CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION – A BRIEF THEORETIC OVERVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief theoretic overview of some aspects relevant to research in communication. The researcher believes that government communicators always need to conduct research on the basis of sound theoretical guidelines and principles to ensure research of good quality. Writing about Total Quality Management (TQM), Pace (2001) defines quality as "doing the right thing the right way the first time and every time", and further defines "right" and "wrong" with regard to quality as follows:

The right thing must be understood from both internal (product/service) and external (customer) perspectives. This means that the product or service meets customer requirements, performs as stated, is priced fairly, and is delivered on time.

The right way is the most effective, most efficient, lowest cost, fastest, highest value approach to producing the right outcome the first time and every time. It applies conformance to all applicable standards and specifications as well as minimisation of the costs of poor quality such as rework, waste, and scrap.

Pace (2001) concludes that "poor quality could be defined as either doing the wrong thing (or failing to do the right thing) or doing the right thing the wrong way (or failing to do the right thing the right way every time)."

The researcher argues that communication research is the "right thing" to do, but that it is of no use if not done in "the right way."

In chapter 2 communication research is defined. The researcher furthermore distinguishes different types of research, discusses the different steps in the research process typical to most research projects and refers to some of the challenges of communication research. Lastly, a few points regarding the use of communication research by governments are introduced.

2.2   COMMUNICATION RESEARCH DEFINED

Definitions and descriptions of different focus areas in research and of various research methodologies and processes are more readily available than a definition of 'research', and Leedy (1997:3) remarks that "the word *research* is used in everyday speech to cover a broad spectrum of meaning, which makes it a decidedly confusing term …"

Reinard (2001:3) provides the following short definition of research: "Research is the systematic effort to secure answers to questions." He expands on this concise definition by stressing the point that "these questions are not mundane ones", but that "research questions deal with issues requiring reference to data and information" (Reinard, 2001:3-4). Leedy (1997:3) defines research as "the systematic process of collecting and analysing information (data) in order to increase our understanding of the phenomenon with which we are concerned or interested." Powell (1997:2) does not provide his own definition of 'research', but quotes three definitions from others:

"Studious inquiring or examination; especially: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories

or laws in the light of new facts, or practical applications of such new or revised theories or laws" (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, cited by Powell, 1997:2).

"A method or study by which, through the careful and exhaustive investigation of all the ascertainable evidence bearing upon a definable problem, we reach a solution of that problem" (Hillway, cited by Powell, 1997:2).

"Research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data" (Mouly, cited by Powell, 1997:2).

Both interesting and useful to understand the meaning of research, is Leedy's guidelines as to what research is not (Leedy, 1997:4):

- Research is not mere information gathering.
- Research is not mere transportation of facts from one location to another.
- Research is not merely rummaging for information.
- Research is not a catchword to get attention.

According to Powell (1997:2) "there is no one definition of research, in part because there is more than one kind of research."

Focus areas in research covered extensively in the literature available, include the following:

- marketing research (Martins, 1996a:3-22; Chisnall, 1991:6; Crimp, 1990:3; Bailey, 1982:2)
- market research (Cooper, 1998:1015-1024; Fairweather, 2001; Smith, 1998:29-65; Yule, 2001; Shalofsky, 1998:1103-1128)

- social research (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000; Bulmer, 2000a:8-9; Groenewald, 1981; Möhler, 1998:1025-1032; Shalofsky, 1998:1103-1128)

- advertising research (Hansen, 1998:653-724; Yasuda and Spence, 2000:179-201; Martins, 1996b:550-567)

- public opinion research (Khoury, 1989; Mattes, 1993:30-32; Worcester, 1999; Taylor, 1998:975; ESOMAR, 2000a)

- media research (Raimondi, 1998:803-838; Martins, 1996c:570-597).

Similar to both Reinard and Leedy, Chisnall (1991:6) and Weiers (1984:2) refer to research as being a "systematic process" when they define marketing research. Chisnall (1991:6) defines it as being "concerned with the systematic and objective collection, analysis and evaluation of information about specific aspects of marketing problems in order to help management make effective decisions." Weiers (1984:2) adapts a definition presented by Kotler in 1980 in the following way: "Marketing research is the systematic design, collection, analysis and reporting of data and findings relevant to a specific marketing situation."

In this chapter, the researcher quotes from different sources consulted where the focus was either on one or more of the focus-areas mentioned above – e.g. marketing research and social research. The researcher is of the opinion that the same broader principles, processes and challenges apply to communication research and the other focus areas identified.

Analysis of definitions available, leads the researcher to the conclusion that most authors emphasise the 'why' and 'how' when defining research and the different focus areas in research.

Referring specifically to the 'how', Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:11) defines scientific research as "the translation into practice of the relationship between facts and theory … in order to acquire specific information" and distinguish the following four characteristics of scientific research:

- "Scientific research is *empirical* since the aim is to know reality. Each step is based on observation, be it when collecting the basic facts or when testing the explanation, assessing the value of the prediction or the result of an intervention.

- Scientific research is *systematic* and *logic*. Not only must the observation be done systematically but a certain logical order must be followed all along (see discussion regarding research process, paragraph 2.4).

- Scientific research is *replicable* and *transmittable*. Since the observation is objective and the explanation logical, anyone placed in exactly the same circumstances can observe the same event and make the same reasoning, leading to the same explanation and prediction. Moreover, it is possible to communicate each step of the research and to transmit the acquired knowledge.

- Scientific research is *reductive*. To grasp the main relationships of laws, the complexity of reality is reduced. All details which are not essential or which have little influence on the process under investigation are omitted" (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:5-6).

The only definition of communication research available to the researcher is that of Reinard (2001:5) who defines communication as "the process by which participants transact and assign meaning to messages" and explains that a message is "the set of verbal and non-verbal cues communicators exchange." According to Reinard (2001:4), communication research is "a speciality that studies message-related behaviour." He explains that "some people have difficulty separating communication research from work in psychology, sociology

or literature", and that they argue "that since 'meanings are in people' (Berlo, cited by Reinard, 2001:4) any study of people is communication research."

Relevant for the communication researcher is the reminder by Worcester (1999:3) who, writing about public opinion research, says that "polls do not measure some abstract 'truth', but people's perceptions."   Worcester (1999:3) refers to the wisdom expressed by Epictetus as long ago as the first century that "perceptions are truth, because people believe them."

Although researchers are confronted with various challenges when conducting communication research (see paragraph 2.5), and the reality that contemporary communication testing is still far from perfect, Hansen (1998:716) argues that it is still good enough to warrant the recommendation: "Test rather than guess."

The researcher fully agrees with Hansen's argument, but wants to emphasise the necessity of conducting this "test" in the "the right way."   Furthermore, the researcher is of the opinion that the spectrum of aspects covered by communication research conducted by governments is broader than "studies in message related behaviour" referred to by Reinard in his definition of communication research as quoted.   Research conducted by governments to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information (see chapers 3 to 5 of this dissertation) also includes studies related to communication and information products and initiatives of governments; exposure to and attitude towards the different mediums that can be used for government communication and the dissemination of government information; awareness and knowledge of and attitude towards government performance and towards government policies and initiatives on a wide spectrum of issues. To some extent, therefore, the research conducted by governments to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information focuses on more than merely communication and

information. The focus includes areas like media research, public opinion research and social research.

2.3 TYPES OF RESEARCH

2.3.1 Introduction

There are many different ways according to which research studies are classified – e.g. according to various focus areas (see paragraph 2.2), the environment from which the research is conducted (e.g. academic, business or government) or the specific technique of data collection (e.g. personal interviews, telephone interviews or mailed questionnaires).

The researcher distinguishes different types of research according to the classification of Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:37-44). These authors suggest that research studies can be classified according to the following three aspects:

- the methodology used (*quantitative* and *qualitative* research)
- the reasons for the research being conducted (*basic* social research and *applied* social research)
- the demands of the research question (*exploratory* research, *descriptive* research, *correlational* research and *explanatory* research).

2.3.2 Different types of research

2.3.2.1 Quantitative and qualitative research

Two broader *methodologies* are mostly distinguished to classify different types of research studies – quantitative and qualitative research.

(a)   Quantitative research

Quantitative research involves "the collection of primary data from large numbers of individuals, frequently with the intention of projecting the results to a wider population" (Bennett, 1996:125). Quantitative research is normally conducted amongst a representative sample of a target population with the aim to generalise the research findings to the specific population (or universum). The emphasis is on numerical measurement (Smith, 1998:40; Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:38 and MORI, 2001a) and subsequent statistical analysis (Smith, 1998:40; Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:38). The large sample (number of respondents) is necessary to analyse the results according to categories within the target population - that is according to age, gender, exposure to a communication product or message and so forth. According to Reinard (2001:8) quantitative research "tends to be explanatory, especially when experiments are involved, or it attempts to use precise statistical models to achieve comprehensive understandings of human communication (as in survey studies and polls of public opinion)." Using quantitative research methods, researchers often aim to explain communication behaviour by looking at processes that allow them to predict future behaviour (Reinard, 2001:8).

Reinard (2001:11) argues that there are two major types of quantitative research - surveys and experiments. Examples of the different types of quantitative research, in the focus area of communication research is also provided by Reinard – see table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1

TYPES OF QUANTITATIVE STUDIES[1]

TYPES (DESCRIPTION)	EXAMPLES
SURVEY METHODS*:* Techniques that involve carefully recorded observations that provide quantitative descriptions of relationships among variables	
Descriptive or observational surveys: Direct observation of behaviour by use of some measurement (the researcher does not manipulate or change any variables)	• Discovering what sorts of things small-group communicators say that predict their becoming group leaders • Identifying the relationship between the number of newspapers a person reads on a regular basis and the amount of ear of society the person reports

(continue …)

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[1] Reinard, 2001:11

TYPES (DESCRIPTION)	EXAMPLES
Content analysis: A systematic, quantitative study of verbally communicated material (articles, speeches, films) by determining the frequency of specific ideas, concepts, or terms **Opinion surveys:** assessments of reports from individuals about topics of interest	• Studying the amount of violence on children's television programmes • Inquiring into the amount of newspaper space dedicated to stories about a women's movement • Analysing the types of speech defects shown by children in samples of spontaneous speech • Analysing surveys regarding which candidate people think won a political debate • Examining whether the public believes that speech correction therapy should receive increased funding in public schools • Assessing surveys of the favourite television programmes people watch
EXPERIMENTAL METHODS: A method of studying the effect of variables in situations where all other influences are held constant. Variables are manipulated or introduced by experimenters to see what effect they may have	• Studying the impact of the use of evidence by exposing one group to a speech with evidence and another group to a speech without evidence • Studying the effect of colour in advertising by exposing one group to an advertisement with colour printing and another group to an advertisement without colour printing

The methods of data collection mostly used for quantitative surveys include:

- face-to-face (or personal) interviews of the interviewer (or researcher) with the respondent at the respondent's place of residence, in the street, at shopping malls or at work

- telephone interviews

- self-completion of a questionnaire by the respondent (either alone or as individuals in a group) in the presence of the researcher or through the questionnaire being delivered and collected by the researcher

- self-completion of a questionnaire by the respondent received and returned by post

- Internet or online research

(Ward, 1998:149-171; Bennett, 1996:125-133; Smith, 1998:49-55).

Each of these data collection methodologies has certain limitations and advantages – e.g. in terms of cost, time to collect the data, quality control and sampling efficiencies. These are not discussed by the researcher. The limitations and advantages need to be properly investigated and considered in the context of each survey when a decision has to be taken regarding the method of data collection.

(b)   Qualitative research

Qualitative research, according to Goodyear (1998:177), is often defined in terms of its relation to quantitative research: "Where quantitative research *measures*, and answers questions like 'how many, how often, what proportion, what size …?', qualitative research leads to *understanding* and answers questions like 'why did, how can, in what way?"

Furthermore, Bennett (1996:133-134) argues that qualitative research methods can also be used "to uncover new ideas from or hidden feelings of respondents" and that it can best be achieved by "unstructured interviews in which respondents can talk freely without too much leading" from the moderator.

In qualitative research, qualifying words or descriptions are used to record responses (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:37) and observations are mostly described in "non-numerical terms" (Reinard, 2001:6). In qualitative research the researcher involves a smaller number of respondents (Smith, 1998:40) and there is no attempt to generalise about the population (Bennett, 1996:145). Qualitative research does not place the same emphasis on classic statistical validity as quantitative research. Smith (1998:40) explains that, for qualitative research, "validity centers more on *face* validity – that is, establishing whether the evidence is consistent with existing theories and prior knowledge."

Qualitative research is response and not question orientated. The response to a question largely determines the following question, therefore respondents are not interviewed according to a predetermined set of questions (Smith, 1998:40).

According to Reinard (2001:6) qualitative research studies in the field of communication "tend to *describe* or *interpret* communication exchanges." Reinard (2001:7-8) proceeds to explain that these studies attempt to "describe the human condition by using general views of social action" and that "researchers who use qualitative methods often try to interpret the meanings to be found in communication exchanges."

Qualitative research can be conducted in either an individual or group setting. There are a number of different approaches to collecting qualitative results on an individual basis. According to Smith (1998:45), the *depth interview* is the most commonly used method in this regard. Bennett (1996:134) emphasises that depth interviews require the services of skilled interviewers and refers to Webb (1992) who identifies the following circumstances where depth interviews will be particularly useful:

- when the issue under investigation is embarrassing, stressful or of a confidential nature
- when a detailed analysis needs to be conducted of rather complex situations such as attitudes, beliefs and feelings
- when peer pressure may cause some respondents to conform to societal norms when in reality they would not
- when the interviewer needs a progressive set of images, such as buying decision with regard to overseas holidays
- in complex situations when the aim is to explore rather than measure.

From experience, the researcher can add that depth interviews with individual respondents are, for various reasons, also often preferred to qualitative research in a group setting when involving leaders, managers or opinion-formers.

With regard to collecting qualitative research results on a group basis, there are also a variety of approaches, but the most widely used is the *group discussion* (MORI, 2001b; Smith, 1998:45; Bennett, 1996:136). A group discussion describes a session involving between six and eight

individuals (Smith, 1998:45) who are recruited according to specific criteria.[2]

The moderator's role is to manage the discussion flow in the group (Smith, 1998:45). Bennett (1996:138) explains that ideally the moderator should let the group carry on the conversation "by themselves" and that "interventions are deemed necessary only to introduce a new topic if it does not come up spontaneously or to bring the discussion back on track if participants have strayed into irrelevant areas." The moderator needs to manage the discussion flow according to the discussion guide in a response-orientated approach and probe for response where appropriate. The moderator should "create a relaxed atmosphere in which respondents can comment in a constructive, non-defensive way" (Smith, 1998:45) and facilitate the balanced involvement of different members of the group. Moderators "should exercise just enough authority to direct and control the flow of conversation without affecting its content" (Bennett, 1996:138). Furthermore, the moderator needs to observe non-verbal communication in the group (Smith, 1998:45).

The terms *group discussion* and *focus group* are mostly used interchangeably, but Smith points out that they are in fact slightly different: "The group discussion, which has a European pedigree, places the emphasis on depth understanding. In contrast, the more American style focus group tends to place more emphasis on – albeit still in a qualitative mode – measurement and quantification" (Smith, 1998:45). It is of critical importance to properly understand the need of the research client in this regard.

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[2] The criteria will depend on the nature of the study. In communication research basic socio-demographic variables are commonly used – e.g. gender, age, level of socio-economic development and language preference.

2.3.2.2   Basic and applied research

Based on the *reasons* why research is conducted, the two types of research distinguished are basic research and applied research.   Whether the aim of the research is basic or applied does not affect the way in which the research is conducted (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:39) – the methods of inquiry are identical (Reinard, 2001:4).   Suchman (cited by Philips, 1985:534) and Kidder and Judd (1986:396) also emphasise that the significant difference between basic research and applied research is one of purpose and not of method.

(a)   Basic research

Basic research applies when the researcher seeks to "contribute to human knowledge and understanding relating to a specific phenomenon" (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:38).   Neuman (1997:21) argues that "basic research advances fundamental knowledge about the social world."   Neuman furthermore explains that basic research "focuses on refuting or supporting theories that explain how the social world operates, what makes things happen, why social relations are a certain way, and why society changes" and that "basic research is the source of most new scientific ideas and ways of thinking about the world" (Neuman, 1997:21).   Reinard (2001:4) explains that basic research is conducted "to learn about relationships among variables" and according to Vickery (cited by Powell, 1997:2) basic research "is concerned with elucidating concepts and their relations, hypotheses and theories."   This aim is normally achieved by "gathering more facts and information which enables existing theories to be challenged and new ones to be developed" (Bless and Higson-Smith 2000:38).

Basic research is research conducted "regardless of any immediate commercial product or service" (Reinard, 2001:4).   As Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:38) put it, the "actual utility or application of this newly acquired knowledge is of little

concern to the researcher." According to Reinard (2001:34) and Powell (1997:2) most research usually referred to as 'pure' scientific research is actually basic research.

(b)   Applied research

Applied research is conducted if the researcher's motivation is to assist in solving a particular problem (Reinard, 2001:4; Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:38; Philips, 1985:534; Neuman, 1997:22 and Powell, 1997:2) or to develop a product (Reinard, 2001:4). According to Neuman (1997:22) theory is "less central" to applied researchers than "seeking a solution to a specific problem" and its main strength, is its "immediate practical use."

Although Powell (1997:2) mentions that applied research is occasionally referred to as action research, Neuman (1997:23-28) remarks that researchers use "several types of applied research," and distinguishes three types of applied research: action research, social impact assessment and evaluation research.

According to Neuman (1997:23) *"action research* is applied research that treats knowledge as a form of power and abolishes the line between research and social action."   Isaac and Michael (cited by Powell, 1997:45) state that the purpose of action research is "to develop new skills or new approaches and to solve problems." Action research is characterised as "practical, orderly, flexible and adaptive, and empirical to a degree, but weak in internal and external validity" (Isaac and Michael, cited by Powell, 1997:45). Neuman (1997:23) explains that there are "several types of action research" and that "most share the following common characteristics:

- those who are being studied participate in the research process
- research incorporates ordinary or popular knowledge
- research focuses on power with a goal on empowerment

- research seeks to raise conscious or increase awareness, and
- research is tied directly to political action.

Social impact assessment, according to Neuman (1997:24) "may be part of a larger environmental impact statement required by government agencies. Its purpose is to estimate the likely consequences of a planned change. Such an assessment can be used for planning and making choices among alternative policies." Researchers conducting social impact assessments "examine many outcomes and often work in an interdisciplinary research team" (Neuman, 1997:24). Neuman furthermore notes that "social impact studies often include a cost-benefit analysis" in which the researcher "estimates the future costs and benefits of one or several proposed actions."

Evaluation research is a widely used type of applied research (Neuman, 1997:25) and has as its primary goal "not the discovery of knowledge but rather a testing of the application of knowledge within a specific programme or project" (Powell, 1997:45). Neuman (1997:25) emphasises that "ethical and political conflicts often arise in evaluation research because people have opposing interests in the findings" and Powell (1997:45) notes that "evaluative researchers must be concerned with threats to validity, such as intervening variables, measurement techniques and operational definitions." The two general types of evaluation research are *summative* evaluation and *formative* evaluation. Summative evaluations look at final programme outcomes (Neuman, 1997:25). A summative or outcome evaluation "tends to be quantitative in nature and often is used as the basis for deciding whether a programme will be continued" (Powell, 1997:46). Formative or process evaluation is "built-in monitoring or continuous feedback on a programme" (Neuman, 1997:25) and "examines how well the programme is working" (Powell, 1997:46). According to Powell (1997:46) formative evaluation is often more qualitative and it is typically used for "revising and improving programmes."

Classifying research projects in this way is perceived as not being very useful in practice. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:39) argue that no study is "only purely basic or purely applied," and Reinard (2001:4) explains that "last year's basic research may be today's source of new products." Powell (1997:2) also holds the opinion that basic and applied research are "not necessarily dichotomous" and that "in spite of the fact that basic and applied research have tended to be conducted in isolation from one another."

2.3.2.3   *Different objectives of social research*

A third way of classifying types of research is based on the demands of the research question, that is in terms of the research objectives. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:37-44) distinguish four types of research on the basis of this classification: exploratory, descriptive, correlational and explanatory.

(a)   Exploratory research

In cases where very little is known about the research topic, one speaks of exploratory research (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:37). Powell (1997:58-59) explains that exploratory research "can increase the researcher's familiarity with the phenomenon in question, can help to clarify concepts, can be used to establish priorities for future research, can identify new problems and … can be used to gather information with practical applications." According to Neuman (1997:19) exploratory researchers are "creative, open minded, and flexible; adopt an investigative stance; and explore all sources of information. Researchers ask creative questions and take advantage of serendipity, those unexpected or chance factors that have large implications."

Both Powell (1997:58) and Neuman (1997:19) remarks that exploratory researchers frequently conduct qualitative research. Powell (1997:59), speaking

of exploratory research in general, emphasises that "it is important to remember that exploratory studies merely suggest insights or hypotheses; they cannot test them," and Smith (1998:38) remarks that a "typical outcome" from exploratory research would be "the generation of a number of hypotheses that could be taken forward for quantitative testing at a later stage of the project."

(b)   Descriptive research

Descriptive research "presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship" (Neuman, 1997:20). Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:41) and Neuman (1997:20) are of the opinion that descriptive and exploratory research have some similarities. Neuman (1997:20) remarks that descriptive and exploratory research "blur together in practice" and explains that "in descriptive research, the researcher begins with a well-defined subject and conducts research to describe it accurately." Descriptive research focuses on "how", "who", "what", "when" and "where" questions (Smith, 1998:38 and Neuman, 1997:20) and "provides a solid platform for helping to understand currents, and possibly predict future behaviour" (Smith, 1998:38).

(c)   Correlational research

When the research question requires an understanding of the relationship between variables, the research is called correlational research (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:37). The task of determining a casual relationship is a complex and difficult one. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:43) explain that "it is based on systematic comparison, manipulation and control of variables." Correlational research is "not only useful when no clear causal relationship exists, but also allows for an estimation of the strength of the relationship between two variables even when one variable is influenced by many others" (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:43).

(d)   Explanatory research

"When the research question demands that the researcher explains the relationship between variables and demonstrates that change in one variable causes change in another variable, the research is called explanatory research" (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:37). According to Neuman (1997:20) the desire to know why things are the way they are, to explain, is the purpose of explanatory research. Neuman (1997:20-21) explains that explanatory research "builds on exploratory and descriptive research and to identify the reason why something occurs." Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:43) state that explanatory research is often not feasible: "This is the case when it is not possible to manipulate the suspected independent variable or to assess the time-order of variables."

2.3.3   Summary

Different research methodologies are applied (or applied in combination) depending on the reasons why the research is conducted, the demands of the research question, the target group for the research, available funding, time-scales and the competency and capacity of researchers.

2.4   THE RESEARCH PROCESS

2.4.1   Introduction

In paragraph 2.2 the researcher, with reference to various authors, mentions that research is a "systematic effort", a "systematic process" and the "systematic and objective collection, analysis and evaluation of information." In paragraph 2.5.3, reference is made to Reinard (2001:12) who remarked that "productive research

follows steps that carry out some sort of design." This implies that every research project invariably requires careful and appropriate planning and execution by the researcher.

No matter how unique any research problem or project, there are a number of steps which are common to the process relevant to most research projects. As the word *process* implies, Puth (1996:80) explains, "(marketing) research involves a series of steps or phases which cannot be viewed in isolation, but which should be seen and dealt with as an integrated whole. This integrated evolvement of steps which are followed when planning and executing a research project is known as the research process."

Although not all the steps are applicable to all types of research, sensitivity and application of relevant steps in the research process by the researcher will enhance the success and quality of the research project – it will assist the researcher in his/her initiative to do "the right thing" in "the right way" (see paragraph 2.1).

Different sources of research literature distinguish many different steps and permutations of steps. The researcher uses the steps as identified and developed by Puth (1996:80-96) through combining and synthesising an extensive variety of relevant documentary resources. The different steps in the research process are referred to shortly, but not discussed in any detail.

2.4.2 Steps in the research process

2.4.2.1 *Identifying and formulating the problem*

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:15) express a sentiment shared by many other researchers that "selecting a research problem is a delicate task." Puth

(1996:82) mentions that the American Marketing Association (AMA) came to the conclusion in 1968 that "if any step in a research project can be said to be more important than the others, then problem definition is that step."

The step in the research process referred to by the AMA as 'problem definition', is broken up into two distinguishable phases by Puth (1996:82). The first phase entails the identification of the problem whilst the second phase is the refinement of the problem to a level where it can be clearly formulated in order to provide direction and guidance to the research process. If the research problem is well formulated and the research objectives precisely defined, the likelihood of designing a research study that will provide the necessary information in an efficient manner is greatly increased. Problem identification and problem formulation should result in "a precise statement of the objectives of the research to be conducted and a set of research questions" (Puth, 1996:82).

Reinard (2001:32-35) suggests the following five criteria to formulate sound and useful problem statements:

- problem statements must be stated unambiguously, usually as questions
- except for simple exploratory studies, problem statements must include at least two variables
- problem statements must be testable
- problem statements must not advance personal value judgements
- problem statements must be clear grammatical statements.

2.4.2.2   *Deciding on what kind of data is required*

After identifying and formulating the problem, the researcher will have a good idea of the nature of the data required. According to Puth (1996:84) the data relating to the research objectives may be anyone or more of the following:

33

- facts – e.g. demographic profile

- levels of awareness – e.g. awareness of an announcement by government regarding initiatives to create job opportunities

- opinions and attitudes – e.g. respondents' opinions and attitudes on whether government's initiatives to create jobs will be successful

- preferences – e.g. the channel(s) of communication preferred (closely related to opinions and attitudes)

- motives or predispositions – reasons why people act or think as they do

- behaviour (that can be seen as the result of attitude, preference and motivation).

On their website, MORI (2001c) also adds the aspect of knowledge – that is assessing what the respondents know (or think they know, or claim to know!).

2.4.2.3   Exploring secondary data sources

Puth (1996:86) argues that as every research project is a search for information on some topic, researchers can be more confident of the quality and appropriateness of their information if they tap all the relevant resources. "Often there is a wealth of information and data on the research problem already collected by others, in which case it may not be cost-effective or necessary to conduct a whole new research project in order to answer the research question. In many cases existing secondary data may be sufficiently relevant and comprehensive to answer at least a certain part of the overarching research question" (Puth, 1996:86).

An exploration of secondary data resources can begin with a search of published data, identification of unpublished data that is relevant and interviewing knowledgeable or well-informed people on the topic or problem area.   It is

essential to explore all possibilities of secondary data sources before proceeding with the remaining steps of the research process.

Reinard (2001:76) remarks that "some inexperienced researchers believe they can ignore past work and use entirely new ideas and methods". Reinard (2001:76) proceeds by referring to Stanovich who calls this misguided approach the 'Einstein syndrome' since "researchers who suffer from it fail to connect their 'sudden breakthroughs' with lessons from others. By discarding previous lessons as irrelevant, they fail to learn from the lessons from others."

2.4.2.4   *Revising and fine-tuning the research question*

After exploring the secondary data sources, the researcher needs to fine-tune the research question. According to Puth (1996:86), this is the stage at which "a clearer picture of the problem starts to emerge and where the project begins to crystalise in one of two ways:

- it is apparent that the question has been answered and the research process has been completed
- the original question has been modified in some way by the gathered information."

Puth (1996:86-87) furthermore identifies five other problem-related activities that should be considered to effectively complete the fine-tuning of the original question:

- examine if the concepts and constructs to be used in the investigation are defined satisfactorily
- review the investigative questions to break them down into more specific levels of questions
- if hypotheses are used, they must be relevant to the refined research problem

- determine what evidence needs to be collected to answer the various questions and hypotheses

- set the boundaries or limits of the project by stating what is part of the research problem and what is not.

2.4.2.5   Designing the research study

Mouton (2001:55) explains that a research design is "a plan or blueprint of how you intend conducting the research." Mouton (2001:56) argues that researchers often confuse 'research design' and 'research methodology' and summarises the differences between these two concepts – see table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY – A SUMMARY[3]

RESEARCH DESIGN	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Focuses on the end product: What kind of study is being planned and what kind of result is aimed at?	Focuses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used
Point of departure = research problem or question	Point of departure = specific tasks (data collection or sampling) at hand
Focuses on the logic of research: What kind of evidence is required to address the research question adequately?	Focuses on the individual (not linear) steps in the research process and the most 'objective' (unbiased) procedures to be employed

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[3] Mouton, 2001:56

Puth (1996:87) is of the opinion that "selecting an appropriate research design is often complicated by the availability of a large variety of methods, techniques, procedures and ever-more-sophisticated computer programming and technology." Also emphasising the reality that the design of the research study is one of the most challenging steps in the research process, is the viewpoint of Smith (1998:29) that researchers will seldomly be able to pursue their 'ideal' design and that it is a process of compromise. Smith (1998:29) explains that "decisions have to be made about what degree of *precision* is needed and how much *depth of understanding* is required. This trade-off also needs to be balanced against the *time* and *budget* available." Further, Smith explains, "market researchers must take into account the *practicality* of different approaches whilst ensuring the study is *ethical*" and also complies with the codes of conduct in the research industry.

Mouton (2001:57) presents a broad classification of the main research design types according to the kind of questions the design types are able to answer – see figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: *A typology of research design types*[4]

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │   TYPES OF STUDY    │
                        └─────────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────────┐
              ▼                                          ▼
  ┌────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
  │  Empirical studies │              │        Non-empirical studies         │
  └────────────────────┘              │                                      │
              │                       │ (Philosophical analysis, conceptual  │
              │                       │  analysis, theory building,          │
              │                       │  literature reviews)                 │
              │                       └──────────────────────────────────────┘
              ▼
  ┌────────────────────┐
  │ Using primary data │              ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
  │                    │              │        Analysing existing data       │
  │ (Surveys,          │              └──────────────────────────────────────┘
  │  experiments, case │                       ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
  │  studies, programme│                       ▼                             ▼
  │  evaluation,       │              ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
  │  ethnographic      │              │    Text data     │      │  Numeric data    │
  │  studies)          │              │                  │      │                  │
  └────────────────────┘              │ (Discourse       │      │ (Secondary       │
                                      │  analysis,       │      │  data analysis,  │
                                      │  content analysis,│     │  statistical     │
                                      │  textual criticism,│    │  modeling)       │
                                      │  historical      │      │                  │
                                      │  studies)        │      │                  │
                                      └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
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2.4.2.6   Determining the sample

According to Collins (1998:69) "almost all market research studies use sampling – the attempt to learn about some large group, a population, by looking at only a small part of it, a sample."

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[4] Mouton, 2001:57

The "population" referred to by Collins is not necessarily the total population of a country or area, but the totality of the target group (or universum) from which the sample needs to be drawn. As a first step in the sampling process the target population needs to be identified. Thereafter the researcher needs to determine the sample characteristics and determine the sample size.

Two broader sampling methods can be distinguished, namely probability and non-probability sampling. Martins (1996d:253) explains that "a probability sample is one in which every element has a known non-zero probability of being selected. It is unnecessary for all elements to have an equal chance of being selected, but each element must have a chance and that chance must be known so that the sampling results can be applied to the universe. Non-probability samples rely on the judgement of the researcher and are only as representative as the researcher's luck and skill permit. In non-probability sampling there is no way of estimating the probability that any element will be included in the sample, and therefore there is no method of finding out whether the sample is representative or not". It is important to note that "the most important criterion" of a sample, according to Puth (1996:87) is that it will be "totally representative of the population relevant to the solving of the management problem and the ensuing research questions."

2.4.2.7 Allocating funds and resources

Depending on the nature and scope of a research project, substantial financial and human resources may be necessary. The researcher needs to do appropriate planning and allocate resources timeously in order to avoid a situation where a project has to be terminated due to a lack of resources.

Puth (1996:88) explains that "although data collection does require substantial resources, it might not always be as big a part of the budget as clients or

researchers would expect. Employee salaries, training and travel, and other miscellaneous expenses are incurred during data collection, but this phase of the project often takes no more than a third of the research budget. The geographic scope and number of respondents naturally affect the cost, but much of the cost is relatively independent of the extent and size of the data gathering exercise." An interesting and useful guideline suggested by Puth (1996:88) is that project planning, data collection and analysis and, lastly, interpretation and reporting each have a share more or less equal in the budget.

2.4.2.8   *Writing and presenting the research proposal*

A research proposal is mostly developed and fine-tuned concurrently with the exploring and planning phases of the research project. The research proposal would therefore incorporate the decisions and choices made by the researcher in the preliminary stages of the project.

The most important purpose of the research proposal is to ensure that all parties concerned understand the project's purpose and the proposed methods of research.   Time limits and budgets are also identified and justified in most research proposals. Various responsibilities and obligations are clarified.

According to Puth (1996:89) "every proposal should contain two basic sections, namely the problem statement and a statement of what will be done and how it will be done. In its varied forms the research proposal can include any number of the following elements: executive summary, problem statement, research objectives, literature review, importance and benefits of the study, research design, data analysis, nature and form of results, qualification of researchers, budget, time schedule, facilities and special resources, project management, bibliography and appendices."

2.4.2.9   Conducting a pilot test

Piloting is the last stage in the design of a research project (including design of the questionnaire or discussion guide) before the survey goes into the field for data collection (Miller and Read, 1998:380).

Puth (1996:89) explains that the primary purpose of a pilot test is two-fold: to detect weaknesses in design and instrumentation and to provide a sound base for determining and refining the sample. During the pilot test respondents are drawn from the universum or target population and the procedures and protocols of the research project are simulated. The number of respondents involved in a pilot test would depend on primarily the research methodology and the characteristics of the target population, but need not be statistically selected.

2.4.2.10   Collecting primary data

According to Bulmer (2000b:205), the "most critical phase in social research is that during which data are actually collected."

The different data collection methods (e.g. questionnaires or transcribed recordings of focus group discussions) will have different implications for data collection.   Each method of data collection has specific advantages and disadvantages, qualifying it as a better or a less-preferable option than other methods for the collection of certain types of data. Puth (1996:90) mentions that "although a combination of methods can be considered in certain circumstances, it is often not done for reasons of cost." The researcher then needs to decide invariably on the method that will yield the most satisfactory range of reliable data as cost-effectively and as quickly as possible.

In order to provide data in a form that can be used by the researcher for analysis and interpretation, it needs to be edited to "identify and isolate omissions and spoilt responses. In the case of survey methods editing is essential to reduce recording errors, to improve legibility, and to identify and filter unclear and inappropriate responses" (Puth, 1996:90).

2.4.2.11   Analysing and interpreting the data

Data analysis involves reducing the accumulated data to a manageable size to allow summarising, comparing, syntheses and applying statistical techniques in order to interpret the results in relation to the research problem. Data analysis can be either very basic (e.g. one-way frequency distributions or cross-tabulation), involve different methodologies of significance testing (e.g. analysis of variance or the Mann-Whitney test) or even done by applying multivariate statistical techniques (e.g. discriminant and cluster analysis) (Martins, 1996e:305 and 315; Loubser, 1996b:336 and 339; Wegner, 1996:356-363).

Mouton (2001:109) explains that interpretation involves the synthesis of data into larger coherent wholes. Observations or data are interpreted and explained by "formulating hypotheses or theories that account for observed patterns and trends in the data. Interpretation means relating one's results and findings to existing theoretical frameworks or models, and showing whether these are supported or falsified by the new interpretation. Interpretation also means taking into account rival explanations or interpretations of one's data and showing what levels of support the data provide for the preferred interpretation."

In order to interpret results correctly, the researcher needs to be familiar with the method of the research and the limitations of the results (Van Wyk, 1996:396). The pitfalls awaiting the researcher in the interpretation of results include the following:

- drawing inferences from the data that are not supported by the data

- biased intepretation of the data through selectivity

- overgeneralisation

- confusing correlation with causation

(Van Wyk, 1996:396 and Mouton, 2001:110).

Adding to the pitfalls already mentioned, Van Wyk (1996:397) emphasises "there may be more information hidden in the data than the researcher cares to or is able to bring to light" and that "it requires experience, disciplined thinking and familiarity with the research method to let the results say what they are able to say."

2.4.2.12 Reporting the results

Preparing the research report and communicating the research findings and recommendations to the client are the final steps in the research process. Van Wyk (1996:398) argues that "the report is the culmination of the whole research project" and quotes Churchill who expressed this sentiment: "Regardless of the sophistication displayed in the other portions of the research process, the project is a failure if the research report fails."

The ultimate objective with the report is "to enable the client to make an informed and scientifically verified decision to solve the original problem that prompted the undertaking of research in the first place" (Puth, 1996:90). Various authors emphasise that research reports will be quite different in terms of style and organisation depending on the aim and objectives of the research project and the target audience for the report (e.g. Van Wyk, 1996:398-402; Puth, 1996:90; Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:141).

Puth (1996:91) remarks that "the items to be included in a research report are essentially the same as those identified in the discussion of the research proposal." But, taking into account the target audience for the research report, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:141) write as follows:

The most detailed, complete and scientific report for research-funding institutions and archives will present all the different steps of research in detail. A report written to be published in a scientific journal will have to show a high level of scientific quality condensed into a few pages. A report written for an agency particularly interested in the conclusions and practical consequences will cut short the technical aspects of the research and emphasise the discussion of the findings. A report to be understood by the average educated readership of a magazine will present the findings in more general terms and will avoid scientific vocabulary. In other words, these different reports will stress one or the other aspect of the most complete research report.

Clients will often also expect the researcher to make a personal presentation of the findings and recommendations. Marbeau (1998:520) is of the opinion that the challenge of results presentation lies in achieving "*speed* and *clarity* without stripping out any important substance from the findings. The answer is conciseness, i.e. being short yet complete." The same author also regards it as important for the presenter to be *modest*, and to "present the results and the answers rather than the research and the researcher. Also important is *honesty*, to separate the reliable facts from their hypothetical interpretation" (Marbeau, 1998:520).

2.5   CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Already from the preceding paragraphs, it is clear that researchers conducting communication research are exposed to various problems and challenges. Awareness of such challenges is essential for conducting communication research of professional quality.

Reinard (2001:6-14) identifies the following six challenges of communication research:

- the challenge of breadth and focus

- the multiple methods challenge

- the scholarly rigour challenge

- the personal challenge (or what do I need to do to study communication research methods successfully?)

- the ethical challenge

- the structure of the field challenge.

The researcher shortly discusses the challenges of communication research according to Reinard's categories of challenges, incorporating contributions from other authors.   A few of the other challenges facing the communication researcher are also mentioned.

2.5.1   The challenge of breadth and focus

Reinard (2001:6) is of the opinion that although "the number of communication applications can seem enormous, there is a rational order to it."   Making this statement, he refers to the work done by McBath and Jeffrey (1978) to identify the professional areas in communication on behalf of the Speech Communication Association and the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES).   These two organisations were trying to organise information about careers in various

fields. The list of communication specialities used by the NCES is provided in table 2.3. The left column of the table shows the official taxonomy with an emphasis on the career areas of scholars. Reinard added a couple of areas to those originally listed by McBath and Jeffrey - e.g. conflict management, journalism, radio and television, public relations and health communication. In the column to the right of table 2.3 a description is provided of the kinds of research issues that are normally addressed in each of the areas.

TABLE 2.3

COMMUNICATION SPECIALITIES[5]

COMMUNICATION TAXONOMY	DESCRIPTION
1. The Broad Areas of Mass Media Communication	
Advertising	The study of mass media methods of influence to promote a product, service or cause
Communication Technology	The study of the mechanisms and technologies of mass media
Communication Policy	The study of public policy and regulation of mass media communication and freedom of speech
Film as Communication	The role of popular and technical cinema in society
Journalism	The study of the methods of reporting and organising news for presentation in print media

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[5] Reinard, 2001:7-8

Public Relations	The study of methods of managing publicity and press relations for an organisation, person or cause
Radio	The study of the methods and uses of radio
Television	The study of the methods and uses of televised communication
2. Specific Areas of Speech Communication Research Code Systems	The study of the uses of verbal and non-verbal symbols and signs in human communication
Intercultural Communication	The study of communication among individuals of different cultural backgrounds
Interpersonal Communication	The study of communication interactions occurring in person-to-person and small group situations
• Conflict Management	The study of the role of communication in the creation and control of conflict
• Family Communication	The study of communication transactions within the constraints of families of all sorts
Organisational Communication	The study of interrelated behaviours, technologies, and systems functioning within an organisation
• Health Communication	The study of communication issues among participants involved in medical and health systems
Oral Interpretation	The study of literature through performance involving the development of skilled verbal and non-verbal expression based on critical analysis of written texts (aesthetics of literature in performance, criticism of literature in performance, group performance, oral traditions)

Pragmatic Communication	The study and practice of communication, the object of which is to influence or facilitate decision making
• Argumentation	The study of reason-giving behaviour
• Debate	The study of decision making in which adversaries present arguments for decision by a third party
• Discussion and Conference (including Group Decision Making)	The study of methods of decision making in which participants strive to discuss, explore and make decisions on issues
• Parliamentary Procedure	The study of the means used to handle deliberation in large legislative bodies through the use of formal rules and procedures to regulate debate and discussion
• Persuasion	The study of the methods used to influence the choices made by others
• Communication and the Law	The study of communication issues involved in the legal system and the practice of law
Public Address	The study of speakers and speeches, including the historical and social context of platforms, campaigns, and movements
Rhetorical and Communication Theory	The study of the principles that account for human communicative experiences and behaviour
Communication Education	The study of communication in pedagogical contexts (communication development, oral communication skills, instructional communication)

Speech and Hearing Science	The study of the physiology and acoustical aspects of speech and hearing (biological aspects of speech and hearing, phonological aspects of speech and hearing, physiological aspects of speech and hearing)

The researcher fully agrees with Reinard's (2001:6) sentiment that "each area is broad enough to promote many interesting studies." The breadth and extensive focus of communication research clearly poses various challenges to the researcher, and the importance of having a broad knowledge should be emphasised.

2.5.2 The multiple methods challenge

Reinard (2001:6) explains that qualitative methods are mostly used in studying literature whilst the historical method is employed in history and the experiment holds a prominent position in psychology. Contrary to this, the communication researcher uses all of these and other methods to answer questions. Research projects in communication tend to rely mostly on quantitative and qualitative methods – see paragraph 2.3.2.1. The research question or objectives guides the selection of methods, not the other way around (Bulmer, 2000a:10; Reinard, 2001:8; Smith, 1998:40).

Smith (1998:39) remarks that "the debate that is often conducted about the merits of small scale, flexible qualitative, and larger scale, structured quantitative research, has been largely unhelpful in the sense that they are more 'mutual friends' than 'mutually exclusive foes'." To a growing extent it is suggested that different methodologies should be used in combination. Smith (1998:40) strongly argues the case that "a good research design invariably involves adopting an eclectic approach, mixing together the best combination of methodologies to deal

with the research objectives." Sonnenwald and Iivonen (1999:430-431) conclude that "research in information studies increasingly combines multiple methods to research human information behaviour because doing so can provide a more holistic and comprehensive view of information behaviour, increase the validity of research results through data and methodological triangulation, or both."

The communication researcher needs to have appropriate knowledge of different research methods and needs to know when, why and how to apply different methods. Furthermore, the researcher needs to understand when and how to apply more than one method during work on a communication project in order to properly address the aim and objectives of the research project.

2.5.3 The scholarly rigour challenge

In order for research to meet standards of excellence, communication researchers must conduct research with recognition of five key challenges identified after Tuckman by Reinard (2001:12):

- Research is *systematic*. Productive research follows steps that carry out some sort of design. Researchers ask questions and implicitly agree in advance to seek for answers by examining pertinent information.
- Research is *data driven*. If data cannot be collected, or if we are unwilling to alter our opinions, the issue is not suitable for research.
- Research is a *sound* argument. Research arguments reason from research data and information to draw conclusions. Thus, arguments in this context are defined as claims advanced on the basis of reasoning from evidence. Sound reasoning is vital for effective research. Logic and the methods to evaluate arguments are valuable tools to judge research.
- Research is capable of *replication*. If research methods are so vaguely described that it is impossible to repeat the procedures in a study, the worth of the entire research project is questioned. Regardless of whether

replications actually are completed, the ability to replicate studies is essential for any piece of sound research.

- Research is *partial*. Research findings are partial because we may discover new relationships involving other variables that make us modify or qualify the conclusions we have found. Thus, communication researchers do not claim to have discovered 'The Truth' for all time. Instead, they advance tentative - but meaningful - insights for communication phenomena.

2.5.4   The personal challenge

This challenge relates to the question of what a person needs to do to study communication research methods successfully. According to Reinard (2001:13-14) the following five aspects apply:

- the need to *think* in an *orderly* way – to train our minds to separate the relevant from the irrelevant, the observable from the unobservable, and the complete from the incomplete

- the need to *write clearly* – crisply, clearly, precise, structured and to the point

- the need to *set aside personal prejudices* in the light of data – be willing to let the data decide our conclusions, even if we do not like them

- the need to stay *organised* and *follow instructions* – research requires carefully following protocols and methods and to fight the urge to leave out steps, to take shortcuts or to ignore instructions

- the need to *know the reasons* for studying research methods – e.g. to learn to think rigorously and critically, to find answers to questions about communication, to acquire survival skills to help read and use the field's literature and to learn how to sort through past research for answers to research questions.

2.5.5 The ethical challenge

Every decision made in communication – e.g. which methodology to apply for a project – is not merely a practical one, but also an ethical one. Reinard (2001:14) remarks that "research is judged not only by the rigor of procedures and the results obtained but (also) by the ethics of the researchers."

In the literature on social research, the importance of specifically the ethical issues of voluntary participation of respondents, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality is emphasised (e.g. Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000:100-101; Shalofsky, 1998:1111-1113; Groenewald, 1981:97-98). The reality is that ethical issues in communication research are much broader than the few mentioned above that only relate to a specific aspect of data collection. For example, Reinard (2001:14) refers to a situation in the United Kingdom where the archbishop of York once challenged British scientists to consider the ethical consequences of their research by urging them to ask "What applications will be made of my research?" before they undertake their studies.

Over the period of the last few decades, many research organisations have developed formal codes of conduct to guide practitioners and researchers. The first code was published in 1948 by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) (ESOMAR, 2000b).

In South Africa initiatives of the Southern African Marketing Research Association (SAMRA) to develop a code of conduct for this industry in the country go as far back as 25 October 1963. On that date a first sub-committee was appointed to "investigate the ethical codes of conduct existing in market research practices overseas." In October 1967 the first SAMRA Code of Conduct was ratified. Following various revisions, the current SAMRA Code of

Conduct includes guidelines regarding the following issues (SAMRA, 2001:60-67):

- responsibilities to the reader of a report
- obligations to the client/sponsor of a survey
- responsibility to informants
- responsibilities to and of the research practitioner
- responsibilities to the general public.

A document that creates food for thought to the researcher sensitive to the importance of ethics, is the document compiled by Paul Reynolds in 1979. Reynolds compiled an extensive list of ethical issues from documentation from 24 organisations doing research in the social sciences (Reinard, 2001:14). The list involves a total of 78 guidelines according to the following broader structure, and is attached as an Annexure:

- general issues related to the code of ethics
- decision to conduct the research
- conduct of the research
- effects on and relationships with the participants' informed consent
    - general
    - provision of information
    - voluntary consent
- protection of rights and welfare of participants
    - general issues
    - deception
    - confidentiality and anonymity
    - benefits to participants
    - effects on aggregates or communities
- interpretations and reporting of the results of the research

2.5.6   The structure of the field challenge

Reinard (2001:14) correctly remarks that "communication research has been promoted by many organisations whose members often cross the barriers created by the organisation of different schools" and that "it is helpful to know how the diverse and major organisations in our field showcase our research."

The researcher is of the opinion that communication researchers need to make a specific effort to enhance their perspective and the quality of their work by seeking to engage and interact with other researchers in the field of communication research through outreach to professional organisations in their country as well as abroad, to private sector research companies, the advertising and public relations industry and the academic environment.

2.5.7   Other challenges

A few of the many other challenges facing the communication researcher are:

- measurement in a cross-cultural environment (McGorry, 2000:74-79)
- challenges in underdeveloped and developing communities - e.g. availability of reliable statistics, language, cultural and custom-related issues, identification, training and management of interviewers (e.g. Bulmer and Warwick, 2000:38; Gil and Omaboe, 2000:42; Hershfield *et al.*, 2000:241; Loubser, 1996a:236-248)
- public education on how survey statistics and differences are generated, and how to use them (Cooper, 1998:1024)
- choosing the right research company to conduct a research project (MORI, 2001c)
- bridging the communication gap that often exists between researchers and creatives (Hansen, 1998:655).

When conducting communication research for government, researchers need to be alert of all the potential challenges, and implement procedures and processes to ensure that the research conducted is of unquestionable quality.

2.6   THE USE OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH BY GOVERNMENTS

According to Faure (1995:11) previous initiatives for development in "third world" countries failed due to "lack of understanding by professionals or change agents for the real needs of 'third world' communities. An overarching problem was that development programmes in the 'third world' were characterised by a strong deterministical (unilateral Western) paternalistic 'top-down' approach."

Interesting though, is information provided by Khoury (1989:77-79) that "even in ages and societies where government was of despotic nature, most of the illustrious rulers retained by History, have shown in one way or another a deep concern for public opinion." Examples provided by Khoury to prove his point, include that of H Al Rashid and Cathrine II from Russia. Al Rashid, one of the most famous Arab Khalifs[6], as depicted in the *One thousand and one nights* tales of the thirteenth century, was so eager to know what the people thought of his Khalifat that he left the Palace, and went into the streets of Bagdad asking the people their opinion. Cathrine II, the Great of Russia, devised a way for taking into account the public's reactions in the process of her decision-making. Before taking an important stand or approving a new law, she used to spread rumours about it in the streets of Moscow. Thereafter she asked for feedback reports on the people's reactions and considered them in her actions.

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[6]   A Khalif in Islam has two roles – he is the head of the state and the head of the religious authority

Two former heads of state in the United States also remarked about the importance of public opinion. Worcester (1999:1) quotes Abraham Lincoln as saying: "Public opinion is everything." According to Cooper (1998:1015) former US President Clinton is said to have remarked just prior to his election that "the most important people in the United States today are those sitting in focus groups."

Cooper (1998:1016) argues that "market research is a powerful and well-established tool for the development and maintenance of any democratic society." The term *democracy* originates from the ancient Greek, *demos* (people) and *kratos* (strength or power). "In essence", Cooper (1998:1016) explains, "it means that the strength of a society rests with the people, and that a society is strong when the people or their elected representatives directly exercise their power."

In the first edition, in 1988, of *Fundamentals of social research methods: an African perspective*, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:iii) remark that "it was observed that many African governments, non-government and private sector organisations were beginning to attach greater value to social research and the information it provides."

Talking about the process of transforming government communication in a democratic South Africa at the Conference of Government Communicators, Thabo Mbeki (1995b:1) made clear his opinion about the importance of South African citizens' contributions:

The road to an informed and active citizenry should be defined by the citizens themselves. We must strive to ensure that each individual, whatever his or her station in life, plays a meaningful role in decision-making and in governance.

Mbeki (1995b:2) furthermore remarked that South Africa "cannot afford a situation where the majority of our people are mere consumers of information and opinion whose content is determined by one sector of society" and that "the people out there are crying out to hear and be heard."

It is encouraging to note that governments increasingly realise that communication research can be used to enhance the effectiveness of their communication and the dissemination of government information. In order to conduct communication research in "the right way" (see paragraph 2.1), governments communicators need to understand – or at least have the support of those who know and understand – the important principles, challenges and processes involved.

2.7   SUMMARY

Since the researcher's point of departure is that it is of critical importance that communication research by government needs to be conducted on the basis of sound theoretical principles and processes, a brief theoretic overview of research in communication is provided in chapter 2. The concept communication research is defined, and different types of research explained briefly. The research process is attended to by means of a short discussion of the steps in the research process. Lastly, the researcher describes some of the challenges of communication research.