* (2011) found case studies to be one of the most prominent designs used in similar international reviews. Cassell *et al.* (2006) found that grounded theory also was as popular as case study methodology. In this regard, Creswell *et al.* (2007) specifically

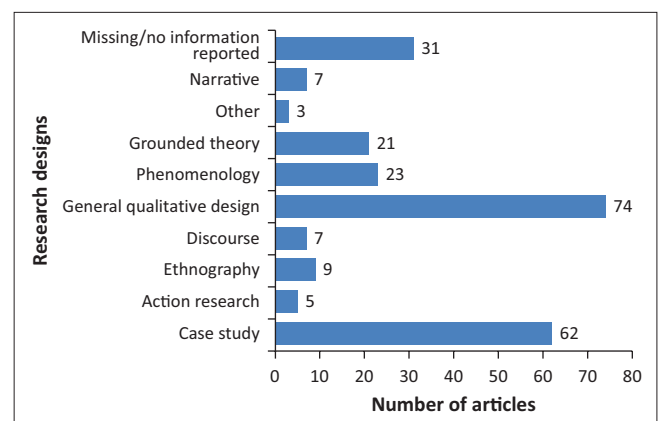


FIGURE 3: The different research designs featuring in the total number of articles ($n = 242$).

names grounded theory alongside case study methodology as the most popular designs employed in research on counselling psychology. According to the present review, designs of grounded theory were also popular (8.68%) but not nearly used as much as case studies, and was also preceded by phenomenological designs (9.50%).

From the data, it is evident that only a few articles used designs such as AR (2.07%), discourse analytic studies (2.89%), narrative designs (2.89%) and ethnography (3.72%). Other designs were used too scarcely to justify a category on its own. These were grouped under 'other' and included, for example, IQA.

When comparing the research designs used in the various journals, it is evident that some designs do not appear as frequent in certain journals. Table 3 summarises these comparisons.

As illustrated in Table 3, the largest diversity in designs is found in the publications from SAJP in which all of the categories are covered. SAJHRM did not feature any articles that used discourse analytic studies or any of the few designs categorised under the 'other' category. SAJIP seems to have published the least variety in designs in which its publications used mainly case study methods, the general qualitative design, grounded theory, phenomenology and AR. Other designs such as narrative, discourse analytic, and ethnographic

designs are not featuring in SAJIP articles at all. This is contrary to the finding of Schurink (2003) that ethnography is a popular design for management and organisational studies. It seems, therefore, that the case study methods and grounded theory are the more prevalent designs featuring also in SAJHRM, with only one ethnographic design published. Similar to the paradigm descriptions, the articles which did not provide information on the reported designs are from SAJP.

Data-analysis methods

In terms of the prevalence of data-analysing methods, various forms were reported, as indicated by Figure 4.

Evident from Figure 4 is the wide distribution of data-analysing methods used in qualitative publications. Thematic analysis (19.02%), content analysis (18.18%) and grounded theory (13.64%) were the analysing methods named the most. Although a fairly even distribution of data-analysing techniques is found in qualitative publications, it seems that narrative analysis (2.48%) is the least popular method that was reported. This is not surprising since narrative analysis would most often, but not always, be linked to narrative designs – also one of the least popular designs mentioned. This is, however, in contrast to findings by Stead *et al.* (2011) that 8.9% of the articles in their review utilised narrative analysis. These researchers did, however, not find articles using discourse analysis, while it is evident from Figure 4 that this form of analysis is used in the articles included in the present study (7.4%).

A variety of less prevalent analysing methods were grouped under the 'other' category (10.33%). These entail the following forms of analysis: ethnographic, IQA, semiotic, as well as analysis within the framework of transcendental realism and various versions of phenomenological analysis. Again, a number of articles (10.33%) did not describe how the data were analysed during these studies.

A comparison can be made of the data-analysing methods featuring in the three journals, as indicated in Table 4.

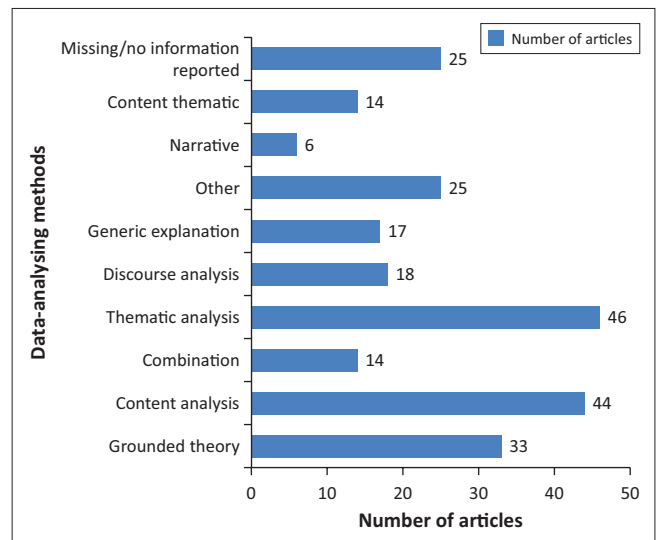


FIGURE 4: The various data-analysing methods featuring in the total sample of articles ($n = 242$).

TABLE 3: Comparison of research designs indicated in the respective journals.

Research designs	Number of articles			Total
	SA Journal of Industrial Psychology	SA Journal of Psychology	SA Journal of Human Resource Management	
General qualitative design	18	39	17	74
Case study	21	15	26	62
Phenomenology	7	12	4	23
Grounded theory	6	3	12	21
Ethnography	0	8	1	9
Discourse	0	7	0	7
Narrative	0	6	1	7
Action research	3	1	1	5
Other	0	3	0	3
Missing and/or no info	3	26	2	31

Note: Bold values indicate significant trends.

TABLE 4: Comparison of data-analysing techniques according to the respective journals.

Data analyses	Number of articles			Total
	SA Journal of Industrial Psychology	SA Journal of Psychology	SA Journal of Human Resource Management	
Thematic analyses	10	25	11	46
Content analyses	19	10	15	44
Grounded theory	9	9	15	33
Other	4	14	7	25
Discourse analyses	8	10	0	18
Generic explanation	3	7	7	17
Content thematic	1	12	1	14
Combination	3	9	2	14
Narrative	0	5	1	6
Missing and/or no info	1	19	5	25

Note: Bold values indicate significant trend.

From Table 4, it is evident that most of the studies utilising thematic analysis (54.35%) were published in SAJP. This confirms Braun and Clarke's (2006) view that thematic analysis is used widely in psychology.

Content analysis was found to be more popular within SAJIP articles (43.18%) and SAJHRM (34.09%) as opposed to SAJP (22.73%). This confirms Schurink's (2003) view that modernist methods such as content analysis are common practices captured in organisational and management studies. Grounded theory is often also equated with a more modernistic approach (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). Almost half of the articles (45.46%) that employed the analysis through grounded theory were published in SAJHRM. Almost all (85.71%) of the reported articles using content thematic analysis were published in SAJP. None of the articles published in SAJHRM used discourse analysis, whereas 55.56% were published in SAJP and 44.45% in SAJIP.

Scholarly and institutional involvement

Regarding scholarly involvement in qualitative research publications over the past two decades, 372 authors were involved with the 242 identified articles and a total of 40 institutions were listed as affiliations on these publications. Various authors (at least 45 authors) were involved with many of the identified articles. The scholars from the sample of qualitative publications in the present study who were found the most involved are summarised in Table 5.

According to the research, the five institutions that were mostly involved with these qualitative publications are as follows: University of Johannesburg (127 articles), University of South Africa (105 articles), North-West University (42 articles), University of Cape Town (36 articles) and University of Witwatersrand (Wits) (35 articles).

Discussion

Outline of the results

The first objective of the present study was to compare the number of qualitative publications with other publications over the past two decades. An increase could be found in the publication of qualitative studies over the past 20 years in the three reviewed journals. However, there still is a lower volume of qualitative research in comparison with non-empirical, mixed methods and quantitative studies. These findings are similar to that of Coetzee and Van Zyl (2014) for the period of 2004 to 2013 on publications in SAJIP. The present study indicated that this pattern is also evident for publications in SAJHRM and SAJP, which

reflects international trends in psychology, IOP and management studies as well (Blustein *et al.*, 2005; Cassell *et al.*, 2006; Cunliffe & Locke, 2015; Madill & Gough, 2008; Ponterotto, 2005; Stead *et al.*, 2011).

Cassell *et al.* (2006) point out various possible reasons for the limited (if any) growth in qualitative publications. Some of these listed factors may also be found to be present in South Africa, and include the following: (1) the 'gatekeepers' such as editors and reviewers are not accepting qualitative studies; (2) certain editorial criteria directing, for example, the presentation of articles are not conducive to the variations of qualitative studies; (3) the criteria applied to evaluate the research are based on the positivist tradition, and will thus not be appropriate for qualitative studies; and (4) there is a lack of exposure to qualitative methods.

Although a range of methodologies is included in the qualitative studies, it seems that qualitative researchers in psychology as well as management and organisational studies have not yet taken full advantage of the available options in qualitative inquiry (Pritchard, 2015). For instance, following to the second objective of the study, the findings indicated that some approaches and methods remain popular, especially for certain journals. It is evident from the results that more contemporary methods (such as autoethnography) are not prominent in the three South African journals included in the current investigation even though these methods increasingly feature in international organisational research (Parry, 2008). This again may relate to the factors listed by Cassell *et al.* (2006) discussed previously. Another reason for this lack of these methods may be that because qualitative research have become so varied that it is often evaluated according to inappropriate criteria, and thus dismissed unfairly.

The present study indicated the popularity and prevalence of certain qualitative approaches and designs featuring in specific journals. This finding confirms that certain approaches and methods are more acceptable in specific journals. This is due to either the criteria for publication as well as the review and editorial process, or because of contributing authors' exposure. Where authors lack exposure it has a snowball effect: limited exposure could possibly result in scarcity of publication, which in turn causes less exposure to contemporary methods. As a result, potential contributors may have less interest in these methods and forfeit possible training opportunities. Due to this lack of exposure, scholars who do wish to publish may not be properly informed, and hence submit articles without proper description, methodological grounding and rigour. The lack of exposure may also lead to less trained reviewers.

With regard to the use of specific paradigms, it was found that a large number of researchers prefer generic qualitative research. As Cooper and Endacott (2007) point out, these designs are probably selected for pragmatic reasons, but it could also be due to the lack of uniformity in various textbooks and scholarly work on the usage of the different paradigms. This confusion, combined with the philosophical

TABLE 5: Scholarly involvement (most published author).

Most published author	Number of articles from this sample
F. Cilliers	18
W. Schurink	14
G. Roodt	10
A. Crafford	9
M.S. May	5

nature of the paradigms' origins and the lack of guidelines on utilising them, may cause many, especially novice qualitative researchers, to feel overwhelmed by the complexity thereof. Many researchers find discussions on paradigms difficult to follow and understand. Therefore they may also be reluctant to design their studies according to a specific paradigm. The problem with generic qualitative research, however, is that it may be weak due to a lack of rigour (Caelli *et al.*, 2003; Morse *et al.*, 2002).

Lee *et al.* (1999), Stead *et al.* (2011) and Schurink (2003), mention that authors of qualitative management and organisational research generally provide weak descriptions of the way they analysed their data. Similarly, it was found that authors did not explicitly describe and identify the methodology, or did not outline it comprehensively. Rynes and Gephardt (2004) point out that this is one of the reasons why qualitative research is often rejected by top-ranking journals internationally. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the importance of clarity when writing the methodological processes in qualitative studies. In this regard, Cassell *et al.* (2006) posit that a qualitative study should: include a thorough literature review, explicitly state the goals of the research, as well as specify the methodological process and discuss it adequately in order to justify the credibility of the results. In the same vein, they also point to the fact that journal's criteria often limit the amount of words. In some qualitative studies, the methodology is complex and requires more space, which makes it difficult to describe the method adequately.

Rynes and Gephardt (2004) ascribe the unclear formulation of the paradigm and design (methodology) to the lack of clearly stated guidelines for the publishing of qualitative research. On the other hand, journals that provide specific guidelines for authors on the content of the submissions do feature clearer descriptions in their articles (Elliott *et al.*, 1999). This is also evident in the present review, in which the two journals (SAJIP and SAJHRM) that provide formal guidelines for qualitative publications on their respective websites have published more articles where the authors did indicate or describe their paradigm, methodology and data analyses.

Regardless of author guidelines, methodological descriptions may, however, still lack clarity and detail regarding the practical steps that were taken. According to Ponterotto (2005) the root of this problem is merely a lack of knowledge due to insufficient training provided in research methodology, starting at tertiary education. South African higher education does not have a tradition of training qualitative methods in human resource management and industrial psychology departments. When these methods are indeed taught, it often does not carry the same weight and endorsement as the quantitative methods (Schurink, 2003). As a result, both the scholars and students as emerging researchers are left in the dark about the possibilities that qualitative methods hold and how to employ them.

The concentration of certain methods (e.g. discourse analytic studies) in certain journals may not only revolve around the review process and authors' exposure and knowledge

(Cassell *et al.*, 2006). It could also be linked to the profile of the authors who feature in specific journals. The results show clearly that there are highly prominent authors representing specific institutions, who contribute to the scholarship of qualitative IOP research.

Practical implications

The present study provided an opportunity to appreciate the scope of possibilities for publication in the field of IOP, psychology and HRM in South Africa. At the same time, it revealed gaps to develop new methodologies that are not often utilised.

What is published and how it is presented in journals do, however, not only rely on the authors of the articles, but to a large extent on the reviewing process, and particularly, on the preferences and knowledge of the reviewers and editors concerned. This emphasises the need for specialised reviewers in qualitative research, and for journal editors to consider the various methodologies that qualitative research has to offer. Qualitative research is no longer a unified methodology, and pluralism should thus be recognised in the review process (Madill & Gough, 2008).

Limitations of the study

The researchers began the search for articles by means of the journals' search functions using specific key words. If the used keywords were not set for a qualitative article, it would not have been included in the data. Although various keywords, and combinations of keywords, were used to make sure that this did not happen, the researchers will only know for certain if all the journals were also hand-searched for omitted articles.

Since the review did not include articles from all the different methodologies, the research could not compare qualitative designs in particular with mixed methods, conceptual or quantitative research.

At certain instances when reviewing the articles, it was found that authors mentioned the use of certain paradigms or methodologies, yet on closer inspection, it became evident that the named methodology/paradigm in fact was not used. This matter is also noted by Rynes and Gephardt (2004) who found that many articles claim to use grounded theory methodology, but in reality less often apply it. This tendency can be ascribed to the fact that reviewers and editors of journals find some qualitative designs more acceptable than others. For the present study, this may also reflect a lack of understanding and insight into qualitative research on the part of the editor, reviewers and authors of the articles. An inconsistency between the named and applied methodology may deliver superficial results (Rynes & Gephardt, 2004). Although numerous instances were noticed in the present review, the focus of this study was not to critique the published articles, but rather to use the mentioned methodology for analysis.

To a certain extent, the use of an inductive coding method allowed variation and flexibility during the analysing process.

More importantly, this method made it possible to keep as close as possible to the researchers' own description of their methodology. On the other hand, however, due to the vague descriptions there, unfortunately, is the risk of incorrect categorisation throughout, although the researchers used independent coding and cross-checking in an attempt to reduce this possibility.

Recommendations

From this study's results, recommendations can be made to the various role players in the process of publication of qualitative research, namely the researcher, the journal editors and the review boards, as well as the community of scholars in IOP, psychology and HRM in general. Firstly, specifically related to researchers, although it is evident that qualitative research is being accepted more in mainstream journals, prospective qualitative researchers should keep in mind that some aspects of qualitative research 'still lurks in the shadows' (Pritchard, 2015, p. 309). There is more possibilities in qualitative methodology than that which is presented in publications. Secondly, although it may not be as popular as quantitative studies, it still provides an opportunity for publications that may have a great impact in practice, especially in an organisational context (Cunliffe & Locke, 2015). Thirdly, when it is pursued, qualitative researchers should steer away from generic qualitative research. Whichever paradigm (or number of paradigms) is chosen, researchers should make explicit their paradigm, which they consistently should represent throughout their selection of the design, as well as in their writing and interpretation of the results (Elliot *et al.*, 1999; Madill & Gough, 2008; Ponterotto, 2005; Pratt, 2009). The last point pertaining to the researchers specifically is that for the sake of quality of qualitative publications, as well as exposure within the community of qualitative practitioners (Cunliffe & Locke, 2015), qualitative researchers should make the methodology they followed explicit in their writing.

Journal editors should consider differentiating among the various methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods and non-empirical studies), as well as between qualitative research traditions, when developing guidelines for authors and reviewers of their journal. It is evident that whether and what guidelines given to prospective qualitative researchers have an impact on the quality of the article published. Although the present article supports the idea of proper author guidelines, a rigid structure may hamper the incorporation of a variety of qualitative methodologies, especially the more postmodern approaches such as autoethnography. Clear guidelines of the journal's expectations without stifling the many possible forms of qualitative research, may increase the quality of the publications.

As it relates to the scholarship in IOP, psychology and HRM in general, the underutilised methods indicate a need for more training opportunities in qualitative methodology as mentioned by Cassell *et al.* (2006), Rynes and Gephardt (2004) and Schurink (2003). The present researchers express the

hope that further training may lead to more publications in these journals, which in turn may result in greater exposure of researchers to what the methodology has to offer.

Conclusion

The present study offered an overview of two decades of qualitative research that was published in SAJIP, SAJHRM and SAJP. Besides creating an awareness of the trends in publication, the hope is that this research will initiate a dialogue between local researchers on the development of qualitative methodologies in future research.

In line with the objectives set out in the present study, the findings showed: (1) although there seem to be a slight increase in qualitative publications over the years, qualitative studies still have a lower volume than its counterparts; (2) certain journals prefer the use of specific paradigms and methods, while all the journals feature numerous descriptions of generic qualitative research methodology and some articles totally omits the methodology of the studies; (3) a number of authors and institutions are very active in publishing qualitative research. Although the pluralism of the methods is evident over the years, there are methods that remain underutilised. More awareness should be created among the wide range of available methods and how they can be used.

When authors publish qualitative research they should aim to give a comprehensive description of the processes involved in the methodology they employed. Besides strengthening the rigour of the research, this practice will increase the visibility of qualitative methods and expand the 'methodological menu' of this type of research in the 21st century.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their gratitude towards Rachele Roos, who traced the articles used for this research.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

S.O. and E.K. shared equal responsibility for the project leadership, project design and project conceptualisation.

References

- Bansal, P., & Corley, K. (2011). The coming of age for qualitative research: Embracing the diversity of qualitative methods. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*, 233–237. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2011.60262792>
- Barnard, G., & Fourie, L. (2007). A conceptual framework to explore the roles and contributions of industrial psychologists in South Africa (Part 1). *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *33*(2), 34–44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v33i2.375>
- Blustein, D., Kenna, A., Murphy, K., De Voy, J., & DeWine, D. (2005). Qualitative research in career development: Exploring the centre and margins of discourse about careers and working. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *13*, 351–370. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1069072705278047>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Bryman, A. (2004). Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review. *The Leadership Quarterly, 15*, 729–769. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.09.007>
- Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). Clear as mud: Towards greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Method, 2*(2), 1–13.
- Cassell, C., Symon, G., Buehring, A., & Johnson, P. (2006). The role and status of qualitative methods in management research: An empirical account. *Management Decisions, 44*(2), 290–303. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/0025174061065025>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, UK: Sage.
- Coetzee, M., & Van Zyl, L.E. (2014). A review of a decade's scholarly publications (2004–2013) in the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 40*(1), 1–16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v40i1.1227>
- Conger, J.A. (1998). Qualitative research as the cornerstone methodology for understanding leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 9*(1), 107–121. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(98\)90044-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(98)90044-3)
- Cooper, S., & Endacott, R. (2007). Generic qualitative research: A design for qualitative research in emergency care? *Emergency Medicine Journal, 24*, 816–19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/emj.2007.050641>
- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, & mixed methods approaches*. (4th edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W., Hanson, W.E., Plano Clark, V.L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 236–264. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>
- Cunliffe, A.L., & Locke, K. (2015). Continuing to build community in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 10*(4), 310–313. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2015-1300>
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *The sage handbook of qualitative methods*. (2nd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Edley, N. (2006). Never the Twain Shall Meet: A critical appraisal of the combination of discourse and psychoanalytic theory in studies of men and masculinity. *Sex Roles, 55*(9), 601–608. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9116-x>
- Ehigie, B.O., & Ehigie, R.I. (2005). Applying qualitative methods in organizations: A note for Industrial/Organizational Psychologists. *The Qualitative Report, 10*(3), 261–638.
- Elliott, R., Fischer, C.T., & Rennie, D.L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 38*, 215–229. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1348/014466599162782>
- Eriksson, P., & Koalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative methods in business research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. (4th edn., pp. 301–316, Chapter 17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Frost, N. (2011). *Qualitative research method in psychology: Combining core approaches*. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.
- Glazer, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Guercini, S. (2014). New qualitative research methodologies in management. *Management Decision, 52*(4), 662–674. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/MD-11-2013-0592>
- Halbesleben, J.R.B. (2011). A plea for more training opportunities in qualitative methods. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 84*, 661–665. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8325.2011.02040.x>
- Holt, A. (2011). Discourse analysis approaches. In N. Frost (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in psychology combining core approaches* (pp. 66–91, Chapter 4). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.
- Hutchinson, S.R., & Lovell, C.D. (2004). A review of methodological characteristics of research published in key journals in higher education: Implications for graduate research training. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(4), 383–403. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/B:RIHE.0000027392.94172.d2>
- Johnson, P., Buehring, A., Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2007). Defining qualitative management research: An empirical investigation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 2*(1), 23–42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17465640710749108>
- Jordaan, Y., Wiese, M., Amade, K., & De Clercq, E. (2013). Content analysis of published articles in the *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences, 16*(4), 435–451.
- Kolbe, R.H., & Burnett, M.S. (1991). Content-analyses research: An examination of applications with directives for improving research reliability and objectivity. *Journal of Consumer Research, 18*, 243–250. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/209256>
- Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, T.W., Mitchell, T.R., & Sablynski, C.J. (1999). Qualitative research in organizational and vocational psychology, 1979–1999. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 55*, 161–187. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1707>
- Locke, K., & Golden-Biddle, K. (2002). An introduction to qualitative research: It's potential for industrial and organizational Psychology. In S.G. Rogelberg (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 99–118). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- Madill, A., & Gough, B. (2008). Qualitative research and its place in psychological sciences. *Psychological Methods, 13*(3), 254–271. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0013220>
- McMahon, M., & Watson, M. (2009). Career psychology research challenges: A systems theory response. *South African Journal of Psychology, 39*(2), 144–194. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/008124630903900204>
- Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice. Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1*(2), 13–22.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2016). Introducing qualitative research. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (2nd edn.). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Ngulube, P., & Ngulube, B. (2015). Mixed methods research in the *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*: An investigation of trends in the literature. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences, 18*, 1–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2222-3436/2015/v18n1a1>
- Parker, L. (2014). Qualitative perspectives: Through a methodological lens. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management, 11*(1), 13–28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/QRAM-02-2014-0013>
- Parry, K.W. (2008). Viewing the leadership narrative through alternative lenses: An autoethnographic investigation. *Management Revue, 19*(1/2), 126–147.
- Ponterotto, J.G. (2005). Qualitative research in counselling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 126–136. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.126>
- Pratt, M.G. (2009). From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management, 52*(5), 865–862. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2009.44632557>
- Pritchard, K. (2015). On 'growing up' with QROM: Invited contribution for the anniversary issue. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 10*(4), 307–309. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2015-1297>
- Rothmann, S., & Cilliers, F.V.N. (2007). Present challenges and some critical issues for research in industrial/organisational psychology in South Africa. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 33*(1), 8–17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v33i1.262>
- Rynes, S., & Gephart, R. P. (2004). Qualitative research and the 'Academy of Management Journal'. *The Academy of Management Journal, 47*(4), 454–462. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2004.14438580>
- Shreuder, D., & Coetzee, M. (2010). An overview of industrial and organisational psychology research in South Africa: A preliminary study. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 36*(1), Art# 903, 11 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v36i1.903>
- Schurink, W.J. (2003). Qualitative research in management and organisational studies with reference to recent South African research. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management, 1*(3), 2–14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v1i3.25>
- Shepherd, C., & Challenger, R. (2013). Revisiting paradigm(s) in management research: A rhetorical analysis of the paradigm wars. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 15*, 225–244. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12004>
- Stead, G.B., Perry, J.C., Munka, L.M., Bonnett, H.R., Shiban, A.P., & Care, E. (2011). Qualitative research in career development: Content analysis from 1990 to 2009. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 12*(2), 105–122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10775-011-9196-1>
- Strumpfer, D.J.W. (2007). Lest we forget that industrial and organizational psychology is psychology. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 33*(1), 1–7.
- Van Maanen, J. (1979). Reclaiming qualitative methods for organizational research: A preface. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*(4), 520–526. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2392358>
- Watson, T.J. (2011a). Ethnography in the context of management and organizational research: Its scope and methods, and why we need more of it. *Journal of Management Studies, 48*(1), 198–201. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00981.x>
- Watson, T.J. (2011b). Ethnography, reality, and truth: The viral need for studies of 'How things work' in organizations and management. *Journal of Management Studies, 48*(1), 202–217. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00981.x>
- Werner, S. (2002). Recent developments in international management research: A review of 20 top journals. *Journal of Management, 28*(3), 277–305. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/014920630202800303>
- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- West, D. (2007). Directions in marketing communication research. *International Journal of Advertising, 26*(4), 543–554.
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. (3rd edn.). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Appendix 1

Example of articles from the data for the various paradigms, designs and data analyses.

Variable	Reference from the data	Journal
Paradigms		
Constructivism	Reuben and Bobat (2014)	SAJIP
Interpretivism	Grobelaar, Roodt and Venter (2004)	SAJHRM
Post-modernistic	Mayer and Louw (2009)	SAJHRM
Critical theory	Shefer and Strebel (2000)	SAJP
General qualitative approach	Steynberg and Veldsman (2010)	SAJHRM
Modernist	Lesabe and Nkosi (2007)	SAJHRM
Pragmatic	Draper, Lund and Flisher (2011)	SAJP
Social constructivism and interpretivism	Saayman and Crafford (2011)	SAJIP
Pluralist qualitative research	Barnard, Schurink and De Beer (2008)	SAJIP
Hermeneutic phenomenology	May (2012)	SAJIP
Designs		
Case study	De Bruyn and Roodt (2009)	SAJHRM
Action research	Geldenhuys (2012)	SAJIP
Ethnography	Beyleveld and Schurink (2005)	SAJHRM
Discourse	Wilson and Strebel (2004)	SAJP
General qualitative design	De Beer and Barnes (2003)	SAJHRM
Phenomenology	Groenewald and Schurink (2003)	SAJHRM
Grounded theory	De Jager, Cilliers and Veldsman (2003)	SAJHRM
Other		
Narrative	Chinyamurindi (2012)	SAJHRM
Data analyses		
Grounded theory	Whitehead and Kotze (2003)	SAJHRM
Content analysis	Chawane, Van Vuuren and Roodt (2003)	SAJHRM
Combination	Blackbeard (2007)	SAJP
Thematic analysis	Bowman, Bamjee, Eagle and Crafford (2008)	SAJP
Discourse analysis	Motsoaledi and Cilliers (2012)	SAJIP
Generic explanation	Oosthuizen and Naidoo (2010)	SAJIP
Other	Gumani (2014)	SAJIP
Narrative	Rapmund and Moore (2002)	SAJP
Content thematic	Brandt (2004)	SAJP

Note: These articles are not included in the reference list, but full references are available upon request from the authors.