

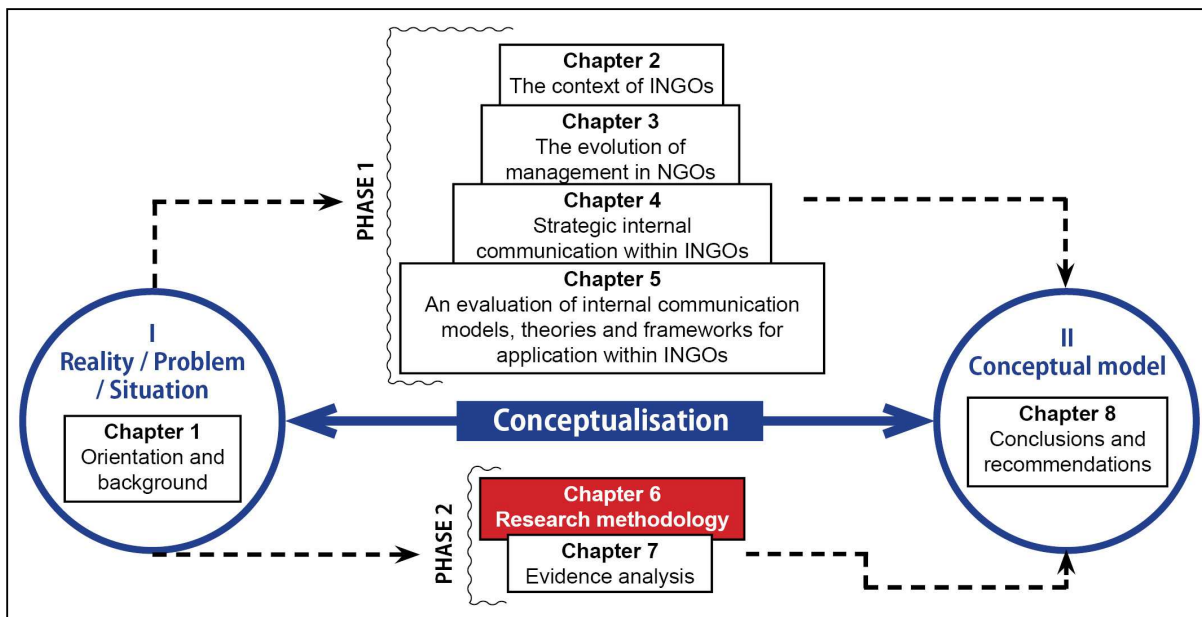
Chapter 6

Research Methodology

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the process for the empirical research phase of this study. As can be seen in Figure 6.1, this chapter is part of the conceptualisation process in the Mitroff *et al.* (1974) model of problem solving and focuses on the methodology through which an empirical understanding of the problem is developed. In addition, the decisions made with regard to the research design and method for this study were influenced by the research question and objectives and the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 1 as well as the theory that arose in Chapters 2 to 5. Figure 6.1 highlights this chapter's position in relation to the rest of this dissertation.

Figure 6.1: Chapter 6 in relation to the other chapters



The result of this influence is a qualitative approach to an exploratory multiple-case study research design. Within each case study, two qualitative research techniques were used to collect evidence from two sources: (i) semi-structured interviews with senior communicators and (ii) organisational documents. The evidence gathered is analysed

through four phases identified by Morse and Field (1995): (i) comprehending, (ii) synthesising, (iii) theorising and (iv) recontextualising.

The following sections describe the research design and methodology in more detail. They conclude with a description of the criteria necessary for rigorous qualitative research and how this study aims to meet them. Chapter 7 then describes the evidence collected and provides the individual and comparative case study analysis to complete the empirical phase of this study.

6.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

6.2.1 Exploratory

This study has an exploratory purpose because relatively little literature exists on the topic. Exploratory studies aim to clarify and improve understanding of a problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007:133). Since, as illustrated in the previous chapters, there is relatively little literature on the strategic contribution of internal communication and more importantly on its role in the INGO context, an exploratory study is the best way to develop the necessary background for future investigations of this topic.

6.2.2 Qualitative

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it was appropriate for both the research problem and objectives and the conceptual framework adopted. Qualitative research seeks to understand the complex nature of phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:94-95). In its simplest form, it uses words, images or anything non-numerical as its source of data (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:5; Saunders *et al.*, 2007:470). However, the approach is much more complex than this suggests. Four characteristics of qualitative research make it a particularly appropriate approach for this study: (i) naturalism, (ii) the insider perspective, (iii) the level of detail and (iv) flexibility.

Naturalism refers to the fact that qualitative research techniques are better situated than quantitative research to examine phenomenon in their natural environments (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270). Unlike the quantitative techniques which often try to isolate variables

from their environments, qualitative research seeks to understand events and phenomenon as they naturally occur (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:6). In this sense, qualitative research allows the research to obtain some form of direct experience of the phenomenon (Trochim, 2006). As a result, qualitative techniques are often embraced by interpretive, critical and postmodern scholars (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001:163) because of the importance placed on context.

In addition to fitting the worldview of this study, naturalism is particularly relevant to the study topic as well. To start, strategic internal communication is a phenomenon that is firmly embedded within its environment. Secondly, since the purpose of the study is exploratory, the goal is to understand how strategic internal communication is 'naturally' occurring, not to test any interventions or specific variables.

Another characteristic of the qualitative approach, which makes it an ideal approach for a study with a postmodernist and social constructivist worldview, is its emphasis on the insider perspective. The insider perspective refers to the qualitative researcher's desire to view and understand the world through the eyes of the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:6). In this study, that means that the researcher can investigate how those who actually manage strategic internal communication see it work. This is a characteristic appealing to the researcher with a postmodernist and social constructivist worldview because it places the focus on the perspectives of the participants and not the researcher. In particular, qualitative research fits the ontological assumptions of this study that reality is socially constructed based on each individual's perspective (Trochim, 2006).

As a direct result of its naturalism and insider perspective, qualitative research is able to provide a higher degree of detail of the research phenomenon within its context than quantitative research. Qualitative research thus enables the researcher to describe the research phenomenon in greater detail (Trochim, 2006a). It allows for the development of a fuller description of the subject than depending solely on quantifiable elements (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:472). Since the goal of this study is to explore the characteristics of the research problem, as opposed to finding a solution, achieving a high level of detail is a necessary condition for the success of this research.

Finally, qualitative research tends to be more flexible than quantitative research. It allows the researcher to be flexible in the inquiry in each particular context (Trochim, 2006b). As such, it is appropriate for an exploratory study such as this one because it allows the research to explore new avenues of research should they arise and prove relevant. In addition, the qualitative approach is cognizant of the role of the researcher in research (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:5) and is therefore in line with the value-conscious axiological position of this study.

6.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

6.3.1 Case study research

Case studies are often a good overall research design for exploratory studies (Gerring, 2007:79/43), such as this one. Yin (2003:13) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Yin’s definition emphasises a key characteristic of case study research, the importance of context. It is primarily because of this quality of case study research that this research design was chosen for this study.

The context of the research phenomenon or unit of analysis is a significant part of a case study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:281). As is emphasised in Yin’s (2003:13) definition, a case study is particularly appropriate when the research phenomenon cannot be easily separated or distinguished from its context. Within communication and public relations research, this makes case study research a useful design for understanding contemporary communication events in their context (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:105). Yin (2003:9) also notes that case studies are the preferred research design when dealing with ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions about contemporary events when behaviour cannot be manipulated.

This study’s research question is concerned with how internal communication makes a strategic contribution in INGOs, a contemporary event which is very much embedded within the context of the INGO. As was noted in Chapter 4, several elements of an organisation’s context can have an impact on the management of strategic internal

communication, including organisational form, structure and culture. Therefore, case study research is an appropriate design to explore this phenomenon.

In addition to being an appropriate design for the research problem, the focus on context in case study research fits neatly within the integrated postmodernist social constructivist worldview of this study. Both these positions argue that reality is contextually situated. Case study research, by focusing on a limited number of cases, allows the researcher to uncover a holistic view of the research phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:282; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:107). Therefore it is possible to gain an understanding of multiple elements at play in the research phenomenon. The case study design avoids oversimplifying the phenomenon and the development of generic meta-narratives which run contrary to the postmodernist worldview.

6.3.2 Multiple case study design

Yin (2003:40) distinguishes single and multiple case study designs. He (2003:46) highlights several situations in which a single case study is appropriate, but notes that evidence is generally more compelling and the study more robust in a multiple-case study. The reason is two-fold. First, by conducting multiple case studies, the volume of evidence available to the researcher increases considerably. Second, multiple-case study design allows for the application of replication logic similar to a multiple experiment design (Yin, 2003:47). In other words, by replicating the study in multiple cases, the support for the proposed theory or conclusions increases.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, INGOs are a very diverse group of organisations both in form and function. In order to be able to differentiate between contextually dependent elements and elements that impact INGOs more generally, it is necessary to consider multiple organisations. Therefore, in order to provide more compelling evidence and conclusions, the researcher adopted a multiple-case study design.

6.4 CASE SELECTION

6.4.1 Number of cases

There is no clear consensus in the literature on the ideal number of cases to include in a multiple-case study project. Perry (1998:794) suggests a minimum of four and a maximum of fifteen, highlighting the restrictions of the researcher's time and resources as a major component of selecting a number. Yin (2003:51) does not provide a specific number, but notes that the decision is dependent on the amount of certainty the researcher desires through the 'replication' of case studies. What this means is that cases are selected based on replication, as opposed to sampling logic, where they either replicate each other to achieve similar results for predicted reasons (literal replication), or to achieve contrasting results for predicted reasons (theoretical replication) (Yin, 2003:47). Taking these two considerations into account, the researcher aimed to conduct between 5 and 7 case studies because it was within the resources of the researcher and was an adequate number to be able to explore the diversity of INGOs that would result in sufficient evidence to provide compelling observations and conclusions.

6.4.2 Selection criteria

As noted in section 6.3.1, in case study research the context cannot be easily separated from the research phenomenon. This means that a detailed description of the case (the unit of analysis) is necessary to understand and interpret the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:282). Similarly, Perry (1998:793) notes that case selection is purposeful and depends on the conceptual framework developed for the study from theory. Therefore, an important component of the case selection process is the development of a theoretical framework that states the conditions necessary for the particular phenomenon under study to be found or not found (Yin, 2003:47). The following discussion outlines the specific contextual details that were used to select the cases.

The theoretical framework developed in Chapters 2 to 4 identified organisational form as a key criterion for the way strategic internal communication is managed in an organisation. In this study, the form under investigation is the INGO. Therefore, all cases were selected from organisations that meet the criteria of an INGO. This means that, based on the

definition outlined in Chapter 2, they are private, not-profit distributing, self-governing and voluntary organisations working in development in two or more countries. Further characteristics of the cases' organisational form are described in section 6.4.4 below. Based on the theoretical framework of this study, these cases were selected based on organisational form to achieve a literal replication.

Organisational form was identified as a key contextual element for the management of strategic internal communication irrespective of the specific purpose and work of the INGO. In order to ensure the veracity of this statement, as well as to broaden the theoretical generalisability of the study and its applicability to a broader range of INGOs, an attempt was made to select INGOs from different sectors within the development category. The particular sectors from which cases were chosen were education, social enterprise, humanitarian assistance, poverty alleviation and human rights. In addition, different sizes and structures were also chosen.

With the above in mind, practical considerations were, as Gerring (2007:150) argues they should be, the final criteria used to select the cases. As Berg (2001:29) notes, for case study research to be successful the researcher must have access to the case and the ability to conduct the necessary research at the site. Thus the pool of potential cases was limited to those with offices in Gauteng province in South Africa. As well, selection was biased towards those organisations where the researcher had contacts and other connections to ease the problem of access.

6.4.3 Selection process

In order to facilitate the selection of cases, the researcher used the Prodder database. The Prodder Database is a comprehensive online database of NGOs and development organisations in South Africa. The database lists 256 INGOs with local offices in South Africa, 166 of which are located in Gauteng. This list was further refined based on the criteria identified in the previous section. A final pool of 23 potential cases was initially contacted through a telephone call or email. The initial introduction included a brief description of the research study and confirmed that the organisation met the selection criteria. All INGOs which expressed an interest in the project were sent further details on the research, the participation requirements and the necessary permission forms

(Annexure A). Only 5 INGOs responded favourably and granted formal permission for the research within the necessary timeframe. As each of these INGOs met the selection criteria, including the need to represent different sectors, they were confirmed as an adequate number of case studies.

The major challenge in finding case studies was in getting a response from INGO contacts. Many contacts simply did not return telephone calls or emails. In addition, due to the international nature of their roles, as well as the time of year of the research (December to February) many contacts were away from their offices for extended periods of time. Therefore, the researcher struggled to get an affirmative reply from the organisations and the formal written permissions to conduct the research, resulting in only five case studies being conducted.

As noted by Saunders *et al.* (2007:320-324), questions of anonymity and privacy can hamper access to evidence sources. While not a concern for most in this study, the researcher did assure the INGOs that their participation would be anonymous and worked with each organisation to identify appropriate means of maintaining this anonymity. In addition, the researcher provided information regarding the use of the evidence collected and its presentation so that the organisations could make an informed decision to participate.

6.4.4 Case descriptions

As noted above, a detailed description of the case is necessary to understand and interpret the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:282). The following provides a description of each case and its in context. Further discussion of each case in included in Chapter 7 as part of the evidence analysis.

6.4.4.1 Case A

Case A is an INGO with headquarters in South Africa but partner organisations all over the world. It operates in the education sector in the global arena, and also in national contexts via local partners. Considering the three types of INGO structures identified by Van Tulder and Van der Zwart (2006:65-67) in Table 2.5, Case A resembles a network. Its control of

its work in local, national and regional contexts is decentralised and depends on the actions of its partners. However, unlike Van Tulder and Van der Zwart's classification, its localisation is not local but global, meaning that it adopts a global presence and position on global issues. In Case A, the local positions and presence are determined by its partners.

The organisational structure of Case A is neither fully functional nor divisional. There is a structured communication function; however, certain communication roles are housed in specific campaigns and programmes. A new global campaign has resulted in a rapid increase in the organisation's staff and increased confusion regarding roles. The majority of employees are located in the organisation's headquarters in South Africa, with a group primarily related to the new campaign in London, and two staff members in Washington, D.C. Overall, the organisation has a diverse employee group, many of whom are frequently travelling or otherwise not working at the headquarters in South Africa.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Lewis (2007:40) identified three main roles for INGOs: an operational service-oriented role, a global policy and advocacy role and a counter-hegemonic activist role. Of these, Case A mostly fulfils a global policy and advocacy role. This role centres on its strategic intent which takes the form of three goals: (1) to achieve a specific development goal in poorer countries, (2) to secure investment and conducive policies from richer countries and international institutions for this development goal and (3) to grow the scale and strength of the organisation and the movement of which it is a part.

6.4.4.2 Case B

Case B is an INGO working around social enterprise. It is headquartered in Washington DC, with 25 regional offices throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, including the Southern Africa office in Johannesburg. Considering the three types of INGO structures identified Table 2.5, Case B most closely resembles a global organisation with a relatively centralised structure and a global position. However, within the organisation, regional offices do have some ability to modify their corporate strategy in line with the local context.

Case B did not have an organogram they could share with the researcher; however, based on their staff list they appear to have a divisional structure around specific programmes and regions. The interviewee identified a global communication structure but there is no formalised regional communication team. Overall the organisation has 160 staff, with a diversity of nationalities and cultures across the regions.

In terms of the three main roles for INGOs identified by Lewis (2007:40), Case B fulfils a global policy and advocacy role. The interviewee was not able to provide a clear understanding of the organisation's strategic intent or a strategy document; however, the organisation does have a mission and vision.

6.4.4.3 Case C

Case C is an INGO headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland with a regional Africa office in Johannesburg. It works in the sector of humanitarian assistance. The organisation also has regional offices for Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, Europe and North Africa and the Middle East. In addition, the organisation is closely affiliated with national organisations in most countries in the world. Through the headquarters, regional offices and national affiliates, Case C operates in global, regional and local contexts. Considering the three types of INGO structures identified in Table 2.5, Case C most closely resembles a federation. It adopts a multi-domestic position with a central coordinating body that establishes an organisation-wide strategy and a global position on issues, but national affiliates can make independent decisions on local positions and activities.

Within its headquarters, Case C adopts a functional structure but its regional offices are structured using a matrix. For example, in the Africa region, the most senior communicator's line manager is the Africa Zone Director, but he also reports to his technical manager, the head of the Communication Unit in headquarters. Case C has over 1600 employees working around the world. Overall, both within and across offices there is significant diversity among employees.

Case C fulfils two of Lewis' (2007:40) roles for INGOs: an operational service-oriented role, and a global policy and advocacy role. These roles are centred on their strategic

intent which includes three strategic aims to prevent and alleviate human suffering, and three enabling actions.

6.4.4.4 Case D

Case D is an INGO that works on poverty alleviation with headquarters in South Africa but offices and affiliate organisations all over the world. It operates both in the global arena via its international secretariat and regional offices and in the national context through national affiliates and country programmes. Considering the three types of INGO structures identified in Table 2.5, Case D most closely resembles a federation. It has a central coordinating body which establishes an organisation-wide strategy and a global position on issues, but national affiliates have a significant amount of control to determine local positions and activities. Through this multi-domestic position, Case D aims to be 'Glocal' in its outlook: having influence and relevance at both the global and local levels.

The organisational structure of Case D is a matrix. Axes related to function, theme and region criss-cross the organisation with staff possessing multiple accountabilities and working in collaboration as teams. Case D has over 2000 employees working in 43 countries. Many employees, particularly those in the international secretariat, regularly work away from their home offices. Overall, the organisation has a diverse and disparate workforce.

In terms of Lewis' (2007:40) three main roles for INGOs, Case D fulfils two: an operational service-oriented role, and a global policy and advocacy role. They are held together by a strategic intent based on four goals and six priority areas related to human rights and poverty alleviation.

6.4.4.5 Case E

Case E is a human rights INGO headquartered in Washington DC, with 11 regional offices around the world, including the Southern Africa office in Johannesburg. Considering the three types of INGO structures identified in Table 2.5, Case E most closely resembles a global organisation with a relatively centralised structure and a global position. However, it does not have a clear global strategy, although it does have a mission and vision. Within

the organisation, regional offices do have some ability to develop their strategy in line with the local context but it is not clear how this is linked to the work of the global organisation. Of the three roles for INGOs identified by Lewis (2007:40), Case E fulfils a global policy and advocacy role, as well as a small operational service-orientated role.

Case E has a divisional structure around specific regions. For example, there is the Africa Manager who oversees both an Africa team in the head office and the regional Africa offices. Overall the organisation has 120 staff globally, with a diversity of nationalities and cultures across the regions.

6.5 EVIDENCE COLLECTION

Being able to draw upon multiple sources of evidence is one of the characteristics of case study research (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:108) and is what allows it to achieve a holistic view of the research phenomenon. By using multiple sources of evidence, the researcher can create converging lines of inquiry that make the findings of the case study more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2003:98). Within each case study, two sources of evidence were used: local senior communicator and organisational documents.

6.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect evidence from the most senior communicator in INGOs in South Africa. In particular, semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of the strategic contribution of internal communication in INGOs and how it is managed from the international and local level. The development of the interview guide is discussed in section 6.6. The following sections discuss how the communicators were selected and the process of conducting the interviews.

The decision of what communicators to interview was made based on theoretical sampling. In this method, the researcher selects evidence sources based on their perceived relevance to the theory and research question under consideration (Pole & Lampard, 2002:37). Since the research question centres on the management of strategic internal communication, which is an integral part of the overall communication function of an organisation, the most senior communicator in each INGO was interviewed.

Since INGOs are, by definition, international organisations, the offices in South Africa are not necessarily the headquarters of the organisation. Therefore, an attempt was made to interview both the local and the international senior communicator. However, except in the three cases where the INGO was headquartered in South Africa, this proved very difficult. Even with the support of the local senior communicator, it was not possible to get a response from the overseas communicators of the three remaining case studies.

All interviews with senior communicators were semi-structured, face-to-face interviews except for one which was conducted telephonically. Semi-structured interviews are interviews undertaken with a list of pre-determined questions, but, unlike in a structured interview, the interviewer can and should probe beyond these with additional questions that arise through the conversation (Berg, 2001:70). Semi-structured interviews are common in qualitative exploratory studies because they allow the researcher to question the meaning of what is said and can lead the researcher into areas not previously considered (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:315-316). The semi-structured interview is an appropriate method for this study because the structured portion allows the researcher to ensure that the appropriate topics are covered, while the unstructured elements mean that new perspectives and ideas can arise, an important component of an exploratory study.

The process of collecting evidence from the INGO case studies via semi-structured interviews was multi-stepped. Within each selected INGO, the researcher arranged the interview with the senior communicator directly. Each interview was scheduled for forty-five minutes to an hour at a time and place convenient to the interviewee. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts are available from the researcher.

As prophesised by Saunders *et al.* (2007:74), various issues arose during the evidence collection phase that had the potential to hamper access to the evidence sources as well as influence the quality of the evidence collected. For example, questions of anonymity and privacy hampers access to individual managers just as it hampered access to the organisation. Similar principles as those followed with the organisation (see section 6.4.3) were used to reassure individual managers who had concerns in this regard. Informed consent forms (Annexure B) were provided to and signed by each interviewee.

6.5.2 Organisational documents

The second evidence source is organisational documents. Yin identifies the most important use of organisational documents as corroborating and augmenting the evidence from other sources (Yin, 2003:87). The documents chosen had two main functions in the study. Firstly, documents such as annual reports and the website provided contextual background for the case study. Secondly, theoretically relevant documents might yield further evidence on the strategic contribution of internal communication.

Documents were chosen for analysis based on their theoretical relevance and their selection is discussed in section 6.6.2. However, not every INGO possessed all the documents identified as relevant. The documents available for each INGO are identified in Chapter 7. The documents possessed were identified and obtained during the interviews with the senior communicators.

Although a simpler process compared to the interviews, collecting organisational documents posed its own challenges. The first challenge was determining which documents were theoretically relevant. Each INGO possessed different types of documents that were called different names. Therefore careful questioning of the senior communicators was needed to determine which documents existed and were relevant to the study. The second challenge was gaining access to the documents as many were internal documents that the INGO was nervous about sharing with the researcher. Therefore, careful assurances were made about ensuring the anonymity of the INGO and the researcher was careful to explain exactly how the documents were to be used. These assurances were sufficient in most, but not all cases, to gain access to the necessary documents for this study.

6.6 DEVELOPMENT OF EVIDENCE GUIDES

6.6.1 Interview guide

When conducting a semi-structured interview, the researcher uses a list of pre-determined questions to guide the interview or discussion. The guide is based on the nature and objectives of the research being undertaken (Berg, 2001:74). Annexure C contains the

interview guide used in this study. The following describes the process through which this guide was developed.

When creating an interview schedule, Saunders *et al.* (2007:74) suggest starting with an outline of the major themes to be covered in the interview and then developing lists of questions for each of these. Perry notes that interview questions are developed from current theory (1998:790). Therefore, the major themes correspond to criteria for internal communication to be considered strategic, the key components of the internal communication process and the specific context of INGOs. Following Perry's (1998:791-792) suggestion, the guide contains broad questions that capture the perceptions of the interviewee on these research themes. Table 6.1 shows the correlation between the themes from the theory and the research questions.

Table 6.1: Correlation between themes and question numbers

Themes		Question number
Criteria for internal communication to be considered strategic	Strategic content	Throughout
	Strategic purpose	4, 11, 14
	Strategic position and role	1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9
Internal communication process	Strategic orientation	11
	Leadership	3
	Strategic knowledge	7
	Symmetrical communication and dialogue	13
	Internal communication infrastructure	10, 12
INGO Context		15, 16, 17

Where necessary during the interview, the researcher supplemented each of these with probe questions, based on the theory, to discuss any issues that did not arise on their own. This structure for the guide also helped to limit researcher bias in the interviews and discussions (Perry, 1998:791-792). Researcher bias occurs when the preconceptions and actions of the researcher influence the evidence collected (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:318), such as may occur if questions are worded to elicit specific responses. By starting the interview with broad questions, the participants' perceptions were captured before they were influenced by the researcher and the theoretical background (Perry, 1998:791-792).

In addition to researcher bias, several other potential issues were considered during the development of the guide. For example, there was a need to ensure that the guide did not include leading or ambiguous questions or questions that included jargon or technical terms (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:175). It was also necessary to ensure that the guide gathered the information needed for the study. To deal with these issues, the researcher followed Berg's (2001:80) recommendation and had the guide critically examined by a person familiar with the study's subject matter (the study's supervisor) and conducted practice interviews. This second part was done during the pilot test of this study which is described in the next section.

6.6.2 Organisational documents guide

In order to ensure that the same documents were collected from each case study, a list of relevant documents was created. The process for developing this list was similar to the process for developing the interview guide, in that it started with the main themes of this study. Each theme, the criteria for being strategic, the internal communication process and the INGO context, was considered to determine if a specific document that an organisation possessed had the potential to provide insight into it. The result of this process was that two types of organisational documents were identified as useful to the study. First, the annual report, website and organogram were identified as potentially providing background information for the case and the INGO's particular context. Second, the organisation's strategy, communication strategy and internal communication strategy were identified as potentially providing insight into the strategic criteria and the internal communication process.

For the documents, a checklist was developed to assist the researcher in confirming which documents (or equivalents thereof) the organisation possessed and whether those documents contained the key attributes associated with the main themes of this study. This document is included in Annexure D. It should be noted that not all case studies possessed all documents and the specific documents used for each case study are indicated in the case descriptions in Chapter 7.

6.7 PILOT STUDY

The purpose of conducting a pilot study is to refine the content of the evidence collection tools and the procedures to be used (Yin, 2003:79). As such, it is more than just a test of the interview guides, but also an opportunity to identify and address potential issues in accessing, organising and conducting the case studies. The following two sections discuss the process of conducting the pilot study and its results.

6.7.1 The process

Yin (2003:79) argues that convenience, access and geographic proximity are the key criteria for selecting a pilot study because it allows the researcher to develop a more prolonged relationship and use the study to try different approaches on a trial basis. As such, the researcher's place of current employment, an INGO that meets the criteria for this study, was chosen as the pilot site.

In conducting the pilot study, the researcher used draft versions of the interview guides developed, using the procedures identified in the previous section. In addition, feedback was sought from the interviewee at the end of the discussion on the process, the questions and the researcher's technique. The results of this process are discussed in the following section.

6.7.2 The report

As noted by Yin (2003:80), the pilot study can identify both substantive and methodological issues. It can also complement theoretical work done by identifying issues that may not currently be covered prior to the full case studies. The following identifies the lessons learned during the pilot study and how these were incorporated into the research design for the actual case studies.

Three methodological issues were identified during the pilot study. First, it became apparent through discussions with the interviewee that most INGOs did not have dedicated internal communication people, particularly in their local offices. As a result of this realisation and strategic internal communication being integrated within the broader

communication function, it was determined that interviews in each case would be conducted with the most senior communication person available as reflected in the previous section.

Second, the pilot interview highlighted an issue with the order of the questions on the interview schedule. The original interview schedule started with a discussion of the communication function overall before moving to questions on organisational strategy and finally internal communication. While the order made sense from a theoretical perspective, the result was confusion for the interviewee as to what the questions were referring to. For example, was the researcher asking about organisational strategy or communication strategy or internal communication strategy. Therefore the final interview schedule was reorganised to move from the broad, organisational strategy level, to the overall communication function, to the internal communication function and ended with a discussion of the INGO context.

The third and final methodological issue was that several questions were found to be redundant in that they received similar answers. Therefore, in the final interview schedule, several questions were removed or combined with others in order to (i) avoid duplication, (ii) focus the interview and (iii) avoid confusion thereby improving the quality of the evidence collected.

In terms of theoretical issues, the pilot study only highlighted one new issue that had not been previously considered. The pilot case is a relatively small INGO which operates out of a primary secretariat in South Africa with only limited staff in other countries. Therefore, they rely heavily on partners in other countries to implement their projects. As a result, the senior communicator included communication with these partners as part of internal communication. While external organisations are theoretically not considered part of internal communication, in situations such as this, where they are intricately involved in the delivery of the INGOs work, their alignment with the organisation's strategy is equally important. Therefore, it was decided that if a similar situation was uncovered with any of the case studies, the researcher would ask the relevant questions both with regards to the narrower definition of internal stakeholders as well as for the broader version that includes external partner organisations.

In addition to the above issues, the pilot study provided the interviewer with an opportunity to practice conducting a semi-structured interview and ensure that future interviews would run smoothly. All lessons learned were incorporated into the final case studies.

6.8 CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Daymon and Halloway (2002:232) note that there are no set rules or processes for undertaking qualitative analysis, rather, researchers need to follow the approach which they consider to be the best fit for their overall research design and the nature of their evidence. For the purpose of this study, it was determined that the four cognitive phases of qualitative analysis proposed by Morse and Field (1995:103) were useful in organising and analysing the evidence in this study. The phases are: comprehending, synthesising (decontextualising), theorising and recontextualising. Each phase depends on the previous ones in order to be successful.

While Morse and Field's four phases are useful for organising the analysis of qualitative evidence they do not provide a specific method of data analysis. For this process, this study undertook a thematic open-coded analysis. The use of Morse and Field's four phases and open-coded analysis bears some resemblance Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory in that it starts with an attempt to comprehend and code the evidence as broadly as possible without reference. However, unlike Strauss and Corbin, the process this study follows incorporates already existing theory into the analysis process, primarily at the theorising stage. The process and steps followed during each of the four phases in this study are discussed below.

6.8.1 Comprehending

In qualitative analysis, comprehending means "learning everything about a setting or the experiences of participants" (Morse, 1994:27). As such, it occurs not just during the empirical phase of this study, but also during the literature review when the researcher gains understanding of the research topic and the study's context.

As advocated by both Yin (2003:111) and Morse and Field (1995:104) the researcher developed a familiarity with the literature on the research phenomenon prior to data

collection in order to be able to recognise what was interesting and relevant during the data collection process. However, during the evidence analysis, prior theory was kept separate from evidence collected in order not to contaminate the evidence with a perspective it does not reflect (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:232; Morse, 1994:26). This separation was achieved through the use of post-coded thematic analysis. Post-coded or open-coded themes are themes that develop from the data during analysis rather than being pre-determined by theory (Henning, 2004:105). Therefore, while the interview questions are related to the themes and constructs developed in Chapters 2 to 5, the analysis of the responses was not directly connected in the same manner. This point is important, given the exploratory purpose of the study because it allowed for the emergence of new themes and patterns from the evidence.

The comprehending phase of evidence analysis is achieved when the researcher can write a coherent and detailed description of the case (Morse & Field, 1995:174). Several steps in the analysis process helped the researcher achieve this aim.

Firstly, as noted in section 6.5, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher and reviewed for accuracy. During this process, the researcher started to develop a list of initial ideas regarding themes around the functioning of internal communication to be used in coding the evidence (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:150; Braun & Clarke, 2006:87). As Henning (2004:105) notes, by transcribing the interviews herself, the researcher stayed closer to the data and was more competent when it came to the second step, coding.

Coding is the process by which segments of interest in the evidence are tagged with relevant labels (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:234). As noted above, the study adopted an open coding approach wherein codes were identified within the evidence. Codes are used to identify features in the data and are the most basic component of the data that is meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2006:88). The evidence was coded through a systematic reading that gave careful attention to each part of the evidence. Any piece of evidence that seemed like it might be relevant was coded.

Once all the data was coded, the codes were grouped together under relevant themes related to the functioning of internal communication in INGOs. Themes are the broader

levels of analysis which allow arguments to be made about the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006:88). This process involved grouping and regrouping the codes to form meaningful themes. It should be noted that the process is iterative with new themes and sub-themes being continuously identified during the coding, requiring the already-coded evidence to be recoded (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:482). Therefore, once an initial set of themes was identified, the data was read again to ensure it fitted the themes identified. The themes were then grouped according to their relevance to the major thematic areas in the research phenomenon, internal communication content, purpose, position, process, as well as additional groups for themes related to the INGO context and the communication of strategy.

The organisational documents were analysed in a different fashion. First, the documents were read once to gain a background understanding of the case. Second, the documents were reviewed again using the checklist in Annexure D to determine how well they fitted into the normative criteria for strategic internal communication in INGOs developed in Chapter 4. Finally, the documents were reviewed a third time following the coding of the interview transcripts to determine their support or contradiction of the themes arising from that process.

This process allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of strategic internal communication within the context of each particular organisation, thus starting to fulfil Objective 2 of this study. The evidence was strengthened by the review of both documents and transcripts, as it was possible to identify where they corroborated and contradicted the picture each drew of their particular case. This contextual analysis is important, given the postmodern approach to this study as well as the importance of context to the research phenomenon. The individual case descriptions are included at the beginning of Chapter 7.

6.8.2 Synthesising

Objective 2 of this study is to identify the current strategic internal communication practices of INGOs empirically. Comprehending this process in each individual case study is the first step. However, to meet the objective fully, there needs to be a synthesis of understanding across the INGO case studies. As defined by Morse (1994:30), synthesising is “the

merging of several stories, experiences, or cases to describe a typical, composite pattern of behaviour or response.” Therefore it is the phase where the evidence is decontextualised in the sense that analysis is no longer focused on the evidence within the context of a particular case but rather on the comparison of evidence across cases. The process of synthesising thus allows the researcher to identify both areas of commonality and difference across cases and to explain the variations (Morse, 1994:30-31).

The case studies were considered from two perspectives. As suggested by Eisenhardt (2002:18), the case studies were grouped into broad categories and examined both for within-group similarities and between group differences. The categories related to INGO structures and size: two cases were large federations with over 1000 employees, two cases were global organisations with approximately 150 employees, and one case was a network organisation with only 30-50 employees but with many members with whom it worked closely worldwide. In terms of internal communication practices, there were significant similarities within these groups and significant differences between the groups making these useful contexts within which to consider the research phenomenon. In addition, themes that cut across all cases were also identified. The results of the cross-case analysis are presented in the second half of Chapter 7.

6.8.3 Theorising

Morse (1994:32) defines theorising as “the constant development and manipulation of malleable theoretical schemes until the “best” theoretical scheme is developed.” The process of theorising involves the development of working propositions and then testing them against the data (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:239). It includes the conscious consideration of alternative explanations in order to ensure that the explanation developed is indeed the “best fit” (Morse, 1994:33).

Several strategies can be used to assist in theorising. This study used what Yin and Moore (quoted in Berg, 2001:230) describe as process matching, whereby information from a case study is examined for a relationship to a theoretical proposition. This process brings together the theoretical and empirical phases of this study by comparing the hypothetical propositions and themes that emerged from the evidence to the theoretical criteria for strategic internal communication developed from the literature and presented in Chapters

4 and 5. The first step of this process was to take each theoretical element of strategic internal communication individually and compare it to the related themes which arose from the evidence. Empirical evidence was sought for each theoretical construct. Where appropriate, explanations for differences were proposed. Since much of the theory around strategic internal communication is normative, areas where the theory indicated that a change in management could potentially improve strategic internal communication in INGOs were also noted. In addition, the evidence was also analysed for new elements of internal communication or the removal of those that were theoretically identified but not empirically supported. The final component of this analysis was to refine the criteria for strategic internal communication in INGOs based on the comparison between theory and evidence. The results of this process are integrated in the cross-case comparison in Chapter 7 and conclusions are presented in Chapter 8.

6.8.4 Recontextualising

The final phase of the evidence analysis process is recontextualising. This phase involves presenting the emerging theory so that it is applicable in other settings (Morse, 1994:34). This process involves making theory-based generalisations and positioning the study within the field's current body of knowledge (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:239). The theorising phase described above included, in this study, the process of generalising from the specific cases to the current theory in the field. Based on the results of this process and the lessons learned during the study, further recommendations on how this study can contribute to further research and development of the field are included in Chapter 8.

6.9 CRITERIA FOR SCIENTIFIC SOUNDNESS

Since this study adopts a qualitative approach, the standard means of demonstrating the rigour of quantitative research, reliability and validity, are not easily applied. However, rigorous research and quality of design are still important in qualitative research (Pole & Lampard, 2002:207). Lincoln and Guba (quoted in Babbie & Mouton, 2001:276) developed criteria for evaluating qualitative research which has been widely adopted by researchers using this approach to replace reliability and validity. For them, the key criterion for good qualitative research is trustworthiness, which they identify as establishing the merit of the research with the researcher's audience. As such, trustworthiness is determined by the

readers of the research and the researcher's responsibility is to provide sufficient information so readers can form their own judgement.

Four criteria are generally used to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:93). These criteria are discussed individually below, along with those elements of the research design that demonstrate their presence in this study for the reader.

6.9.1 Credibility

Credibility is similar to the concept of internal validity but conceptualised for qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003:601). As such, it is concerned with whether the constructed realities of the study are recognized as truth by the people in the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:93). In other words, do the participants of the study agree that the findings of the study reflect their social reality. Babbie and Mouton (2001:277) suggest several procedures to ensure credibility of qualitative research, including: triangulation, referential adequacy and member checks. This study uses the first two techniques to demonstrate the credibility of the research.

Triangulation is the use of multiple data sources to verify what the evidence from one source is saying by allowing it to be compared to data from another (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:139). Data source triangulation is part of this study's research design where evidence is collected from both interviews and organisational documents. It is a key element of this study's credibility because it helps to corroborate the evidence collected and establish a 'complete' picture of the social context under study (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:98). Therefore, by using triangulation, the likelihood of the research findings accurately mirroring the 'reality' within the organisations in this study is increased.

The study's credibility can also be judged based on its referential adequacy. Referential adequacy refers to having adequate materials to document the research findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277). As noted above, in addition to the documents collected for each case study, the interviews conducted for this study were recorded and transcribed. This provides a large collection of materials which are used to document and support the research findings in Chapters 7 and 8. All this documentation is available from the

researcher. By the use of triangulation and referential adequacy, the reader can establish the credibility of this study.

6.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is to qualitative research what external validity is to quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003:601). As such, it refers to the extent that research findings can be applied to other contexts or populations (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277). However, since all qualitative research is defined by the context in which it occurs, it is not easily generalized to larger populations, nor is this usually the goal of the researcher. Therefore, in qualitative studies, it is the obligation of the reader to determine whether the study's findings are applicable in the context to which they want to transfer them (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277). This means that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the reader has the information needed to do so. In order to meet this obligation, this study provides clear criteria for the selection of INGOs in this study (see section 6.4.2 above) as well as a detailed description of each case in Chapter 7.

In addition to the above conceptualisation, transferability can also be viewed as closely related to the idea of theory-based generalisations (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:93). Advocated by Yin (2003:10) for use in case studies in particular, theory-based or analytical generalisation means that the research findings are used to support, disprove or modify a theory as opposed to their findings being applicable to a specific population. By developing theoretical propositions prior to evidence collection and using those propositions as the basis for analysing the evidence, the case study design has a high level of analytical generalisation. By this means and the contextual information provided, the reader can establish the transferability of this study.

6.9.3 Dependability

Reliability, the ability of other researchers to achieve similar results, is not a concept that is strictly applicable to qualitative research, simply because qualitative interviews by definition are conducted within a particular context and their flexibility in this regard is one of their major strengths (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:319). It is not possible for another researcher to apply the same methodology in a different context and achieve the exact

same results. Therefore, reliability is conceptualised differently for qualitative research and the term dependability is used instead (Golafshani, 2003:601).

Dependability means that the research findings are consistent and accurate (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:94). Since it is nearly impossible to repeat a qualitative research project with the same respondents in the same context and achieve exactly the same results, this generally means opening both the research findings and the process by which they were obtained to public scrutiny, so that the reader and other researchers can establish their dependability for themselves (Pole & Lampard, 2002:207). In this study, in addition to the information located within this dissertation, the researcher kept all notes on the research process which are available upon request.

6.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research replaces the notion of objectivity and neutrality (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:94). It refers to the degree that the research conclusions are related to the focus of the study and not to the biases of the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:94). In order to establish confirmability, Lincoln and Guba refer to a confirmability audit trail (quoted in Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278). An audit trail consists of various elements, including raw data, various research notes, proposals and draft documents, which allow an auditor (another researcher) to determine if the research findings can be traced to their source and are supported by the evidence. Similar to the information necessary for establishing dependability, these elements are available from the researcher.

6.10 LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in several key ways, due both to its subject matter and its methodology. Firstly, it is limited to the concept of strategic internal communication as defined herein. Thus any conclusions drawn may not be relevant to internal communication with any other goal but strategic alignment, such as task communication and information management. Secondly, this study is limited to exploring the research problem and not to finding a solution. Therefore the conclusions only provide an indication

of the elements that need to be considered in managing strategic internal communication in INGOs and not how to undertake that management.

Related to its methodology, this study is limited by its focus on interviewing only management and not employees in each case study. The result is that the evidence captures only the views and challenges of managers. The views of employees, as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of current strategic internal communication practices within each case are missing. This limitation was deemed acceptable given the exploratory nature of this study. However, as a result, the conclusions of this study should be viewed only as an initial foundation on which to build future studies that consider the employee perspective as well.

This study is also limited by its case selection. By only using INGOs in South Africa as case studies, the transferability of the study to INGOs more broadly may not be possible. In addition, in three case studies, only the local senior communicator was interviewed meaning that the results may not be an accurate depiction of internal communication in the organisation as a whole.

6.11 CONCLUSION

A qualitative approach was taken to the empirical phase of this study because of its fit with the postmodernist and social constructivist worldview through its emphasis on context and obtaining the insider perspective and its appropriateness for the exploratory purpose of this study. Within this approach, a multiple case study research design was adopted in order to obtain a holistic view of the research phenomenon. The case studies were selected based on criteria developed during the theoretical portion of this study as well as practical considerations such as convenience and access.

Within each case study, evidence was collected from three sources. The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with local senior communicators. In addition, organisational documents provided further support to the evidence collected in the interviews. The evidence collected from these three sources was analysed in four

phases: comprehending, synthesising, theorising and recontextualising. The results of this process are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

Finally, the criteria for judging the rigour of this research design were identified as being credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. While it was noted that the ability to judge these criteria rests with the reader, the researcher highlighted several components of the research design and this study can aid the reader in this process, notably: the use of triangulation, the depth of the description of the research contexts and the availability of the research transcripts and notes from the researcher.