

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHOD

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the research methodology applied in the exploration of employee experiences of a transformation process. The epistemological framework that guided the study is discussed as well as the research strategy and techniques employed.

2 EPISTEMOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

2.1 Qualitative approach

A research study may typically or traditionally be described as qualitative or quantitative research. Quantitative research is generally understood as the traditional, positivist, hypothetico-deductive or experimental paradigm (Creswell, 1994; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). It may also be described as an approach "emphasizing the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b, p. 4). Quantitative enquiry is purported to take place within a value-free framework.. By contrast, qualitative research is referred to as the naturalistic, contextual or interpretative approach (Creswell, 1994). This means that researchers "stress the socially structured nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape enquiry" (Denzin, et al., 1994b, p. 4). Qualitative research therefore deals with "meanings" in participants' life-world (Dey, 1993). Given the preceding understanding of qualitative and quantitative research, this study of people's experiences of the process of organisational transformation is defined as qualitative.

However, defining a study as qualitative or following a qualitative research approach is still vague. The reason for this vagueness is that the concept "qualitative research" does not have a one-dimensional meaning or definition. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions surrounds it (Denzin, et al., 1994b). It is complicated by the fact that it cross-cuts various historical moments (traditional, modernist, blurred genres, crisis of representation, post-modern) and is applied in various disciplines (eg, nursing, anthropology, sociology and psychology) and accommodates many theoretical paradigms and perspectives, such as constructivism, feminism, positivism and postpositivism (Denzin, et al., 1994b; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Various research strategies (eg, ethnography, biographical method) and research methods (eg, interviews, participant observation, textual analysis) are applied in qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 1998; Jacobs, 1988; Atkinson, Delamont & Hammersley, 1988). Approaches in the qualitative paradigm are also distinguished, based on the objective of the process, such as whether it is aimed at describing or interpreting a phenomenon or is orientated towards the building of theory (Dey, 1993). Given the multidimensionality and multiplicity of qualitative research tradition, it is necessary to clarify the particular approach applied in this research study in more detail.

2.2 Epistemological framework

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), Creswell (1994; 1998) and Henwood and Pidgeon (1994), the choice of and motivation for a particular research approach should be explicated from an epistemological perspective. Epistemology is understood to be “assumptions about the bases or possibilities for knowledge” (Henwood, et al., 1994, p. 228).

Various epistemologies can be distinguished in the practice of qualitative research but it is not possible to separate the various paradigms or epistemologies into water tight compartments with clear-cut definitions. Gage (1989), for example, distinguishes between the objectivist, the interpretivist and the critical theory paradigms. Denzin and Lincoln (1994b, p. 13) identify four interpretative paradigms in qualitative research, namely positivism, postpositivism, constructivist-interpretative and critical theory et al¹. Among the various definitions of and distinctions between epistemologies or paradigms, the epistemology guiding this study may best be described by strand II of Henwood & Pidgeon (1994). These authors identify three strands of qualitative psychology in particular. Strand I is described as reliability and/or validity with an empiricist epistemology. Strand II refers to generativity and grounding and has a contextualist epistemology. Finally, strand III is described as discursive and reflexive with a constructivist epistemology.

The epistemology of contextualism (strand II: generativity and grounding) may be described as “an epistemological concern with the context specificity of meanings” (Henwood, et al., 1994, p. 231). Contextualism emphasises “that human activity does not develop in a social vacuum but is rigorously situated within a sociohistorical and cultural milieu of meanings and relationships” (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988, p. 66). In other words, human actions, experiences and meanings are situated in a specific context of time, space, culture and a way of doing things. The implication of this dimension of the epistemology for the research process is that it acknowledges and actively seeks to incorporate the contexts or life-worlds of participants in the research process. The research process (or researcher) engages in the life-world of the participant and creates a forum for the participant to discuss or describe a particular phenomenon and the meaning it has in his or her life-world. The subject matter is therefore not “objective data”, but rather personal or personalized and subjective accounts by participants about a particular phenomenon and the meaning it has in their lives (Kvale, 1996).

The researcher’s attempt (through the process of qualitative analysis) to understand and give an account of the complexities of the participants’ contexts (experiences) is also embedded in his or her own context of time, space and culture. The researcher’s particular context is further construed by his or her training, research experience, theory and own/personal biases and prejudices regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

A consequence of this epistemology is the simultaneous commitment to “on the one hand, realism (and inductively reflecting participants’ accounts and naturalistic contexts) and on the other, constructivism, which includes amongst other things, actively encouraging the researcher in the creative and interpretative process of generating new understandings and theory” (Henwood, et al., 1994, p. 232).

1. Denzin & Lincoln (1994b) use “Critical theory et al” as a blanket term for several paradigms namely neo-marxism, feminism, materialism and participatory inquiry.

For this reason the epistemology may also be described as subjectivist (Denzin, et al., 1994b; Guba, et al., 1994; Henwood, et al., 1994). The value-laden nature of the contextualist epistemology is acknowledged as part and parcel of the process. Wolcott (1994) is of the opinion that a researcher deliberately chooses subjectivity as it is a strength of the qualitative approaches. However, this subjectivity or value-laden nature is not an *a priori* excuse for or a validation of the performance of unscientific, irresponsible (sloppy) research. By acknowledging the subjectivity of the epistemology, the researcher or enquirer takes responsibility for the biases (in analysis and interpretation) caused by his or her own context (assumptions, values, knowledge, experience) that are taken into the research process. This is done by forthrightly communicating values and biases that are carried into the study (Creswell, 1998). A researcher is therefore not simply reflecting the “truth” uncovered during the research process but is communicating a personal understanding or interpretation of the meaning of a phenomenon in the life-world of the participant. Acknowledging the personal (or subjective) involvement of the researcher in the research process is not an attempt to decrease the subjective involvement. It is rather aimed at shedding light on the creative role of the researcher in the process, making it more transparent for readers and evaluators of the study. Communicating the values and assumptions at the onset of the study will (hopefully) also alert the researcher to his or her own biased point of departure.

3 RESEARCH STRATEGY

A research strategy may be described as analytic principles and procedures that are applied in the process of executing a research project. Within the qualitative paradigm various strategies are available to researchers such as Miles and Huberman's (1984) quasi-experimental approach, the grounded theory approach (Strauss, et al., 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), ethnography and the biographical method. Researchers or methodologists do not necessarily agree on the procedures that constitute a particular strategy and differences in opinion exist on the “right” application of a particular procedure (Dey, 1993). So, for example, Stern (1994) argues that two schools can be differentiated in the practice of grounded theory namely, the Strauss and the Glaser schools. According to Stern (1994, p.220), “Strauss brings to bear every possible contingency that could relate to the data” whereas Glaser “focuses on the data to allow the data to tell their own story”. However, Dey (1993) argues that whatever the differences in approach and language, the common emphasis is on how data is categorised and how connections between categories are made.

The choice of a particular strategy has to do with various aspects, such as the epistemological framework of the researcher, the objective of the study, the phenomenon under investigation and the researcher's skills and training.

It should be noted, however, that there is not necessarily agreement on the logic for or the process involved in the selection of a particular paradigm. Creswell (1994), for example, argues that several criteria need to inform a researcher's choice of a particular approach. These criteria are the researcher's world-view, training, experience and psychological attributes, the nature of the problem, and the targeted audience of the study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) are of the opinion that the researcher's epistemological stance is the determining factor in the choice of an approach and that methodological aspects or pragmatic issues are secondary in this decision.

As it is not in the ambit of this study to debate how and when a particular approach is chosen, suffice it to indicate the sentiments visible in this study. The researcher's position is that all these criteria are interdependent or bound up together. As a combined entity they play a role in the selection of a research approach and not as individual, independent criteria. In other words, then, if we take the criteria mentioned by Creswell, it is argued that the researcher's training, experience and psychological attributes play an influential role in the development of a particular world-view. At the same time, a particular world-view may sensitise a researcher to be susceptible to specific training issues and experiences. Henwood and Pigeon's (1994) argument that a particular epistemological or theoretical belief necessarily links with a particular strategy, method and/or technical issue(s) is thus supported. It is furthermore logical that the choice of a particular strategy and/or method has implications for what will be understood or acceptable as data, how the data will be analysed and what will be considered a reliable and valid account or representation of the data. Whatever method, strategy or approach is applied, it is important to have consistency or compatibility between the various dimensions constituting the research process. In addition, whatever strategy is applied, the processes of analysis and interpretation should be made explicit.

In discussing the epistemological framework, this study has clearly been situated within the interpretative paradigm, acknowledging the importance of the participants' life-world (context) and the creative involvement of the research. In an interpretative paradigm a grounded theory approach is followed. The grounded theory approach is commonly applied in the interpretative paradigm and is regarded as consistent with a contextual epistemology (Henwood, et al., 1994). This approach insists that the perspectives and the voices of the participants be heard thus allowing the context to be told or constructed by their experiences. In the second instance, grounded theory approach acknowledges to the interpretative role of the researcher during the research process. The researcher is seen as an active, thinking co-participant in the process and not merely as a mirror who is reflecting the reality. Furthermore, the grounded theory approach emphasises the development of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The process of theory building does not start with a preconceived idea or theory which is then tested or proved via the investigation. It is rather a process "where one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (Strauss, et al., 1994, p. 23). This study proposes as one of its objectives, the generation of theory without an *a priori* theory or hypotheses.

The research strategy applied in this study is discussed below with reference to (1) the unit of analysis, (2) data gathering, (3) sampling, (4) data analysis and interpretation, and (5) validity and reliability.

3.1 Unit of analysis

Generally, four units of analysis may be differentiated in a social sciences study, namely, an individual, a group, an organisation and a social artefact (Mouton & Marais, 1985). This study focuses on people's (employees') experience of organisational transformation and therefore the first and primary unit of analysis is the individual employee. As the experiences relate to the process of transformation, the second (and secondary) level of analysis is thus a social artefact, namely transformation as an experienced process. The phenomenon of organisational transformation cannot be experienced other than within the context of an organisation. Although the

organisation cannot be indicated as a unit of analysis, cognisance is taken of the organisation as providing the context for the experiences of transformation.

3.2 Sampling

As the subject matter of the study is not objective data, but personal accounts of the experience of transformation (Kvale, 1996), any person in the Faculty who had experienced the transformation, qualified as a potential participant in the study. Individuals were sampled because of their potential to contribute to the development of an understanding of employee experiences of transformation. The focus of sampling in the qualitative (interpretative) paradigm is on the collection of incidents or experiences, rather than on the number of people per se, data is collected or people are sampled until the saturation of themes occurs (Creswell, 1998; Strauss, et al., 1990). Thus, people are sampled until a point where the researcher hears no more new experiences or nuances but a repetition of previous stories.

The most important criterion for faculty members to qualify as potential participants, was thus having experienced the transformation process in the faculty. For the purpose of this study, a homogeneous accessible population was defined by the application of a time criterion. Seeing that the study incorporated the first four phases of the proposed transformation process, which took approximately three to four years, it was essential to include only those employees who went through the process from the beginning until the point of interviewing. It was furthermore deemed necessary to identify people who were familiar with the faculty as an academic institution prior to the transformation process as that would allow for possible comparisons between before and after. The accessible population was therefore constituted by those people who had been in the employ of the faculty for four or more years at the time of the data gathering.

Once this homogeneous group was identified, purposeful sampling was applied (Strauss, et al., 1990). The reason for purposeful sampling was to allow for as much diversity in experiences as possible. As it was suspected that experiences might differ as a result of contextual differences, such as the respective departmental cultures, the styles of management and as a result of dispositional factors, such as level of seniority (Nelson, 1995), it was decided to sample participants purposefully from (1) all five departments, and (2) from three job levels (Level A: lecturer and senior lecturer, Level B: associate professor and professor; Level C: managerial positions, ie, heads of departments and deans).

The third phase in the sampling process aimed at uncovering differences within the homogeneous sample. This process is referred to as systematic sampling and has the advantage of allowing "maintenance of greater consistency in data gathering" (Strauss, et al., 1990, p. 184). The result was therefore that a heterogeneous sample (within the homogeneous accessible population) (Creswell, 1998) was drawn by systematically selecting male and female respondents from three different language groupings. It should be highlighted that the focus of the sampling was on uncovering differences and not on the representation of the language and gender profile of the faculty in the sample.

Working from the official list of faculty members, potential participants were telephonically approached to involve themselves in the study. Not all the employees approached, had knowledge of the study and in such cases (and whenever it was requested), the letter submitted to the Management Committee was provided as background information. Some employees



requested a personal discussion before deciding to involve themselves. As the most important criterion throughout the sampling process was the willingness to participate, potential participants were not pressurised to take part in the study. Three employees turned down the request to participate. Two motivated the decision due to their resignation that was to come in effect fairly soon while a third employee felt that “experiences” were not within the ambit of the work environment and therefore a non-discussable issue.

3.3 Data gathering

As little information is available on employees’ experience of transformation and the study aimed at understanding (describing and interpreting) employees’ experience of this phenomenon, the qualitative interview is an appropriate and valid method of gathering data in a study of this nature (Kvale, 1996; Fontana & Frey, 1994). The interview can be applied to describe and interpret a particular theme or phenomenon in the life-world of a participant and the way they relate to it (Kvale, 1996). Given the exploratory nature of the study, a less rather than more restricted manner of discussing transformation was considered appropriate and an in-depth interview contributed to this sharing of information. “Interviews can be explorative and hypothesis testing: An explorative interview is open and has little structure” (Kvale, 1996, p. 97).

The recent transformation process in the faculty and the employees’ experience of the process were introduced as the topic of the conversation. To ensure comparability between the individual participants, the transformation process was clearly demarcated as having started with the inquiry and ended with the implementation of the new organisational structure.

Given the potential sensitivity of the topic of discussion, and in an attempt to “adapt to the world of the individuals studied” (Fontana, et al., 1994, p. 371), it was left to the participants to determine the place (at home, at the office, in a cafeteria) for the interview. Interviews took a minimum of one hour and a maximum of three hours. Except for one, all interviews took place in the participants’ offices. One interview was conducted in the private home. In each case the interview was introduced by (1) an explanation of the aim/objective of the particular study, (2) an explanation of the sampling process (and how the participant was identified), and (3) a commitment to total confidentiality.

Interviews were conducted in Afrikaans or English, depending on the participants’ mother tongue. Before the actual interviewing started, participants were informed of the conversational nature of the interview as opposed to a formal inquiry. Issues or themes to be covered were mentioned before the interview started so as to put participants at ease about the expected nature of the interview and reduce the level of uncertainty. Participants had the opportunity to raise questions or to ask for more information about the study or any other issue deemed important. Permission was asked to audio-tape the interview as that would allow the interviewer more freedom to be attentive to the individual and participate in the process. One participant felt uncomfortable with the audio-taping of the interview despite his initial consent. After the first interview and after switching off the tape recorder, the actual discussion started.

As indicated, the theme for the interview was the participants’ experience of the transformation process. Participants were first asked to indicate what changes in their work situations took place as a result of the transformation. It was made clear that the focus was on tangible outcomes (eg, move in office, new subjects, etc) and not on the emotional impact of the process.

This information contributed to understanding the participants' context. The other sub-themes introduced during the interview were:

- (1) what they knew of colleagues' experiences (positive and negative) of the process;
- (2) personal experience of the process in general;
- (3) particular positive and/or negative experiences of the process (this theme was elaborated on quite extensively);
- (4) discussion of the reasons or motivation for participating in or resisting the process.

The logic in asking participants about colleagues' experiences was to provide time for conversation to establish rapport between interviewer and interviewee before shifting the focus to the participants' personal experiences. However, although the interview had to cover particular sub-themes and the interviewer anticipated a particular order from the general to the specific, participants did not necessarily share their experiences of the process in that order. A fairly flexible approach was followed where participants shared their experiences and covered the sub-themes in the way they felt comfortable. The interviewer interacted with the participants in the course of the interview by asking them to clarify or elaborate on specific remarks. At points in the interview, the interviewer's understanding of specific experiences was communicated to the participant to validate the correctness of the interviewer's perspective. This flexible approach followed in the data-gathering phase is in line with the new thinking on interviews in the interpretative paradigm where "the 'other' is no longer a distant, aseptic, quantified, sterilized, measured, categorized, and cataloged faceless respondents, but has become a living human being" (Fontana, et al., 1994, p. 373).

Participants therefore gave a retrospective account of their experiences of the recently completed transformation process. A potential disadvantage of a retrospective account is that participants might have forgotten some of the earlier experiences or the intensity of feelings related to a particular event (Weldon, 2000). However, Nelson and Cooper (1995) argues that individual implications of a process of change (which obviously also involves certain experiences) can hardly be realised until the change has bedded in.

Literature on the themes of organisational transformation, organisational theory, creativity, leadership and learning organisations were also explored. It was not the objective of the literature study to refine any of the concepts but rather to develop a conceptual framework for understanding individual conduct/behaviour during transformation (and thus a framework for interpreting the results of the empirical study).

3.4 Process of data coding, analysis and interpretation

3.4.1 Transcription of interviews

The researcher transcribed all the interviews to allow for maximum familiarity with the data. After completion of the transcriptions, a second shorter interview was held with the participants. As verification of a research project should be addressed throughout the entire research process (Kvale, 1996), the objective of the second interview was to give the participants an opportunity to assess whether the transcript was a reliable reflection of the interview. Participants received the transcriptions at least one day before the second encounter to give them the time and privacy to reflect on the content. However, two participants could not be reached for verification. The second interview was further utilised to clarify ambiguous remarks and to verify a particular

understanding of parts of the transcripts. Participants' corrections and additions were included in the final transcripts. In essence, the second interaction between researcher and participant to reach agreement on the data set, was based on the necessity for the research process to remain true to its participants.

3.4.2 The process of making sense

As stated earlier, the procedures followed in coding, analysing and interpreting the data, were based on Dey's (1993) approach. However, in spite of the careful explication of the process followed in the analysis and interpretation of the data, it should be realised that each process is eventually a very personal and individual one. According to Marshall (1981, p. 399);

Because my feeling of rightness is important, my feeling that this is what I can do, it's my translation, what I have found and interpreted from the data. My bias is something I appreciate, it's part of me as a researcher. And while it is important for me and for others to recognize my bias, it really is what I can give as a researcher, it is my contribution, and it's coherent and it's felt and it has all these other qualities which make me value it more than a detached attempt to be objective. I work from a particular position: I appreciate other positions, and I feel that each has its own integrity and its own validity.

(1) The coding process was started by selecting five diverse interviews from the group. This was not difficult to do due to the high level of familiarity with the content of interviews as a result of the transcription process.

(2) The process of reading and annotating (Dey, 1993) followed during which themes were rather freely identified and comments made on experiences, the process per se, intrapersonal issues or any aspect that seemed to be noteworthy.²

(3) A preliminary coding list (theme/category list) was developed by looking for similarities and differences in these interviews.

(4) After the preliminary list was compiled, four more interviews were added to the initial five for reading and annotating.

(5) The preliminary coding list was adjusted to include changes and additions resulting from the analysis of the latter four interviews. Clarifying notes were added to the identified themes to distinguish them clearly from other categories or to clarify some of the characteristics of the themes to facilitate a conceptually clear and reliable coding process.

(6) The process as described in (4) was repeated by adding the remaining interviews. At the end of this process a fairly stable code/theme list was developed with notes clarifying themes or criteria for selecting the particular theme. The researcher decided not to divide a particular theme into too many sub-themes as this would increase the difficulty of the coding process and

2. During the interview respondents were required to give their impressions or perceptions of how colleagues experienced the transformation. After carefully reading the transcripts, it was decided not to code the parts where participants gave their opinions on how colleagues experienced the transformation. These opinions were regarded as background information because (1) the study focused mainly on their experiences of the transformation and not on their perceptions of other people's experiences, (2) some of the participants generalised their own and colleagues' experiences with the result that little difference (if any) was apparent between the two, and (3) adding the dimension of participants' opinions on colleagues' experiences (given the diversity in response to the question) would have made the data set very difficult to manage.

maintaining conceptual clarity. It was also decided that the detailed analysis of themes should be done later in the analysis process.

(7) The coding or categorising process then followed where data bits were actually selected and ascribed to specific themes for each of the eleven transcribed interviews. As the study dealt with meanings, the criterion in selecting a particular piece as a data bit was whether it conveyed a particular meaning. It was also guided by the bias "toward letting informants speak for themselves" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 350), thus leading to larger verbatim texts rather than interpreted versions. For this reason, it was therefore considered irrelevant to use the data bit size as criterion (Dey, 1993).

(8) The transcribed interviews were then transformed by subtracting the selected data bits and re-organising them according to the themes. Apart from structuring the data according to the identified themes, an impression was also gained of the relative dominance of a particular theme in participants' experiences. The two versions of each interview (the transcription and the re-organised version) were electronically managed, allowing for quick and easy cross-referencing between the two versions.

(9) The individual experiences of transformation were then described in a detailed discussion of each participant according to the identified themes (see ch 3). This was regarded as a symptomatic reading of participants' experiences where each account is regarded as a valid description of the specific relation to the phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). At the end of each of the individual descriptions comments, interpretations and/or questions were raised regarding the management of a transformation process and the nature of a transformation process (either from the participant or researcher's perspective) for possible use later in the interpretative process.

(10) In the next step of analysis, the data was abstracted from the original individual context and presented in the themes as identified earlier in the process. The objective of decontextualising the data was to allow for a different view on the data by comparing data in and between themes (Dey, 1993) (see ch 4). Comparing data in and between themes (categories) resulted in a re-organisation of some of the themes. Themes initially identified as independent in the individual experiences seemed to belong to a broader theme when a group perspective was taken. Presenting experiences in themes gave an impression of the weight or dominance of a particular theme and allowed for a better understanding of the nature and complexity of an experienced issue (theme).

(11) Finally, the contextualised and decontextualised data were conceptually compared to existing literature on this topic leading to a conceptual and theoretical discussion or understanding of experiences of transformation. This process of conceptualising and contributing to theory building may typically be described as "iterative, cyclical and nonlinear" (Gioia & Pitre, 1990, p. 588).

4 GENERALISATION, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

"There is considerable debate over what constitutes good interpretation in qualitative research" (Hammersley in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 479). Some social scientists argue that the same criteria should be applied to both quantitative and qualitative research while others, like the post-positivists, argue for criteria unique to qualitative research although they disagree on what these criteria should be. Supporters of the constructivist paradigm argue for the translation of validity

and reliability into trustworthiness and authenticity whereas another position holds that the character of qualitative research is such that no criteria can be applied (Denzin, et al., 1994a, p. 480). Defining the study within the interpretative paradigm, would concur with Denzin (1994, p. 501) that a “value-free social science appears to be over” and thus necessitates the reinterpretation of the criteria for research in a value-laden context.

4.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research findings (Dey, 1993; Kvale, 1996). It thus pertains to all the stages of the research process from interviewing to analysis. In this context, reliability does not refer to the verification of research findings through the replication(s) of the study. It involves the conscious revealing of the decisions and procedures followed in the various stages of the study. Reliability is therefore not merely something to be reported at the end of the study, but serves as guidelines throughout the research process, reminding the researcher of his/her creative involvement in construing the findings to counteract haphazard subjectivity (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, the explanation of the procedures followed in obtaining the results gives the reader the opportunity to scrutinize the procedures and decide in principle on their reliability (Dey, 1993).

Thus, to allow the reader to follow and evaluate the reliability of the study, this chapter describes the procedures followed in the interviewing phase, transcription of interviews and analysis and interpretation of data. In the analysis and interpretation of the data, participants' verbatim comments are provided quite extensively as motivation for the various decisions and interpretations.

4.2 Validity

Dey (1993, p. 253) defines a valid account in the interpretative paradigm as “one which can be defended as sound because it is well-grounded conceptually and empirically”. As the thrust of qualitative analysis is to ground accounts empirically in the data, validity thus has to do with the craftsmanship of the researcher in the process of obtaining the data and making sense of it and demonstrating how the concepts were identified and connections made (Dey, 1993). It involves a process of “continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the findings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 241). Maxwell (1996, p. 87) describes validity as the correctness or credibility of a conclusion, explanation or interpretation, but argues that using the term validity “does not imply the existence of an objective truth to which an account can be compared”. Researcher bias is often regarded as a threat to validity. This concerns the influence of the researcher's own theories, preconceptions or values on the research process. The issue is not to eliminate these biases but to know what these assumptions or frame of reference were; in other words, to state them openly as far as possible. For this reason, the first part of chapter 2 discussed the epistemological framework that guided the study.

Judging the validity of a study inevitably includes an evaluation of the researcher's credibility and moral integrity as well as an evaluation of the credibility, neatness and transparency in building the arguments from the empirical data to the final theory (Kvale, 1996). Validity in a qualitative study is therefore “not the result of indifference, but of integrity” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 91). Wolcott (1994) argues that in the end labour about validity returns to the concern with “understanding” and “making sense”. A study may be constructed according to and adhere to all the rules of validity, but be without meaning. Finally, as Wolcott (1994, p. 347) says, “to get

somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion ... that you are not quite getting it right. But I also go to considerable pains not to get it all wrong”.

4.3 Generalisation

In the qualitative or interpretative paradigm, a distinction needs to be made between internal and external generalisation. Internal generalisation involves the extent to which conclusions, descriptions or interpretations are generalisable to the setting or the people studied (Maxwell, 1996). Kvale (1996, p. 232) refers to the concept of internal generalisation as contextualisation and describes it as “an emphasis on the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge, with a shift from generalization to contextualization”. It thus refers to the inductive process whereby concepts, interpretations and general propositions are based or grounded in the diversity or full range of participants’ experiences (Dey, 1993). The particular research strategy followed in making sense of the diversity of experiences allowed for maximum accounts of the participants’ experiences both by the continuous referrals to the initial individual context and by exploring similarities and differences in experiences as they pertained to a particular theme.

External generalisation, where findings or “laws of human behaviour” can be generalised to the larger population or even universally, is not a crucial issue in qualitative studies (Kvale, 1996; Maxwell, 1996). However, this does not mean that the findings of such a study can never be generalised beyond the particular setting that was investigated. Generalisation in the qualitative or interpretative context has more to do with how the understanding gained or the theory developed can be extended to other cases (Maxwell, 1996). Kvale (1996) describes this process as analytical generalisation based on assertational logic whereby the applicability of the findings/theory of one study to another situation is argued, clarified and judged. To be able to judge whether a particular theory can be applied to another or a wider population, it is thus paramount that the researcher provides sufficient information regarding the context of the study and decision-making during the process (Dey, 1993; Kvale, 1996). Although this study did not aim to generate knowledge or information that could be applied generally to all employees in all organisations going through transformation, it did intend to provide a conceptual model that could be applied to comparable situations or contexts. For this reason, the change process has been described and defined as large-scale, happening in a knowledge-based environment at a South African university. The contexts of individual participants are also provided to facilitate the process of judging applicability to other contexts.

5 CONCLUSION

Gioia and Pitre (1990, p. 584) maintain that the functionalist approach to organisations, which adheres to an objectivist view of the organisational world and dominated research for a long time, contributed to a too narrow view on the “multifaceted nature of organisational reality”. However, the general appropriateness of the dominant “normal science” is currently called into question (Gioia, et al., 1990, p. 587) Wheatley (1992, pp. 63, 64) describes it as follows:

We are addicted to numbers, taking frequent pulses of our organizations in surveys, monthly progress checks, quarterly reports, yearly evaluations. It is difficult to develop a new sensitivity to the fact that no form of measurement is neutral. Physicists call this awareness contextualism, a sensitivity to the interdependency between how things appear and the environment which causes them to appear.... We still believe in objectivity, in hard data, in firm



numbers. We have avoided the murky, fuzzy world of non-objectivity that contextualism brings to the surface.

This study is thus in the final instance an attempt to contribute to a "more comprehensive view of organizational phenomena" (Gioia, et al., 1990, p. 585) from a non-functionalist interpretative paradigm by trying to subjectively understand the fuzzy world of non-objective experiences of transformation.

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