2   CHAPTER 2

A MEANINGFUL WORKPLACE:

METHODOLOGY

*The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and present the research methodology consisting of a broad goal or ultimate purpose (to develop in the sense of expanding on the current theoretical footprint of the construct a **meaningful workplace**), the research framework (following a qualitative approach), the specific method that will be employed to create such a theory (constructivist), the research genre which serves this project (phenomenological), and an indication of the data sources that will be utilised for this purpose (published research texts, exit interview verbatim responses and Repertory Grid interview information) and closing with a discussion on language as the medium of representation..*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research approach that was chosen is discussed and presented. A qualitative approach is contemplated and discussed in a sequence commencing with the broadest possible framework (i.e. a general orientation towards research) and closes with a discussion of the strategy which comprises three converging streams of information culminating in a discussion on theory formation or in this instance the expansion of an existing theoretical construct.

2.1.1 Structural fit within the context of the research program

The structural positioning within the broader context of the research process is presented in Figure 2.1. Figure 2.1 illustrates the progression from inception of the idea up to the choice of research methodology. The reasoning begins with a broad discussion on research and then progresses towards the reasoning regarding the choice and character of qualitative research.
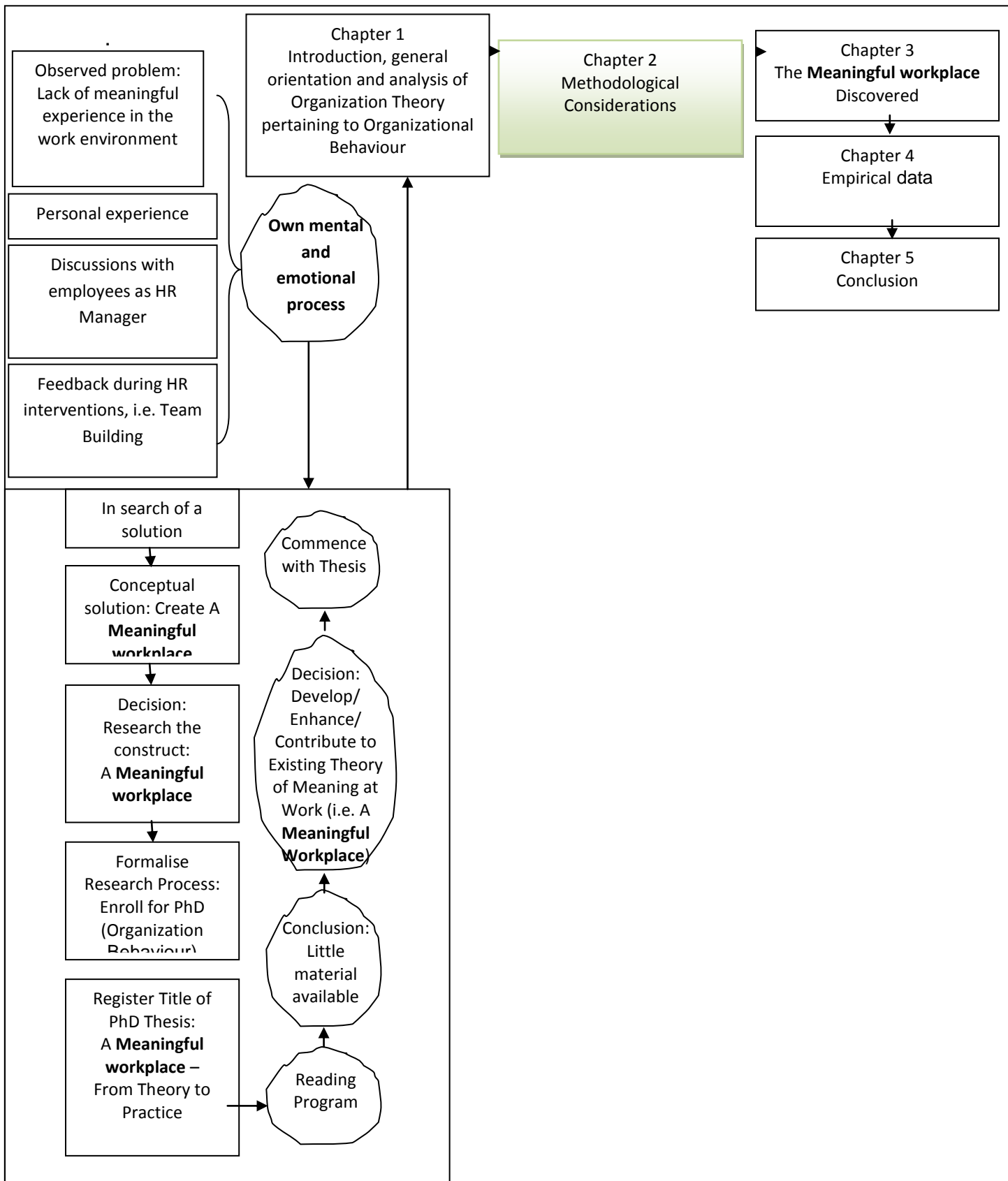
Figure 2.1: Chapter 2 in Context

2.1.2 Structure of the chapter

Firstly, a discussion regarding research as a process and phenomenon for the discovery and acquisition of knowledge as the broadest framework within which this study program, plays itself out is presented. This is followed by the case for a qualitative research framework or paradigm. Data gathering techniques that are utilised in this program are presented as part of the discussion on qualitative research. A discussion regarding phenomenology as the framework of reference for "Verstehen" (understanding the data) as lived experience at work will be noted. This is followed by a discussion of an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, thus paving the way for the expansion of theory regarding the construct under discussion. Within this structure certain issues that force themselves on the foreground will be discussed as they present themselves. Examples of such issues are questions relating to the differences between quantitative and qualitative research and validity in qualitative research, which will be discussed in the appropriate paragraphs.

Figure 2.2 presents a graphic indication of the previous paragraph. This structure is deemed to be a holistic approach towards the research methodology for the purpose of this study program.
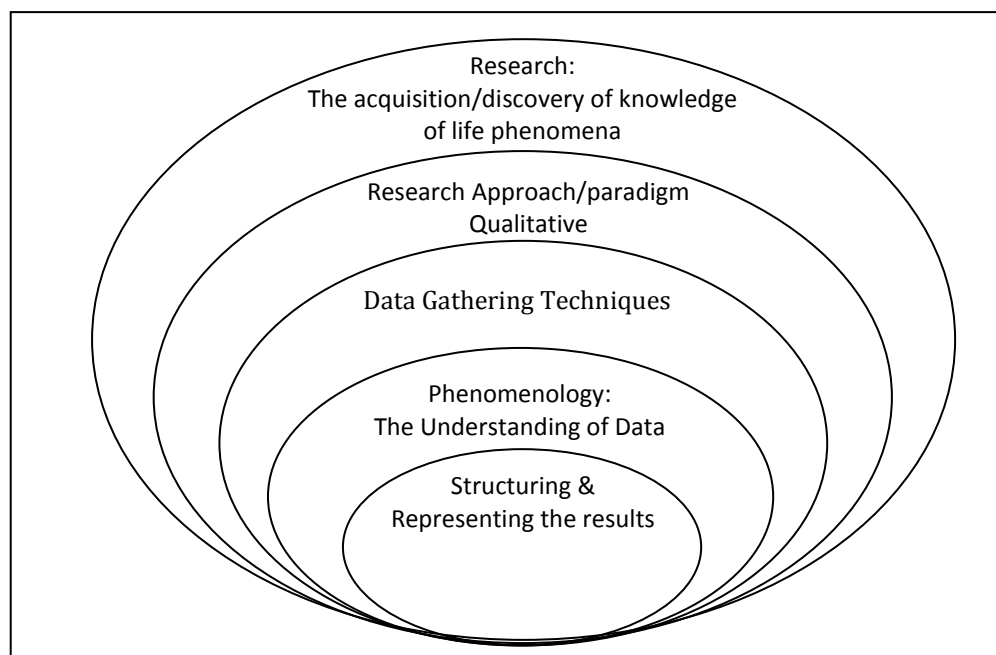

Figure 2.2: A Holistic Perspective

2.2 RESEARCH AS THE PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION

The following paragraphs shed light on the considerations leading up the choice of a qualitative approach. The reason for inclusion of this paragraph is self evident. A "cold canvassing approach" and methodological discussion will not serve the flow of the reasoning towards a coherent discussion regarding the methodology to be followed in this study (which incidentally is also related to the possibility of attaining validity). It is therefore deemed prudent to summarise the research problem, questions and purpose prior to embarking on a discourse in qualitative paradigms.

The acquisition of knowledge or the solution to a problem is most probably the deepest level of achievement of and by any research program. The current research program attempts the acquisition of knowledge of a specific phenomenon and an understanding of the dynamics that are involved in the phenomenon.

The primary problem revolves around the phenomenon that employees suffer a loss of meaning at work. From a positive perspective, it thus focuses on those elements/factors in the workplace that determine or contribute to the experience of meaningfulness at work. This focus predisposes the current study towards an understanding (*Verstehen*) of lived experience in the work place and positions the research program in the broad domain of a qualitative approach.

Janesick (1994, p. 210) uses dance as a metaphor to describe qualitative research designs.

> All dances make a statement and begin with the question: What do I want to say with this dance? In very much the same way, the qualitative researcher begins with a similar question. What do I want know, or what did I want to explain in this study? This is a critical beginning point. As a result of the individual researchers' own lived experience a question is constructed and framed for enquiry. After this question is clear, we select the most appropriate methodology to proceed with the research project.

In metaphoric terms research can be described as a choreographed endeavour, an art form like a dance. As an "art form" research design adapts, changes and moulds the very phenomena they are intended to examine. Following the dance metaphor which follows a pattern of warming up, executing the dance-floor exercises, and eventually ends with a cooling down phase, qualitative research design typically commences with design decisions followed by a phase of execution and eventually winds down. Design decisions revolve around a question or set of questions that guides the study towards execution. "Once the researcher has a question, a site, a participant or a number of participants and a reasonable time period…, he or she needs to decide the most appropriate data collection strategies suited to the study" (Janesick 1994, p. 211). The specific research questions as formulated in the previous chapter serve as boundary markers, without which a qualitative program will expand to the extent that it becomes meaningless without achieving the set objectives. The research questions emanating from the observed problem domain represent a problem complex and can therefore not be limited to a single question or even hypotheses.

The answers to the stated questions will lead to the achievement of the purpose and the objectives of the study program as described in Chapter 1. The research continuum as presented in Figure 2.3 (below), is indicative of the fact that the current study spans the whole spectrum of this continuum, as it commences with a theoretical ideal (to establish a theoretical framework to understand the meaning of human behaviour and experience at work) and moves toward a practical ideal (to implement a model for analysis and intervention so as to sustain the ideal of a **meaningful workplace**).
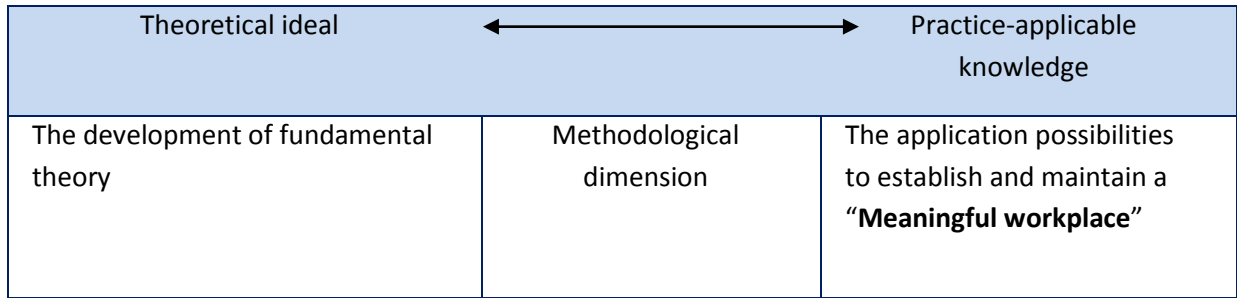
Theoretical ideal	←——————————→	Practice-applicable knowledge
The development of fundamental theory	Methodological dimension	The application possibilities to establish and maintain a "**Meaningful workplace**"

Figure 2.3: The Research Continuum

(Mouton and Marais, 1992)

Such an approach will inevitably lead to a shuttling process between theory and practice. A Research Framework refers to a broad framework within which the program will unfold. In this particular case a qualitative framework. (Although the concept paradigm is also used to refer to qualitative research, the choice for the concept Framework was chosen to refer to qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research modes.) Kotzé (1995, p. 181) referring to Guba and Lincoln, states that qualitative research represents a better "fit for the investigation of socio-behavioural phenomena because the interaction between researcher and participant, of necessity, leads to changes as a result of the interaction itself." The implication is obvious: human behaviour is seldom, if ever, de-contextualised, referring to social and historical background, as well as to time and situational factors, including experiences and stimuli which evolve within the framework of human living, of which work life most probably occupies a substantial share of life activities and energy expended to achieve certain goals. Human experience can never be divorced from the context in which it is "lived experience". Context thus also refers to the influence of their life and world view within which they grow up (bearing in mind the great diversity that exists in this respect), the economic system within which people have to survive, the theoretical organizational framework which dominates when they start with a career and within which they conduct and experience work-life and the changes that take place over time.

The nature of research and reflection however, specifically a qualitative research design, may result in different terminology and a somewhat different closure, depending on the flow of the process in terms of internal logic and abiding by the

rules of the specific paradigm and strategy. This study will end with certain hypotheses, instead of using hypotheses as a starting point and units of measure.

Every research program is characterised by a unique methodology which includes the approach or research paradigm, strategy, research genre and specific data gathering methods. These considerations are not only determined by the domain phenomena but as well as the envisaged purpose of the program. Such a framework (including the approach – qualitative or quantitative research approach, the paradigm (e.g. constructivist) and the strategy (e.g. phenomenology) - serve as the enablers that revolve around the research problem as initially observed as a phenomenon and the questions that guide the research program. It is therefore essential to state the underlying assumptions and approaches that guide the research process as well as to indicate the unfolding of the research process as indicators of the extent of congruence with the envisaged purpose of the study. In order to pre-empt any misconceptions, it is deemed prudent to provide a holistic overview against which this chapter must be understood. Graphically this view can be presented as in Figure 2.3.

2.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A FRAMEWORK/PARADIGM FOR INVESTIGATING AND UNDERSTANDING LIFE-WORLD PHENOMENA

2.3.1 The dividing line: Qualitative and quantitative research

At the outset of the discussion it seems necessary to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research approaches or paradigms. The discussion is broad based as this is not an attempt to differentiate on the basis of detail. The necessity does however present itself as an imperative in order for researcher and reader alike. The researcher is under an obligation to present his /her mental process and pattern and for the reader to follow and develop insight into the mindset and mental process of the researcher.

Table 2.1: Differentiators between Quantitative and Qualitative Research: The Philosophy of Science

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Emanates from a positivistic tradition; major constituents are physical objects and processes; ● The systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships. The process of measurement is central to quantitative research because it provides the fundamental connection between empirical observation and mathematical expression of quantitative relationships ● Widely used in both the natural and social sciences, from physics and biology to sociology and journalism ● The term quantitative research is most often used in the social sciences in contrast to qualitative research	Emanates from phenomenological perspective; emphasises internal, mental events as the basic unit of existence ● The approach does not involve mathematical models ● An approach to inquiry that cuts across disciplines and subject matter
Assumes knowledge comes from observation of the physical world ▪ Knowledge exists in the outside world and must be discovered by sound and controlled methodological approaches based on an specific ontological assumption (reality can be discovered)	Knowledge is actively constructed and comes from examining the internal constructs of people ● Researchers endeavour to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. The discipline investigates the spectrum and context of behaviour decision making and not just the quantifiable variables ● Smaller but focused samples/research participants are more often needed rather than large random samples

Investigator makes inferences based on direct observations or derivatives of the direct observation	Investigator relies on outside observational schemes and tries to keep intact the participants perspective
Goal is to describe cause and effect	Attempts to describe the ways that people assign meaning to behaviour
▪ The objective is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories and/or hypotheses pertaining to natural phenomena to prove causal relationships	▪ Entails the examination, analysis and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships

(Based on Kerlinger and Lee 2000, p. 590)

Table 2.1 indicates the differences between a quantitative and qualitative research approach based upon different and distinguishable philosophies. The different philosophical approaches imply certain ontological and methodological differences.

The elements as tabulated, (which are by no means a comprehensive or an exhaustive list of differences) speak for themselves as differentiating factors in the different approaches between quantitative and qualitative research.

Qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research is followed as an approach and broad framework for this study. The field of study is lived experience of employees as documented in current research with the purpose of understanding the phenomenon the Meaning of Work. The assumption in this study is that the flip-side of the meaning of work can be described as a **meaningful workplace**. Three streams of information (see below) converge to eventually establish the building blocks for the formation of a theory on a **meaningful workplace**. The result will inevitably lead to the creation of theory, based on the observation and study of experiential structures and consciousness. The work-life of any given individual or collective of individuals is lived-experience, a phenomenon in and of society. It is littered with experiences and meanings. Thus this study will inevitably follow the experience of the work-life of individuals from a *subjective* or first person point of view. This lays the foundation of the choice for phenomenology as research genre. Phenomenology can be distinguished from, although related to, other fields of

philosophy and methodology in respect of ontology (the study of being or what is), epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of valid reasoning), ethics (the study of right and wrong action), etc. within a qualitative framework.

Does this imply a pure first-person subjective construction of a proposed theory regarding a **meaningful workplace**? The answer is in the negative. There are certain rules that guide the total process from the inception of the idea and the concerns that arise from the observation up to and including the writing and proposal of a theory. These will be turned to later.

2.3.2   The evolution of Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 13-17) refer to the history of qualitative research that can be demarcated within the following framework:

- ▪ *Traditional period*, covering the beginning of the 1900's to World War II. Qualitative researchers such as missionaries, discoverers, administrators, and others, created mass volumes describing the so-called "primitive cultures" in an *objective* way. These accounts were mostly based on field experiences and observations from a distance (if that were possible while interacting with objects of enquiry).

- ▪ The second phase is described as the *modernist phase*, attempted the application of a rigorous methodology to qualitative research such as the work of Becker et al 1961, in Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 14). Qualitative research in this phase clothed itself in the language and guise of positivist (and later) post-positivist approach. Quite the opposite end of this phase, in the history of qualitative research, was the discovery of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). New interpretive theories were also discovered including ethno-methodology, phenomenology, critical theory and feminism all of which dotted the qualitative landscape with markers of methodology, ontology and epistemology.

- ▪ The third moment or phase in the history of qualitative research is referred to as the phase of *blurred genres*. Theories included Symbolic Interaction,

Constructivism, Naturalistic Enquiry, Positivism and Post-positivism, Phenomenology, etc. Reporting formats were as diverse and ranged from Grounded Theory Case Studies, Clinical Research, and methods of Historical and Biographical action.

- The fourth phase or moment is known as the **crisis of representation**. During this phase concepts such as validity, reliability and dependability became critical. Stoller in Denzin and Lincoln (2000) became critical of the traditional ethnographical and anthropological text accounts and eventually created a memoir, in which he became the first person of the story that he told. This represents a *first-person* representation, akin to phenomenology, which also presents a first-person account based on the interaction between knower and known.

- The **fifth moment** or the post modern period of ethnographic writing abandoned the aloof observer position and experimented with new ways of exposing ethnographical accounts. The search for the *Grand Theories* was abandoned and replaced with local and small scale theories that fitted the research context. In essence two theories can be isolated during the phase i.e. Postmodernist Critical Theory and Constructivism.

- The sixth moment or phase in qualitative research is known as the **post experimental period**. Writings are connected to a free and democratic society.

- The seventh moment or phase can be described as **the border** towards "…multivocality, contested meanings, paradigmatic controversies and new textual forms" (Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 185) we are moving.

A long and coloured history indeed! However the possibilities regarding the demarcation of timelines and approach do not imply clearly demarcated and isolated theories. The legacy of the past lives in the present and will live in the future of qualitative researchers, overstepping boundary lines and fusing theory, methodology, epistemology and ontology.

How does the qualitative researcher cope with six very fundamental issues which include the critique of positivism and post-positivism; the crisis of representation and legitimisation; the various voices, speaking from the background of various agendas

(race, gender, class, ethnic, Third World perspectives, political and ideological agendas, etc); the overlap between the boundaries of systems of meaning?

These are but some of the challenges that face the qualitative researcher in his/her endeavour to uncover meaning, and to construe new knowledge and insight in the field of human behaviour and endeavours, challenges that will have to be faced in this study as well.

Another set of problematic issues with which qualitative research is faced, include confrontations that question the validity, generalizability, and reliability of the research. The implications are self-evident:

Is it in any way possible to generalise the construed theory which places the individual in the centre of the Organisational Behaviour debate, without prejudicing the rational economic perspective on work behaviour, nor diluting the psychodynamic nature of the individual's work related behaviour, and integrating these two perspectives into a single and coherent theory that will not only enrich the theory on Organizational Behaviour, but also contribute towards establishing a framework or approach that will acknowledge the negative work behaviour that is created by only applying a rational economic view in respect of work force in an organisational setting?

When attempting a definition of Qualitative Research cognisance must be taken of the various aspects that come into play. Qualitative Research as such does not necessarily belong to any specific paradigm, perspective, theoretical or methodical practice or framework and therefore there is no unified methodical or methodological unique framework. However it dopes encompass theories, paradigms, methodology according to paradigms, ontological approaches and has its own uniqueness situated in the ***analyses of the data with which it works.***

Marais and Mouton (1992) postulate that the endeavour to understand the extent and depth of a phenomenon almost inevitably leads to a qualitative research strategy (approach). And postulate a three dimensional model to explain and differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research approaches or frameworks.

In the first instance, this study focuses on the understanding of the construct **"meaningful workplace"** and will therefore necessitate a qualitative design. Figure 2.4 (Marais and Mouton 1992, p. 175) provides a further background to this reasoning and at once indicates the differences as well as well as the purpose and requirements of the different research designs and strategies.

Marais and Mouton refer to specific examples of qualitative research methods or paradigms which includes Phenomenology. The purpose is to create an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and self evidently requires involvement, contextualization maximation of comparatives and sensitized concepts. Thus, the act of qualitative research cannot be viewed from a neutral or objective positivist point of view (the last being the difference between Husserl and Heidegger).

However difficult it seems to define qualitative research, it is nevertheless attempted. The problem with such an attempt is that qualitative research cannot be defined according to a specific paradigm or single ideological perspective. Nor is it possible to use a specific methodological standpoint as the "starting block" for such a definition. Following Denzin and Lincoln (1994:30) who are probably close to an inclusive description when stating that qualitative research is *an "inter-disciplinary, trans disciplinary, and even a contra-disciplinary field"* with a *"multi paradigmatic focus"* bound to a *"naturalistic perspective and an interpretive understanding of human behaviour"* and which is continuously caught up in an internal tension of which *"the one pole tends to towards a broad post-modern logic, whilst the other pole tends towards a narrower positivistic conception of human behaviour and the understanding thereof"*. This definition (if it may be called that) confirms the correctness of the concept when viewing qualitative research as *framework-concept* within which a rich variety of methods and genres can be imbedded.

As has been indicated, qualitative research serves her from a diverse plate of content and strategies. Some concepts that function on a different level (or within a different domain) are briefly indicated below.

2.3.3 Qualitative vs. Quantitative research

There are distinct differences between qualitative and quantitative research designs. These will be discussed below without pretending that the discussion is either final or comprehensive. It will however indicate the differences for the purpose of this study.

2.3.3.1 Concepts

Concepts are the constituents of thought on a pre-theoretical level. Seen as such concepts form the building blocks of understanding phenomena which are under scrutiny. Concepts function on a different level when compared to quantitative research designs. In a qualitative research design concepts acquire "surplus meaning", indicating that **concepts** are "connotatively richer in meaning" (Marais and Mouton, 1992, p. 164). In this regard, it would be appropriate to conclude that concepts somehow express abstractions that are formed through a process of generalization based on observed specifics, which implies that phenomena (in qualitative designs, such as in this case) represent a variegated hue of interactions. In quantitative designs researchers endeavour to define concepts in such a way that they demonstrate a denotative character and therefore a single *meaning*.

"Qualitative methods (as opposed to quantitative methods) typically produce a wealth of information about a much smaller number of cases and people" (Patton in Kotzé, 1995, p. 179), thus increasing understanding, but at the same time reducing generalizability.

2.3.3.2   Hypotheses

In quantitative research designs the researcher tests his/her hypotheses and eventually accepts or rejects these through a rigorous process of testing and quantification, hypotheses unfold during the research process, hence, often feature as the end-results of qualitative research designs. Kerlinger (1986, p. 11) describes this unfolding process as follows: *"After actualising the problem, after turning back on experience for possible solutions, after observing relevant phenomena, the scientist may formulate a hypotheses"*.

2.3.3.3   Observation

The third area of difference between qualitative and quantitative research designs pertains to observation. Observation according to Mouton and Marais (1992, p. 166-167) refers to *"…the process according to which the researcher links reality with his/her theoretical assumptions".* In this regard it is important to note that the difference between qualitative and quantitative researchers can be reduced to two fundamental propositions.

Quantitative researchers demonstrate an approach that forces a pre-designed system onto a phenomenon, thereby transposing a structure onto the phenomenon. Qualitative researchers' point of departure is that the phenomenon which is subjected to the research process must manifest itself as "it is" and the researcher will register what he/she observes.

Secondly, qualitative researchers are more involved in and with the phenomenon that is researched, whilst quantitative researchers tend to maintain distance between themselves and phenomena. ("Qualitative Framework") is used here as the broadest possible approach towards this study program and is indicative in its differentiation to other frameworks – such as a quantitative framework and approach. The concept "paradigm" is used to indicate a cluster approaches within the paradigm. The concept: "strategy" is employed to denote the specific

methodological operationalisation for the study. Graphically this can be presented as in Figure 2.4.
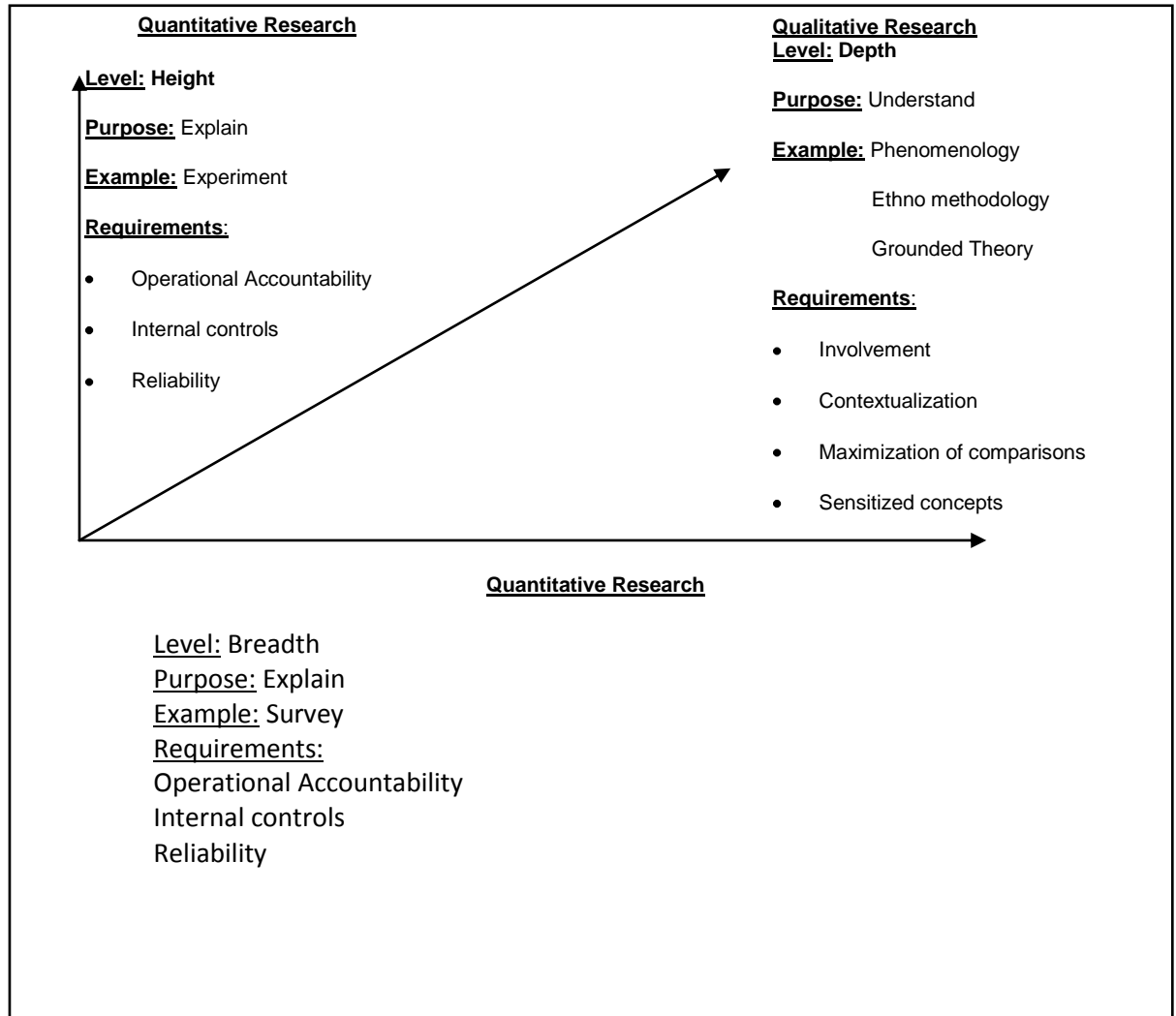

Figure 2.4: Research dimensions

(Mouton and Marais 1992)

2.3.4   Notes on reliability and validity in Qualitative research

Qualitative research, in its essence, as has been implied, is exploratory and inductive in nature. Therefore, although reliability and validity are important concepts in research designs it is not possible to transfer the content and the extent of meaning of these concepts from a qualitative perspective to a qualitative

research design. This does not however mean that reliability and validity are not important in qualitative designs. As this study eventually envisages a theory and model for management practice and the management of Organizational Behaviour, the process to achieve the goal must also comply with basic criteria of which reliability and validity seem to be core. It is therefore necessary to define and apply these concepts in the context of a qualitative research approach and philosophy. This brings us to the quantitative-qualitative debate. This is not the place nor is there any inclination to enter into a what-is-better argument.

At the heart of the quantitative-qualitative debate lies a philosophical, not methodological argument. Qualitative researchers operate under different **epistemological assumptions** than quantitative researchers. In a qualitative approach for instance, lies the belief that the best way to understand any phenomenon is to view it in its context. Quantification is viewed as limiting in nature because it tends to look only at a small portion of a reality that cannot be split or unitized without losing the importance of the whole phenomenon. In the majority of cases qualitative researchers become immersed in researched phenomenon. Move into the culture or organization you are studying and experience what it is like to be a part of it (Trochim 2006).

Qualitative researchers also operate under different **ontological assumptions** about the world and reality. There is no single unitary reality apart from our perceptions. Each individual experiences the world from his/her point of view and therefore every individual a different reality. Research that does not take this into account is viewed as fundamentally violating the fundamental view of the individual. The researcher herself is a unique individual and research is based in the individual perception of the researcher. There is thus no point in trying to establish "validity" in any external or objective sense. All that we can hope to do is interpret our view of the world as researchers.

2.3.4.1   The soundness of Qualitative research

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure or the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is applied under the same conditions with different subjects. Reliability is concerned with the stability of research results. Reliability therefore is a reference to "repeatability" or "consistency". A measure is considered reliable if it would give us the same result over and over again assuming of course that what we are measuring has not changed over time. This is the exact problem faced by social researchers. There are many variables that change over time and in quantitative research designs these are factored into the design. In qualitative designs, reliability becomes problematic because of the differences in the approaches and philosophy of researchers.

Guba and Lincoln propose at least four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research and explicitly offer these as an alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria. The four criteria better reflect the underlying assumptions involved in qualitative research. Their proposed criteria and the "analogous" quantitative criteria are listed in Table 2.2, based on (Trochim 2006).

Table 2.2: Traditional and Alternative Criteria for judging Qualitative Research

Traditional Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research	Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research
internal validity	credibility
external validity	transferability
Reliability	dependability
Objectivity	confirmability

2.3.4.2   Credibility

Credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Since

from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results.

2.3.4.3   Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. The qualitative researcher enhances transferability through a more detailed description of the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research.

2.3.4.4   Dependability

The traditional quantitative view in respect of reliability is based on the assumption of reliability or repeatability. Essentially it is concerned with whether we would obtain the same results if we could observe the same thing twice. By definition however, it is not possible to measure the same thing twice simply because we would be measuring two phenomena.

The idea of dependability, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. The research is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study.

2.3.4.5 Confirmability

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. There are a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability. The researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher can take a "devil's advocate" role with respect to the results, and this process can be documented. The researcher can actively search for and describe instances that contradict prior observations. And, upon completion of the study, an audit of the data as such, the collection of data and analysis procedures can be conducted to ascertain whether the potential for bias and distortion is greater or smaller.

Qualitative studies cannot, seen against the foregoing discussion be judged according to quantitative evaluation criteria to determine the reliability or validity of the research.

This is now an opportune moment to venture to the discussion of the research paradigm which will be followed in this programme.

2.3.5 Data-gathering techniques in Qualitative research

Qualitative researchers can utilise various data gathering techniques. Polkinghorne (2005, p. 137) refers to qualitative research as an "...umbrella term under which a variety of research methods that use languaged data are clustered". Creswell (1989) in Polkinghorne (2005), submits a categorization process according to which multiple approaches could be organized under five traditions, i.e. biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Although this categorization can be useful, it will not be followed in this study.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) mention interviewing, observing, artefacts, documents and records, visual methods, personal experience methods, data management

methods, computer assisted analysis, textual analysis, amongst others. In this study program three of these methods will be employed to gather relevant data. The three methods that will be employed are: textual analysis, interviewing, and the analysis of documents. These methods were chosen for their respective characteristics which differ in terms of the way that the results were achieved in the first place, as well as the way in which this knowledge is coded and documented. Each of the mentioned sources will be discussed in more detail at the relevant place in this document. They are being mentioned here to provide the necessary background and information relating to the means which will be utilised to gather data which will be transformed into information.

2.3.5.1   Textual analysis

Formal texts such as research results present the results of controlled research and representation and take centre stage in the world of formally published results. Texts represent stable content that became fossilised in time based on a process to gain insight and acquire knowledge and that can be interpreted in a new or even possibly alternative context to gain understanding of phenomena. The result of the analysis of formal texts (or literature review as it is commonly referred to) is to gain an understanding of the construct under discussion.

2.3.5.2   Organizational documents

Documents, in this case the documented summary of exit interview feedback information, are not necessarily always formally structured for publication purposes, but nevertheless contain information that is relevant to the organization. The coding and structure is normally organization specific and is determined by the needs at a certain juncture in the development or life cycle of the particular organization. A second tier of documents reflect the research that is done annually in organizations by the CRF Institute in order to determine the "Best employer to work for"

2.3.5.3   Interviews

Interviews represent a very specific focus, and contribute towards the construction of information that is gleaned from raw data or unformatted contributions by participants.

The information acquired from the three data gathering methods, will be interpreted and purposefully converged to eventually; based on interpretation, from a phenomenological frame of mind, and a constructivist representation, form a coherent part theory towards the enhancement of the emerging construct A **meaningful workplace**. The convergence strategy will be discussed below as part of the paragraph of constructivism.
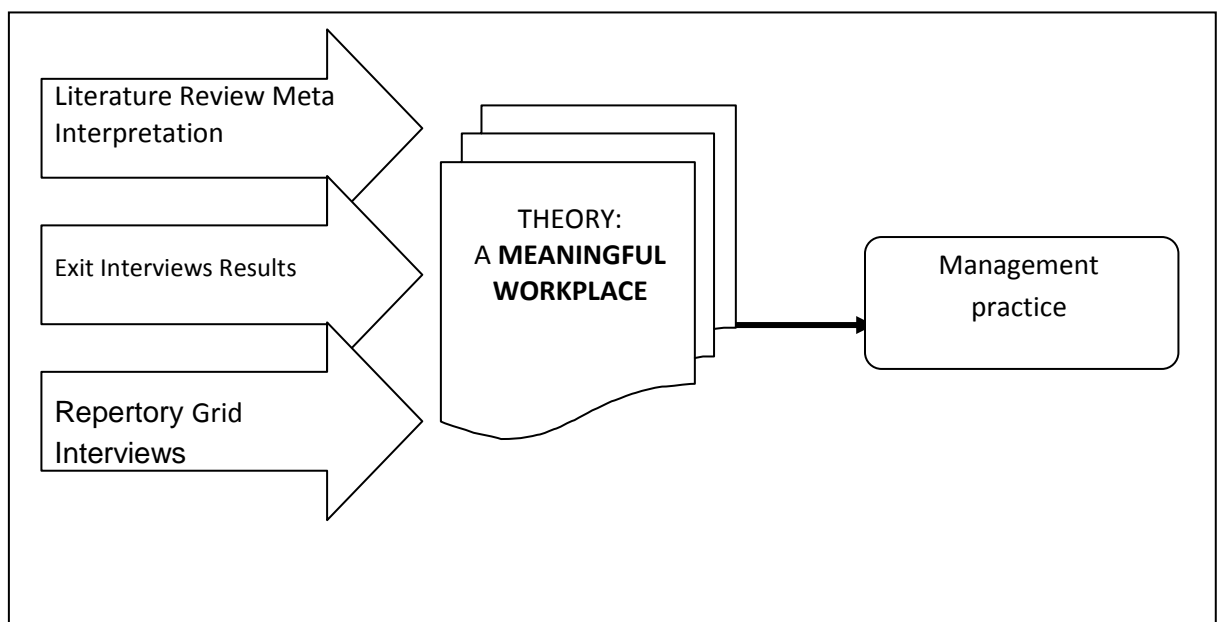

Figure 2.5: Towards theory formation -information convergence

The three data gathering methods will be referred to as "streams" and will forthwith be discussed.

2.3.5.4   Stream 1: Existing research results: Textual analysis

The first stream of information that will contribute towards the formation of theory is herewith referred to as a meta-interpretation of research on the Meaning of Work, Meaningful Work, Meaning at Work, **Meaningful workplace**, and associated concepts and constructs. The specific reason why this particular topic was chosen for such an interpretation refers back to an earlier viewpoint that an abductive reasoning process will be followed in this study.

Why specifically these concepts? The following reasoning is presented as motivation for this specific topic. Research indicates that employees attach meaning to work (Meaning of Work Project Team, 1987). The meaning of work can be linked to values in the general sense of the word as well as to individual values, emanating from, social conditioning, societal values, religious values, work ethics and the like. To a large degree values pertaining to work can be categorised and presented as socially shared systems that provide meaning to work as a life activity, thus a behavioural phenomenon in society. (This discussion will be embarked on in detail). Work is performed within a time-space environment, the boundaries of which are not only geographical, but also imbedded in the flow of time. This environment can be described and defined as any space or any time event within which the activity *work* is performed. Irrespective of the specific characteristics of the time-space environment or event, certain characteristics will always prevail, although these characteristics may vary and radically differ from environment to environment or workplace. Characteristics can be either determined by certain management practices or organizational preferences, or can be the direct result of individuals or groups of individuals that share the same context, or even by an individual that works in an *isolated* environment such as from a home office and without any colleagues or co-workers present. The meaning of work is viewed not only as a direct result of the values of different kinds that are aligned with work, but also as a direct or indirect result of prevailing conditions in the time-space environment where employees perform work behaviour, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. The meaning of work therefore can be interpreted as meaningful or otherwise based on the prevailing stimuli in the work place. The way to reach such a conclusion and to

formulate certain hypotheses related to the meaningfulness of the workplace can be achieved by an abductive reasoning process.

Thus following a (selected) trail of published research regarding the meaning of work and interpreting the results from the perspective of the workplace, certain inferences can be drawn in respect of the **meaningful workplace**.

2.3.5.5   Stream 2: Exit Interview feedback (Organizational Document)

The second stream of information to converge in enhancing the emerging theoretical and conceptual construct (a **meaningful workplace**) is extracted from 1,823 verbatim comments from employees that chose to leave the Company[1]. To retain confidentiality, suffice to say that the results emanate from a Communications Company in South Africa. Electronic (web based) questionnaires were distributed to 4,500 employees, of which 1823 responded to an invitation to additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. These responses were categorised based on a content based interpretation of the verbatim comments, by the compilers of an executive report for top management. The categories as utilised in the report will be applied and used in this study. (The verbatim comments are available upon request.) The questionnaire was completed on an anonymous basis therefore no biographical information is available. It is also not viewed as necessary in a qualitative study of this nature to present results or interpretations based on quantifiable statistics or information as no measurement to determine statistical measures will be undertaken.

As the verbatim comments have already been interpreted in the report and the fact that this interpretation is retained in this study implies that a measure of refined *information* is already available. Although the report is viewed as information, it will nevertheless be *re*interpreted from the perspective of the insight gleaned from the literature study. The possibilities that might arise from this interpretation and

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[1] The research was conducted in an ICT Company in South Africa. The name of the Company is withheld but the report can be made available upon request.

comparison of two streams of information, will contribute to the creation of credibility and to a certain extent validity of the study.

A qualitative analysis was conducted by the Company and the verbatim responses were categorised according to three broad themes that were identified, i.e. "My work experience", "My opinions around the company", and "My future plans". The themes and categories will be explained in a following chapter.

2.3.5.6   Stream 3: Repertory Grid interviews

The third stream comprises content from repertory Grid interviews which were conducted with selected interviewees. The interview as a descriptor of life world experiences provides a valuable link between these experiences – prior to categorization - and the categorization as such. This epistemological position falls within the field of descriptive phenomenology. It is important to note the expression *selected interviewees.* In qualitative designs the researcher is prying for information that can contribute to the study. Against such a background it is a valid practice to select interviewees who are deemed to be able to make a contribution. The interviewees were selected from the current writer's work environment (1 senior manager, 1 middle manager/supervisor/ and 1 operational employee); a minister of religion, a teacher, a project manager, a corporate HR practitioner and an administrative staff member. The raw responses were categorised based on the bipolar comparisons that were used as elements and based on which constructs were elicited during the interview process. A more detailed discussion on Repertory Grid will be presented in a following chapter.

Repertory Grid technique

Repertory Grid Technique has its roots in the research by George Kelly, a clinical psychologist during the 1950's and 1960's.

Market research. Apparently Market research was one of the first applications of RG in industry (Stewart and Stewart 1990). The usefulness of RG in MR lies in its potential to descriptions of products in the words of the consumer. The second values lies in the ability of the technique to provide *hard data* indicating the differences in products in consumer's terms. The extent to which RG can be used in MR is either for (a) construct elicitation only (b) individual grids or group grids.

Quality control. The principles of Repertory Grid are (according to Stewart and Stewart 1990) used by organizations to improve various aspects of quality control. The appeal in this context is to develop the relevant vocabulary for the purpose of quality control. As a field of endeavour, many operators for example, know what to do but the vocabulary does not exist at the outset of a new product range for training purposes to ensure quality control throughout the production cycle.

Questionnaire design. The area of questionnaire design is vast in its application and therefore the following paragraph will only mention examples without going into the detail thereof.

The purpose might be to ascertain why certain people choose certain careers. For this purpose RG provides an ample framework to determine why the choice of an individual is what it is and therefore provides a framework to construct aptitude and interest questionnaires.

A second objective might be to determine why certain individuals leave the career path and embark on a new one whilst others remain on the original career path. RG can be utilizes to determine the difference in attitude within this context.

Motivation at work. RG can be used to elicit constructs in a pre-pilot phase to determine whether employees achieve a sufficient level of job satisfaction or motivational levels in an organizational setting prior to a companywide survey. The problem in this regard, although the theme lends itself exceptionally to the use of RG, is that the purpose must be determined prior to embarking with such a study, whether the results will be of academic or practical value. RG provides the methodology to study motivation at work in sufficient depth within the context of the organization to provide ample answers in respect of the *management* thereof. Two techniques surface in this regard.

(i) Individual RG interviews with a random sample of employees;

(ii) Group administration of RG;

Organizational climate and managerial effectiveness. RG has been used to study the mentioned phenomena with great effect. In this sense it could focus on what managers think about the organization and how this influences their thoughts and behaviour in respect of management practices.

Stewart and Stewart (1990) report the use of RG to determine organizational climate in relation to effective management techniques that will indicate effective management practices in the specific organization.

Of importance in this regard is a case study in a banking environment using RG technique to elicit constructs without the use of any questionnaires. Elements that were investigated include (a) Market knowledge and performance, (b) Client management, (c) Personal impact and appearance, (d) Persistence, (e) Adjustment to the bank, (f) Openness and honesty, (g) Coping with complex demands, (g) Relationships, (h) Communication skills, (i) Intelligence and creativity, (j) Self management, etc.

The Evaluation of training. Fonda (in Stewart and Stewart 1990) describes the application of RG technique in the evaluation of training.

Repertory Grid in counselling. In this regard Stewart and Stewart (1990) describe the different contexts within which RG can be used as a counselling technique and include the areas of (a) Relationships, (b) Client problems, (c) The content analysis of constructs, (d) Laddering of constructs, (e) Statistical analysis of full grids.

2.3.5.7   Summary

It is clear that RG technique can be used in a variety of contexts, emanating from a multitude of purposes and resulting in information that can be used in either an academic or operational context.

2.3.5.8   Repertory Grid in the current study

Interviews

Repertory Grid technique can be categorised as a structured or semi-structured interview technique depending on the process that the interviewer chooses to unfold during the interview.

Context

The technique lends itself towards a contextualised elicitation of constructs based on the experience of interviewees. In actual fact there are two definable and identifiable contexts for Repertory Grid technique. The broadest context is that of the organization within which the technique is applied. The organization provides the boundary for the application of the technique. It is however not an *open* boundary simply because a certain *area* within the organization is explored. Therefore the second boundary is very much drawn from the specific interest of the researcher, i.e. culture, management practice, work experience, etc.

Elements

Elements define the content of the interview and can be defined as those expressions or formulae that determine the boundary of the discussion. An example of the case in discussion is when a surveyor maps a piece of land. The first activity would be to identify salient features such as hilltops, high buildings, spires, ponds, etc. The second step would be to fill in the spaces between the salient features by

means of measurements between them until he has sufficient information to map the area. Elements serve as the salient features of the *landscape*, i.e. the identifying points for the topic that are of interest. Utilising the elements, the interviewer elicits constructs from interviewees that fill the gaps and eventually provide sufficient data to *map the area of interest.*

Selecting or choosing elements.

The choice of elements can either be done by means of a preliminary interview or the interviewer can choose elements based on previous research that has already been completed. Whichever route is chosen, certain criteria guide the choice of elements. These include the following;

(i)   Elements must be discreet;

(ii)   Elements must be homogeneous;

(iii)   Elements should not be subsets of other elements;

(iv)   Elements should not be evaluative, although in this particular study the core concept is evaluative in nature and therefore it is inevitable that elements will discriminate based on evaluative concepts.

Construct elicitation

Constructs consist of bipolar distinctions that describe the perspective of the interviewee in respect of a certain element-set. In its most basic form the following procedure results in a grid of bi-polar constructs representing the perspective of the interviewee for a particular element-set. An example of the result of the technique is produced below for an interview during which the element-set meaningful work experience was elicited.

During the introductory discussion the interviewee was requested to participate in an interview during which a special technique were to be applied in an attempt to determine the differences between a **meaningful workplace** comprising of meaningful work experiences as opposed to work experiences that were not meaningful. The technique was explained and three index cards were provided with the request that the interviewee identify three work-settings where the following experiences were very prominent:

(i)   "A work setting within which there was a predominant experience of meaningfulness;

(ii)   A work setting where the pre-dominant experience was that of frustration and which was demotivational in nature;

(iii) A work setting in respect of which the interviewee was indifferent, i.e. a neutral work environment which neither produced high levels of satisfaction nor high levels of frustration."

The interviewee was requested to number the cards from 1-3. The first exercise was then conducted with the interviewer providing the following guideline:

> "Place cards numbers 1 and 3 next to each other on your left hand side and card number 2 on your right and think of the following – *In what way do work environments numbers 1 and 3 correspond with each other in respect of the way in which you experienced meaningfulness and how does this differ from the environment on card number 2?"* This process is repeated following a card sort process in which cards (i.e. work environments) were compared according to the numbered cards. Work environments 1 & 2 were compared with environment 3 and followed by a comparison of cards 2 & 3 with 1.

The interviewer documented the responses in the flowing manner:

The comments that were related to meaningful experiences were written in the left hand column on a sheet of paper that was divided in two columns, whilst the comments that did not carry positive connotation were written in the right hand

column. In cases where the interviewer was uncertain whether a characteristic was construed as positive or negative, the interviewee was requested to clarify.

This procedure was repeated by using cards numbers 1 and 2 in comparison with card number 2; cards number 2 and 3 in comparison to card number 1.

An extract of the result is reported below.

Table 2.3: Repertory Grid report sheet

Card numbers (Sort)	Positive comments	Negative comments
<u>1 & 3</u> : 2	work adds value to myself	does not add value
	supervisor respects people	does not care about people
	supervisor trusts people	does not trust people
<u>1 & 2</u> : 3	work is structured	work is not structured
	importance of work stressed	no reference to importance of tasks
<u>2 & 3</u> : 1	my work pattern is respected	my supervisor constantly looks over my shoulder
	I have freedom to structure my work as I see fit	I am being micro managed

Although table 2.3 is used as an example it is based on real interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. It merely provides an example of a grid on an individual level with respect to the element-set: **A Meaningful workplace**. The above is by no means exhaustive of the possibilities but it does provide sufficient information to deduce that (a) it does contribute towards the concept meaningfulness; (b) the interviewee was able to discriminate between work environments and to provide information based on which certain elements that contribute towards the experience of meaningfulness can be described. This enables the interviewer to draw certain conclusions in respect of the salient features of the work environments that relate to the meaningfulness thereof. It will be noted that opposites are not necessarily lexical opposites but construed opposites. An

example of what is meant is the following: Card sort 2&3:1 revealed the following positive comment regarding meaningfulness in a work environment – "my work pattern is respected". The logical assumption for an environment that was not experienced as meaningful could be *my work pattern is not respected.* Instead of the logical assumption, the interviewee indicated that the opposite of a meaningful environment where the work pattern was respected is: "my supervisor constantly looks over my shoulder."

(The same technique, of course adapted for group use, can be applied to ascertain the mental model of any level of employee or group of employees in respect of the **meaningful workplace***.* The *theme or context* can be changed or adapted to any specific area of interest and the way in which the technique is administered can eventually result in the cross-pollination of paradigms thus contributing towards a learning experience and eventually contributing to the establishment of a shared mental model for a specific organization regarding a specific theme or area of concern).

The comparative information will be integrated into 'n coherent and systematic theoretical framework by means of an abductive reasoning process.

2.4   UNDERSTANDING DATA: PHENOMENOLOGY AS RESEARCH GENRE

Why a phenomenological approach was chosen for this study will be become evident in the following paragraphs. Suffice to say that in the phenomenological mode of looking at or observing reality commences from the vantage point of the self. Such reality is always construed. Harper (2000) makes this case for the interpretation of visual images such as photographs. But is sensorial observation not visual image in itself as seen through the lens of the first person observer? Not only does one observe but certain images also provoke meaning to the extent that the observer can "live with it". A phenomenological strategy was chosen on the face value of it being suitable for the investigation of existential phenomena such as work behaviour and the quest for a **meaningfu**l **workplace,** a moment (not in terms of time) which exists in the life span of humans. During post modernism the "Aloof

observer position was abandoned"…and the search for *grand narratives* replaced by local, small scale theories, fitted to a particular situation (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:17). If the vantage point of phenomenology is the "self", then it is not merely a question of "Who am I? What am I doing?" But also of "What am I experiencing?" A clinical distance does not communicate the experience of the moment or the continuous experiences of and within the context for that matter. The post experimental and the future is as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state, "upon us". In the moments after the experimental stages of research and positivism, "fictional ethnographies, ethnographic poetry, and multimedia texts are taken for granted" (2000, p. 17). Post experimentalists endeavour to connect their texts to the needs of "a free democratic society". According to Bateson (1972) qualitative researchers are philosophers in the "universal sense in which all human beings are guided by highly abstract principles" (in Guba and Lincoln 2000, p. 19). These principles combine beliefs about ontology (What kind of being is the human? What is the nature of reality?); epistemology (What is the relationship between the enquirer and the known?); methodology (How do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?). The answers to these and similar questions, in the mind of the current writer is that the human being and *reality,* the relationship with reality and knowledge of the world, *can be acquired and known* thus*,* knowable through a *first person interaction based on constructivism*, *which emphasises the point of choosing phenomenology as a strategy of understanding and knowing.*

> One of the most catalytic influences on the qualitative domain within the past 10 years has been the lively dialogue on the nature of language, and particularly the relationship of language to the world it purports to describe. Developments in post structural semiotics, literary theory, and rhetorical theory all challenge the pivotal assumption that scientific accounts can accurately and objectively represent the world as it is (Gergen and Gergen, 2000; p. 1026).

Human beings are immersed in certain cultural traditions (inherited and newly created), which uniquely match the life experience in a lived-world. It is this immersion that provides credence to our documented accounts of the world and the different realities within the world. Needless to say, this view of language gave rise

to scepticism regarding the epistemological and methodological foundations of scientific practices.

Language as representative of the world it is supposed to describe plays a major role in the process of understanding and getting to know the world.

2.4.1   Phenomenology: Definitions, description and background

The Oxford English Dictionary presents the following definition:

> "Phenomenology. (a). The science of phenomena as distinct from being (ontology). (b). That division of any science which describes and classifies its phenomena. From the Greek *phainomenon*, appearance."
>
> In philosophy, the term is used in the first sense, amid debates of theory and methodology. In physics and philosophy of science, the term is used in the second sense, albeit only occasionally.

Phenomenology as we know it was launched by Edmund Husserl in his *Logical Investigations* (1900-01). Two importantly different lines of theory came together in that monumental work: psychological theory, on the heels of Franz Brentano (and also William James, whose *Principles of Psychology* appeared in 1891 and greatly impressed Husserl); and logical or semantic theory, on the heels of Bernard Bolzano and Husserl's contemporaries who founded modern logic, including Gottlob Frege. (Interestingly, both lines of research trace back to Aristotle, and both reached significant results in Husserl's day.) (Smith 2008).

Phenomenology is commonly understood in either of two ways: as a disciplinary field in philosophy, or as a movement in the history of philosophy, and can, following Smith (2008), crudely be defined as "the study of the structure of experience or consciousness."

In concrete and literal terms it is the study of "phenomena": i.e. the appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways in which we experience things, thus the meaning of things in our experience. It is therefore

inevitable that phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view (therefore also the experience of meaningfulness at work, as in the current study). The central structure (according to Woodruff 2008) of experience is the intentionality thereof, being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions.) Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view, and must be distinguished from, (although related to) other fields of philosophy. The ontological, epistemological, logical and ethical dimensions acquire a somewhat changed scheme in a phenomenological study. (Ontology - the study of being or what is), epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of valid reasoning), ethics (the study of right and wrong action), etc. still retain their value as indicators of valid research but are now being regulated by the attempt to use the first person discourse to describe the observed phenomena. (First person in this sense must not be seen as a discourse that commences with *I* but which bears the resemblance of an *I* observation, experience and understanding. The problem in this regard is that the first person observation and understanding can and will be tainted with a subjective hue. It seems, within the context of this study, that the subjective hue will have to be rectified. This *rectification process* (if we may call it that) is initiated when the current literature on the subject is exposed in terms of the value that can be withdrawn for the purpose of this study with a view to understanding the phenomenon under scrutiny.)

Phenomenology, having being practiced as a discipline in a variety of guises for centuries, was forced onto the agenda of discussion during the early 20th century by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others. Phenomenological issues of intentionality, consciousness, qualia, and first-person perspectives became prominent in scientific discussion and the *philosophy* of mind. Phenomenology was prized as the proper foundation of all philosophy — as opposed, say, to ethics or metaphysics or epistemology. The methods and characterization of the discipline were widely debated by Husserl and his successors, and these debates continue to the present day.

In philosophy of mind, the term "phenomenology" is cramped into and restricted by the rules of the characterizations of sensory qualities of seeing, hearing, etc: what it is like to have sensations of various kinds – mostly limited to feelings and emotions that accompany sensory experiences. Experience is much richer in content than mere sensation. It also encompasses thought, mind, being, and spirit. In essence the sensory images evoke certain feelings, it is true, but in reality it evokes all the experiences that can somehow be linked to that perception and feeling, based on the observation of a specific phenomenon. Feeling is not and cannot be the primary objective of phenomenology; it points to and elicits meaning through experience. Accordingly, in the phenomenological tradition, phenomenology is given a much wider range, addressing the meaning things have in our experience.

Although it might seem necessary to trace the different themes in the development of phenomenological as a system of understanding world-life phenomena, it will not be pursued here. The themes that are relevant will be introduced below without delving into the deeper reasoning acquainted with these. As the current study is not a philosophical exposition on phenomenology, the subject matter will not be discussed here. Suffice to say that the concept intentionality as proposed by Franz Brentano is applied in its subjective, introspective application. The experience of meaningfulness is nothing else than an introspective and subjective experience. Intentionality seems to e a central concept in this regard. For a comprehensive discussion the following sources can be consulted: The Stanford encyclopaedia of Philosophy, specifically the article of Huemer on intentionality as argued by Franz Brentano (updated 2006).

The concept bracketing as argued by Edmund Husserl is also an important concept as it is equated to context as a central concept in this study. The study focuses on the experience of meaningfulness within the context of the workplace .For a discussion on the concept "bracketing" the work of Beyer (1960) can be consulted.

Intentionality as in Brentano, is equivalent to a directedness of experience toward things in the world; consciousness that it is a consciousness of or about something. Experience intends to convey things *through* particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc. These make up the meaning or content of a given experience, and are distinct from the things they present or mean. It is thus inevitable for

phenomenology to develop a complex account of temporal awareness (within the stream of consciousness), spatial awareness (notably in perception), attention (distinguishing focal and marginal or "horizontal" awareness), awareness of one's own experience (self-consciousness, in one sense), self-awareness (awareness-of-oneself), the self in different roles (as thinking, acting, etc.), embodied action (including kinaesthetic awareness of one's movement), purpose or intention in action - more or less explicit), awareness of other persons (in empathy, intersubjectivity, collectivity), linguistic activity (involving meaning, communication, understanding others), social interaction (including collective action), and everyday activity in our surrounding life-world (in a particular culture), entails bracketing or contextualises the directness of experience (as in Husserl) . Conscious experience is a fundamental characteristic of phenomenological endeavour and has a unique feature: we *experience* them; we live through them or perform them. Other things in the world we may observe and engage. But we do not experience them, in the sense of living through or performing them. This experiential or first-person feature — that of being experienced — is an essential part of the nature or structure of conscious experience: as we say, "I see / think / desire / do …" This feature is both a phenomenological and an ontological feature of each experience: it is part of what it is for the experience to be experienced (phenomenological) and part of what it is for the experience to be (ontological) (Smith 2008).

2.4.1.1   Being in the world: Hermeneutics (Martin Heidegger)

It is deemed necessary to present a more detailed discussion on the perspectives of Martin Heidegger, with specific reference to the so-called hermeneutical circle as a means of interpreting and understanding the world of phenomena and the human's experience of phenomena.

The human being is being-in-the-world. Humans do not study activities by bracketing the world, but through the interpretation of activities and the meaning phenomena portray. To enable this process we look at the contextual relations with phenomena in our world. According to this train of thought, Heidegger refers to

phenomenology as "fundamental ontology". Heidegger posited that our basic ways of relating to things are in practical activities, where phenomenology reveals our situation in a context of being-with-others. Heidegger differed from Husserl in an important way, which he describes in the following way:

> For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is the method of leading phenomenological vision from the natural attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness and its noetic-noematic experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. For us, phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the Being of this being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed) (Safranski, 1998).

The starting point of phenomenology is conscious experience. However experience *disappears* into less overtly conscious phenomena. As Husserl and others stressed, we are only vaguely aware of things in the margin or periphery of attention, and we are only implicitly aware of the wider horizon of things in the world around us or, as Heidegger stressed, in practical activities we are not explicitly conscious of our habitual patterns of action.

> Phenomenology, for Heidegger, held the potential to re-interpret an issue of which Husserl had been so critical, i.e. ontology. Ontology as the study of "being qua being" (as opposed to beings or things) and Heidegger's reactivation of the question of being has become a watershed event in twentieth-century philosophy (New World Encyclopaedia).

Understanding for Heidegger always involves an element of interpretation. This stance is in opposition to Husserl who attempted to explicate the essential characteristics of each kind of experience. Husserl endeavoured to implement a rigor akin to the natural or physical sciences in his phenomenological thought while Heidegger went the route of hermeneutics in his rendering of phenomenology.

George Gadamer pursued the idea of the universality of hermeneutics inherent in Heidegger's phenomenology (New World Encyclopaedia).

Philosophical hermeneutics, inspired by Heidegger, challenges the classic epistemological posture of the interpreter and his/her task in respect of *understanding that is produced.* Traditionally the phenomenological observers as well as the linguistic analyst claim the posture of the uninvolved observer. This stance is challenged in several ways. (The following summary is based on Schwandt, 1994)

- Understanding according to philosophical hermeneutics is not a procedure. Nor is it an undertaking that is governed by rules. Understanding is a condition of being human. Understanding and interpretation is one and the same thing

- In philosophical hermeneutics tradition and history are not external, objective and past. The observer cannot free him/herself from the influence of the past as it is a force which is imbedded in the lived world which enters into the act of understanding. The past conditions our understanding of the present. It (the past) is not really *past tense* as it is part of the present and becomes part of the future

- Understanding as an act of consciousness is produced through a process of dialogue and engagement with a phenomenon. It is not reproduced, according to Schwandt. This point of view can be challenged because of the fact that the act of reproducing follows the act of producing understanding. It is the same argument that is used in the relationship between understanding and explanation (verstehen and erklären). Reproducing the understanding of human action and the meaning inherent in behaviour, is a constructivist endeavour, although Schwandt (1994;195) states that: "This different conception of meaning signifies a radical departure from the interpretivist idea that human action has meaning and that that meaning is in principle determinable or decidable by the interpreter". Philosophical hermeneutics endorses the conclusion that there is never a finally correct interpretation and reproduction of phenomena, including human action. This is known as the so called hermeneutical circle. This study subscribes to this view of understanding, interpretation and reproduction of the product of the process of

understanding

- In the act of understanding there aren't two separate and distinguishable steps, i.e. first a process of understanding and secondly applying the understanding. Understanding is in a certain sense practical experience in and of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Understanding is lived experience. Gadamer (in Schwandt 2000:196) emphasizes the viewpoint that hermeneutics is not inclined towards developing "…a procedure of understanding but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place. But these conditions are not of the nature of a procedure, or a method which the interpreter must of himself bring to bear on the text".

Laverty (2003) asserts that phenomenology, like hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The way in which exploration of lived experience proceeds is where Husserl and Heidegger departed ways.

> Heidegger focused on 'Dasein' that is translated as 'the mode of being human' or 'the situated meaning of a human in the world. Husserl was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling, and thinking about the world and human beings were understood primarily as knower's. Heidegger, in contrast, viewed humans as being primarily concerned creatures with an emphasis on their fate in an alien world' (Annells, 1996; Jones, 1975 in Laverty, 2003). Pre-understanding is a structure for being in the world, according to Heidegger (1927/1962) as interpreted by Laverty (2003). This pre-understanding is the meanings or organization of a culture that are present before we understand and become part of our historicality of background.

> Pre-understanding is not something a person can step outside of or put aside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world. Heidegger went as far as to claim that nothing can be encountered without reference to a person's background understanding. Koch (1995) described this as an indissoluble unity between a person and the world. Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own

background and experiences. There is a transaction between the individual and the world as they constitute and are constituted by each other (Laverty, 2003).

Interpretation is critical to this process of understanding. Claiming that to be human was to interpret, Heidegger stressed that every encounter involves an interpretation influenced by an individual's background or historicality (Laverty 2003). The process of interpretation implies a focus on the historical meanings of experience. Hermeneutics is the interpretive process that attempts an understanding and disclosure of phenomena by means of a representational act (or process) through the use of language. It is the "study of human cultural activity as texts with a view towards interpretation to find intended or expressed meanings" (Kvale, 1996 in Laverty 2003). Texts are understood to include things such as written or verbal communication, visual arts and music.

The hermeneutic circle is an interpretive process and is achieved through an alternation from the parts of experience to the whole (of experience) and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of texts (Annells, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1983; and Kvale, 1996) in Laverty (2003) viewed the end of this spiralling through a hermeneutic circle as occurring when one has reached a place of sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions, for the moment. Gadamer (See Laverty 2003) saw the work of hermeneutics not as developing a procedure of understanding, but to clarify further the conditions in which understanding itself takes place.

Language (as a source for understanding and a medium of representation) and understanding are inseparable structural aspects of the condition of being human. Horizons fuse during the process of interpretation in a dialectical interaction between the expectation of the interpreter and the meaning of (for example) a text.

> A 'horizon' is a range of vision that includes everything seen from a particular vantage point. A person with no horizon, in Gadamer's view, does not see far enough and overvalues what is nearest at hand, whereas to have a horizon means being able to see beyond what is close at hand. Questioning, he wrote, is an essential aspect of the

interpretive process as it helps make new horizons and understandings possible. Understanding is… more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject...To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were (Laverty 2003).

A hermeneutical approach asks the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection to quite a different end than that of (classic) phenomenology as in Husserl. Specifically, the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but are embedded and essential to the interpretive process. The researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched. The final result (if there is such a state as finality) may include the personal assumptions of the researcher and the philosophical bases from which interpretation has occurred (Allen, 1996; Cotterill & Letherby, 1993, in Laverty, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology follows a process of the co-construction of the data (either of the participant or a text) as the hermeneutic circle of understanding unfolds. Hermeneutics invites participants to participate in an ongoing conversation, without a set or predetermined methodology. A fusion of horizons or dialectic between the pre-understandings on which the research process is based, and the interpretive framework and the sources of information, creates understanding.

Core to the production of meaning in hermeneutic strategy are reading and writing. An imperative to understand the context under which the text or dialogue was being produced is called for to produce units of meaning. A pre-condition for this result (units of meaning) is a synthesis between text (or phenomenon) and context. For a hermeneutic phenomenological project, the multiple stages of interpretation that allow patterns to emerge, the discussion of how interpretations arise from the data and the interpretive process itself are seen as critical (Laverty, 2003).

2.5 REPRESENTATION: INTERPRETIVIST-CONSTRUCTIVISM AS RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR REPRESENTATION

Table (2.3) adapted from Guba & Lincoln (2000, p. 165-173) provides an explanation of the positioning of phenomenology within the framework of a constructivist paradigm. It provides ample information in respect of certain issues that present themselves in qualitative research (column 1) whilst the response to these problems are listed under the headings of *positivism, post positivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory research.* Thus a comparison of the responses towards certain issues is reflected side by side for the purpose of distinguishing and drawing certain lines between the different qualitative paradigms. It must however be repeated, the phenomenon of blurred genres in qualitative research is not a scarcity or rarity. It often happens that the qualitative researcher serves her with various answers to certain problems. It is for this purpose that column 5 Constructivism is highlighted. It not only indicates the unique characteristics of Constructivism as paradigm, but also underlines the fact that borders are blurred as are genres as described by Guba et al. (2000).

It is now also a logical juncture in the reasoning to turn to the specific research "genre" or paradigm that seems to be aligned with the purpose of the research program. The intent is to identify theoretical markers for the construct A **meaningful workplace** that can be used in a process of enhancing current thinking on this construct. In maintaining the internal logic between the purpose of the research and the methodological choices, the most logical research genre or paradigm, imbedded in a qualitative research design seems to be a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm.

An obvious way of deciding on a genre or paradigm is to consider different paradigms as the assumption-base for the program. A paradigm is defined as *"basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions"* (Guba et al., 994:107). Within this definition a paradigm is viewed

> as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimate of
> first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the

nature of the world, the individuals place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts…

A constructivist paradigm can be described along the lines of specific ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs and assumptions, as indicated below.

The **ontological assumption** of a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm is relativist in nature, because it is **assumed** and believed that realities are apprehendable in different forms; *"intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions"* (Guba et al., 1994, p. 111)*.*

The **epistemology** is transactional and subjectivist in nature based on the belief that the *"investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds"* (Guba et al., 1994, p. 111).

The **methodology** is hermeneutical and dialectical in nature. *"The variables of, and personal nature, of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined through interaction between an investigator and respondents"* (Guba et al., 1994, p. 111).

It is inevitable to interpret the data in an attempt to come to certain conclusions regarding the world of meaning associated with the purpose of the study. Work-life has its own meaning and meaningfulness is not necessarily an observable precept on the surface of experiences. Interpretation will reveal the elements or moments of a meaningful work life and subsequently a **meaningful workplace**. For this reason this study can be positioned in the persuasion that has as its goal the understanding of the complexity of the world in which people live their work life, from their experience, which has to be construed and interpreted along the lines of experiences (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

This study can broadly be positioned in a *constructivist* and *interpretivist* persuasion, thereby implying that the goal of inquiry and interpretation is

verstehen, as opposed to *erklären.* Verstehen (*understanding*) in the sense that it is used here

> is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing or tracking one's own standpoint, prejudgements, biases or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires engagement of one's biases (Schwandt 2000, p. 195).

Logically speaking understanding precedes explanation. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state that understanding and explanation stand in a reciprocal relationship where understanding facilitates explanation. *Explanation* primarily becomes a problem in the *representation* of *understanding* which implies a hermeneutical circle.

Understanding and interpretation are the product(s) of our anticipated prejudgements and prejudices, which in the course of time change as a result of new additions to our own construct system.

The problem in such a persuasion resides in drawing the line between investigation and investigator (Schwandt, 1994, p. 119). Fundamentally this boils down to the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. Proponents of the constructivist-interpretivist persuasion have seemingly overcome this polarity by fully accepting the hermeneutical character of human existence. This statement has three implications.

- On the one hand we are thereby asserting that to understand is not to "get inside an actor's head" but to grasp the inter-subjective meaning of symbolisms that constitute social life
- On the other hand the constructivist accepts that verification of the interpreted and reported "reality" is not possible, thereby falling back on explanation upon explanation and thus finding ourselves in an interpretive circle
- In the third instance a constructivist persuasion demonstrates a commitment to the assertion that knowledge and truth are created and not discovered. Reality is pluralistic and flexible and not set in plaster as though it is "something out there that must still be discovered"

The "real world" of meaning does not pre-exist independently from human endeavour and activity, but it is continuously construed by means of symbolic language and human activity. In line with this mode of reasoning, a **meaningful workplace** is not a pre-existent entity that can be discovered by means of objective measures, but something that is construed through the endeavours of humans in organizations, wherever they are on a hierarchical level of management as worker-employees. A **meaningful workplace** and the elements that construe such a construct is the product of discursive practices emanating from knowledge of and insight in the theory of organizations and the behaviour of people within an organization. Fuss (1989) in Schwandt (1994, p. 125) states the following in this regard:

> what is at stake for the constructionist are systems of representations, social and material practices, laws of discourses and ideological effects. In short, constructionists are concerned above all with the production and organization of differences, and they therefore reject the idea that any essential or natural givens precede the process of social determination.

Table 2.4: The basic belief (Metaphysics) of alternative enquiry paradigms

(Phenomenology is viewed as an alternative paradigm)

Item	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism	Participatory
Ontology The study of being, endeavouring to understand the structure thereof The study of the nature of being, existence or reality in general; Discerning basic categories of being or grouped According to similarities and differences	"Real" – reality; The "truth" of observed reality (naïve reality) Reality is apprehendable	Critical "realism" Reality is "real" but only imperfectly Probabilistic apprehendable	Historical "realism" Reality shaped by social, political, economic cultural and other factors Crystallised over time	Relativism; Constructed "realities" Local and specific realities	"Participative reality, subjective-objective reality Co-created by mind and given cosmos"

Item	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism	Participatory
Epistemology The theory of knowled**ge** concerned with the nature and scope or limitations of knowledge Focus on analyzing the nature of knowledge - how it relates to similar notions such as truth, belief, and justification.	Objectivist/dualist Findings are true	"Modified dualist/objectivist" Findings probably true	"Transactional/subjectivist" Value mediated findings	"Transactional/subjectivist Created findings	"Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing, co-created findings"
Methodology Refers to more than a simple set of methods; but the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie a particular study; It is more than an outline of	"Experimental/manipul ative; verification of hypotheses, chiefly quantitative methods"	"Modified experimental /manipulative critical multiplism, Falsification of hypotheses"	"Dialogical/dialectical"	"Hermeneutical, dialectical"	"Political participation in collaborative actions, inquiry primacy of the practical, use of language grounded in shared experiential

Item	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism	Participatory
methods Explains what the researchers' ontological or epistemological views are					context'
Axiology Branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of values, ethics, aesthetics and religion	"Propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself and intrinsically valuable"	"Propositional, transactional knowing is instrumentally valuable as a means to social emancipation, which is an end in itself and is intrinsically valuable'	Practical knowing about how to flourish with a balance of autonomy, cooperation, and hierarchy in a culture is an end in itself		

Item	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism	Participatory
Accountability and Commensurability	"Commensurate for all positivist forms'	"Incommensurable with positivist forms; some commensurability with constructivist, criticalist, and participatory approaches"			
Action	Not responsibility of researcher; action will be viewed as advocacy or subjectivity, thus a threat to validity and objectivity	Found in empowerment, emancipation hoped for, transformation to greater equity is the end goal	"intertwined with validity; inquiry often incomplete without action on the part of participants; constructivist formulation mandates training"		
Control	"Resides solely with researcher	"Often resides in 'transformative intellectual'	"Shared between inquirer an participants"	'Shared to varying degrees"	
Relationship to foundations of truth and knowledge	"Foundational"	"Foundational"	"Foundational within social critique"	"Anti foundational"	"Non foundational"

Item	Positivism	Post positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism	Participatory
Extended considerations of validity	"Traditional, positivist constructions of validity; rigor, internal validity, external validity, reliability, objectivity"	"Action stimulus"	"Extended constructions of validity: *crystalline validity – Richardson-; authenticity criteria – Guba and Lincoln-; catalytic, rhizomatic. Voluptuous validities – Lather -; rational and ethics centred criteria – Lincoln -; community centred determinations of validity*"	(See "action' above	
Voice, reflexivity, post-modern textual representations	"Voice of the researcher, principally; reflexivity a possible problem in objectivity; textual representation unproblematic and somewhat formulaic"	"Voices mixed between observer and participant"	"Voices mixed with participants' voices sometimes dominant; reflexivity serious and problematic, textual representation an extended issue	"Voices mixed; textual representation rarely discussed but problematic, reflexivity relies on critical subjectivity and self-awareness"	
		Textual representation practices may be problematic -i.e. "fiction formulas", or unexamined 'regimes of truth"			

Two distinguishable streams of constructivist positions can be identified. On the one hand one can refer to *radical constructivism,* whilst on the other hand reference is made to *social constructivism.*

▪ In the case of ***radical constructivism***, Schwandt (1994, p. 126) reports the viewpoint of Ernst von Glasserfeld who, in his answer to sceptics, asserts *"we cannot know such a thing as independent, objective world that stands apart from our experience of it. Hence we cannot speak of knowledge as somehow corresponding to, mirroring or representing that world"*. Knowledge is thus not a particular product of the mind that exists independently of the knower. Knowledge and reality stand in an instrumental relationship and not a verificative relationship.

▪ ***Social constructivism*** focuses on the outward world of inter-subjectivity – a shared, socially construed world of meaning and knowledge. Gergen and Gergen (1985), in Schwandt 1994, p. 127) provide the following explanation: *"Accounts of the world…take place within shared systems of intelligibility-usually spoken or written language. These accounts are not viewed as the external expression of the speaker's internal processes (such as cognition, intention), but as an expression of relationships among persons".*

In a constructivist paradigm

> The act of inquiry begins with issues and or concerns…and unfolds through a dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, analysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and participants) construction of case (i.e. findings or outcomes). The joint constructions that issue from the activity of inquiry can be evaluated for their fit with the data and information they encompass; the extent to which they work, that is, provide a credible level of understanding; and the extent to which they have relevance and are modifiable (Schwandt 1994, p. 129).

Constructions carry certain properties, which include the following (Schwandt 1994, p. 129):

- They are attempts at making sense of experience or to interpret experience;
- Most constructions are self-renewing or self-sustaining;
- The range of information that is available to the researcher and the extent of sophistication in dealing with information determine a construction's quality;
- "Constructions are extensively shared";
- Construction can be labelled as *misconstruction,* although they might be meaningful, based on incompleteness, uninformed, internally inconsistent, or derived by means of inadequate methodology; (A judgement in respect of misconstruction can be made based on a framework specific evaluation from within the specific paradigm);
- Constructions are challenged when awareness is created that new information conflicts with the held construction.

2.6   TOWARDS THEORY ENHANCEMENT:

Short from embarking on a *Grounded Theory* pathway (Strauss and Corbin, 1994), it is however necessary to establish guidelines pertaining to the enhancement of theory. Phenomenology, following Heidegger and Gadamer has an interest in creating knowledge of the lived world, by means of a hermeneutical process. Understanding and interpretation as interdependent dimensions of the hermeneutical process produce insight and comprehension of the phenomenon under scrutiny. At the outset of this text it was indicated that the purpose was to establish the parameters for understanding and to create a theoretical framework for the **meaningful workplace**. This purpose cannot be achieved without the creation of theory in a more formalised and structured manner.

The general guideline that will be followed in this text to enhance existing theory pertaining to the meaningful **workplace** construct is to identify current valid research texts upon which to build and expand. Although this is in line with Strauss

and Corbin's (1994, p. 273) definition of Grounded Theory their original program will not be followed religiously. They describe Grounded Theory methodology as

> a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed…In this methodology, theory may be generated, initially from data, or, if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data…researchers can also usefully carry into current studies any theory based on their previous research provided it seems relevant to these – but again the matching of theory against data must be rigorously carried out.

In breaking with methodological orthodoxy, grounded theory has been criticised as a return to "Baconian inductivism" (Haig 1995, p. 2). On the other hand it could be argued that it embodies a problem oriented endeavour in which theories are abductively generated from robust data patterns, elaborated through the construction of plausible models, and justified in terms of their explanatory coherence. Grounded Theory is positioned as a post positivistic method which is data driven with varying views of data from objectivist (or socially constructivist).

It has been noted that a Grounded Theory methodology will not be followed in this particular instance. It is however necessary to take cognisance of the background to the forming of theory from existing texts based on research results.

Schutz (1954) provides a perspective on the formation of theory, (which in the mind of the current researcher implies enhancing existing theory) stating that the primary goal of the social sciences is to obtain organized knowledge of social reality. "Social reality" is then understood as the sum total of phenomena in the world as experienced by human beings living their daily lives among their fellow-men. This is the world of cultural artefacts, historicity, and social institutions into which humans are born. This is the world within which humans survive by various acts and behaviour patterns that elicit meaning from lived experiences and the phenomena with which they are confronted. It is an intersubjective world, common to humans. Although basically the same phenomena confront all humans, their *making* of events can differ radically from the one to the other. Humans construe reality and

therefore, although the same phenomenon might be experienced the real experiences will differ between humans. It is logical to surmise that common ground will be found based on the use of common language to describe events and experiences related to events.

This knowledge is commonly called understanding (A position akin to the phenomenology of Heidegger and Sartre). The explanation of how common understanding (a social reality) amongst humans can occur is the endeavour of the social scientist. To identify experience with sensory observation only, excludes several dimensions of social reality from all possible inquiry. Social reality (as shared reality) is constituted by beliefs, values, historicity and convictions which are *real* because this is how they are defined and presented by humans based on lived experience in a lived world. In an endeavour to construct theory, sensory observation of overt human behaviour isolates a relatively small dimension as a metaphor of reality and expands that dimension into reality. There are many other dimensions of the social world worthy of investigation and theory formation without the constraints of the observation of overt behaviour, based on sensory observation.

As has been mentioned previously, the interpretation or the lived experience of humans will differ from person to person and from group to group (based on differing frames of reference for the different construction). In spite of these differences however *common-sense* of everyday life is sufficient for coming to terms with fellow-men, cultural objects, social institutions-in brief, with social reality.

> The fact that in common-sense thinking we take for granted our actual or potential knowledge of the meaning of human actions and their products, is, so I submit, precisely what social scientists want to express if they speak of understanding or *Verstehen* as a technique of dealing with human affairs. *Verstehen* is, thus, primarily not a method used by the social scientist, but the particular experiential form in which common-sense thinking takes cognizance of the social cultural world (Schutz, 1954, p. 265).

Theory formation from the perspective of a qualitative framework and with phenomenology as a research genre commences from a "problem at hand". This

problem at hand originates in certain identifiable and definable circumstances within which "I" find myself. This is referred to as a biographically determined situation. It can with a fair amount of certainty be postulated that shared reality or a common biographically situatedness involves reciprocity between humans in a common or shared environment. Thus when one situation of one person is described it can be assumed that the same understanding of phenomena and conclusions –at least in broad terms – will also be applicable to person two in the same environment – if he/she shares the same constructed experience. Experiences in a commonly shared environment are socialised amongst members and therefore a common thread or umbilical cord ought to be discernible throughout the environment.

The social scientist observes certain phenomena within social reality which refer to human action and then construes behaviour or course-of-action patterns, or experiences, from what he has observed. These observations are understood from a specific vantage point which can be typified as subjective. However the corroboration of this understanding with accepted research results will provide sufficient grounds for rejection or acceptance of the following behaviour protocol(s) that the social scientist develops. These protocols are eventually presented as theory, albeit an expansion to existing theory or the creation of new theory.

2.6.1   Grand theory or part theory?

The question that naturally presents itself when the discussion turns to theory is whether it is possible to construct a *grand theory?* A grand theory can be described as an overarching unified theoretical perspective that encompasses the whole knowledge base of a particular subject or field of study. In modernism and positivism the question would be answered with a definite *yes,* indicating that the construction of a so-called grand theory is possible and should be pursued, whist in a post modernistic thought culture, the answer to the question is unequivocal *no* (See Hawking 1989). The current study takes the latter position and asserts that no grand theory is possible but that only part-theories are possible. It is not possible to construe a grand unified theory of the field of study based on the reasoning that the

field is too complex, behaviour to unpredictable, and the construct much too complicated for a study of this nature. In addition: from the perspective of the philosophy of science it is accepted that the possibility of knowing "all" is not possible. The third reason why this study will not culminate a grand unified theory is simply because the grand theories belong to the era of a different approach in terms of the acquisition of knowledge. The linear causality of the positivistic and rationalistic approach of modernism has attempted grand theories in many spheres only to be torn apart by the acquisition of new knowledge through different methodologies and epistemological approaches.

This study can do no more than produce a part-theory or a partial theory for the field of study, which can be enhanced and expanded by subsequent research based on either the same approach that is followed here or by means of a different approach. The current study should thus not create the illusion that it will present a grand unified theory covering all the possible aspects from all the possible angles. Such is not possible.

2.6.2   What is theory? (Theory and theoretical modelling)

Theory consists of "plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts" (Strauss and Corbin 1994, p. 278). Theory is produced with a specific purpose in mind, i.e. to understand phenomena that are deemed worthy of a researcher's attention. Without concepts and/or sets or strings of concepts, no propositions can be inferred and thus no cumulative knowledge can be produced.

Theory is always temporal. It is neither complete nor can it be viewed as fixed for all times in all contexts. Theory evolves and is always provisional until it is replaced with a more plausible theory. The very nature of theory allows for endless elaboration and amendment. It is the immersion of researchers in time, society, ideology and emotional space, including an understanding of the self in the world and the phenomena that are construed as lived experiences in time-space, that limit the time-span relevance of theories.

In this project theory will be derived from existing texts as representations of research results, but interpreted through the lenses of Organizational Behaviour and Organizational Theory.

The process of creating or constructing theory, although it depends on certain formal criteria, also includes a dynamic dimension. It requires a dynamic process of going beyond data and trying to establish a new image of reality (an alternative or additional *image of reality*)*.* This process steers towards embracing the data, whether these are sourced from empirical means or from existing literature. Without this type of dynamic (which can also be described as an act of creativity) the understanding of the amended (constructed) or *new reality* will be obscured. To conceive alternatives to established reality (realities) requires a dynamic and/or imaginative approach which boils down to creativity. From this perspective there is thus no limit except the self imposed limit of the author.

Although stated before, a repeat cannot be harmful: No theory is ever devoid of hidden assumptions and postulates which for a great part stem from the ontological perspectives and metaphysical approach of the creator. In addition, theories are always limited by the ability to construe mental projections, based on the lack of breadth and depth of insight as well the limitations imposed upon us by the limits of language as the carrier of meaning. To a certain extent these shortcomings might be countered when fed with new information – information that makes a difference to what we already know, thus: enhanced theory.

2.6.2.1   Theory: Structure

Theories consist of a set(s) of concepts; supplemented by definitions and general propositions that are subject to and imply generalization and particularization, based on a particular observation whilst at the same time reciprocally referring to these observations, organized as a system (or ecology) and most probably in a hierarchical structure that is not only self explanatory but also explains and defines the object of the theory (Sion 1996). Theories therefore consist of an unspecified

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number of qualitative (conceptual) and/or (quantitative) mathematical propositions, of which some could be indicated as primary propositions because they are not derived from other propositions, whilst others, being of a derivative nature may be called secondary. Primary propositions are distinctive to that theory and referred to as the postulates of the theory. In the case where a primary proposition is not distinctive or unique to the specific theory, but also observable in other theories of the subject under investigation it is not essentially part of that specific theory. They stand outside it and may be transcendent axioms, or borrowed from some adjacent or wider field of investigation, taken for granted so long as that other theory holds. Secondary propositions are called predictions. Some predictions are testable, open to empirical observation, perhaps through experiment; some predictions are intrinsically difficult to test.

2.6.2.2   Theory: Criteria.

Theories explain known data as well as to foresee the yet unknown, and thus guide us in further research, and in action. A theory can also explain and define a new field of study or a sub-field of study such as is the case in this research programme. There are however certain criteria to uphold theories which are briefly presented below:

Criteria of relevance

A theory may be upheld as possibly true, so long as it is meaningful, internally consistent, applicable to (i.e. indeed implying) the phenomena under investigation, and consistent with all other observations to date. (Truth in this sense implies nothing more than that the theory is conceivable, and that it has some degree of probability, or relevance.)

Criteria of competitiveness

The process of induction is not complete until the theory has been compared to others, which may be equally thinkable and defensible in the given context. Induction depends on critically pitting theories against each other. Two or more theories may each fulfil the conditions of relevance, and yet be incompatible with each other. They might converge in some respects, having some postulates and/or predictions in common, but found divergent in other respects. It might be possible to reconcile them, finding postulates which succeed in encompassing the ones in conflict, while retaining the same uniform predictions. Or we may have to find exclusive predictions for each, which can be tested empirically to help us make a choice between postulates. This is where abductive reasoning finds a valid place in the bigger scheme of this research. Abduction is the process used to infer to the best explanation for an event or phenomenon.

> It makes its start from the facts, without at the outset having any particular theory in view, though it is motivated by the feeling that a theory is needed to explain the surprising facts…from a hypotheses which seems to recommend itself, without at the outset having any particular facts in view, though it feels the need of facts to support the theory…it seeks a theory. Induction seeks for facts. In abduction the consideration of the facts suggests the hypotheses. In induction the study of the hypotheses suggests the experiments which bring to light the very facts to which the hypotheses had pointed (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok, 1983 as quoted by Balnaves and Caputi, 2001, p. 37).

The term abduction, broadly speaking is used to indicate the method by which hypotheses are generated. This is especially true in this study.

Utilitarian criteria

Although utility is a relatively 'subjective' standard for evaluating theories, it nevertheless plays a considerable role. Knowledge is not a purely theoretical

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enterprise, but a practical necessity for survival. We use it to support and improve our lives, and therefore judge it according to its accessibility, its simplicity, or the elegance of its ordering of information. (However, simplicity should not be confused with superficiality). People and very specifically organizational decision makers, more often than not opt for overly simplistic viewpoints; the most obvious data is taken into consideration, and complex issues ignored. Simplicity should never be pursued at the expense of accuracy; it must be credible and far removed from naivety (http://www.thelogician.net/2_future_logic/2_chapter_47.htm.)

In addition to these characteristics which are viewed as core dimensions of theory, the following discussion adds to the understanding of what constructed theory is about. (The following discussion is based on Klein and Zedeck 2004).

Theories provide meaning.

Ideally a theory should allow the reader to understand and interpreted data, irrespective whether the data is of a qualitative or quantitative character. Theories pretend to indicate which variables and constructs are important, and the specific reasons for such considerations, as well as the context(s) within which the importance rule applies. Theories should furthermore "describe and explain the relationships that link the variables, and identify the boundary conditions under which variables should or should not be related" (Campbell, 1990 in Klein and Zedeck, 2004).

Theory stemming from qualitative research provides an understanding of the reasons why certain events take place (or why certain phenomena present themselves) and do not only indicate that they take place. Theory-building/enhancing research (as in the present research programme) generates understanding and insight.

Theory offers novel insights

Theory teaches readers and researchers something new, something they could not have learned elsewhere (Klein and Zedeck, 2004). Theory in this sense of the word should ideally facilitate or moderate a sense of discovery; a sense of illumination, and intrigues as well as captures the imagination of the reader. This implies that theory development should also establish a baseline for further investigation that could either result in rejection or the enhancement thereof.

Good theory is focused and cohesive

Good theory illuminates and clarifies, often by organizing, and thus simplifying, a set of previously unorganized and scattered observations (Klein and Zedeck, 2004). Phenomena in the world of observation, specifically human behaviour, are never one-sided nor are they linearly or deterministic in nature. Qualitative theory should provide observed phenomena in a clear, coherent and cohesive way through a process of simplification (where possible) and constructing of structure.

Theory is grounded in the relevant literature

Although grounded in literature, theory cannot be a mere replication of the literature. Insights reflected in literature must be interpreted and repackaged in such a manner as to provide some novel insight of the research topic. This contributes to the enhancement of existing knowledge through a program of expansion or, in ideal circumstances the creation of new knowledge. The challenge of course is to seek new, enhanced or focussed insight from existing literature.

Theory presents clearly defined constructs and offers clear, thorough, and thoughtful explanations of how and why the constructs in the model are linked. Clearly defined constructs are the building blocks of good theory. The process of

defining one's constructs sounds easy but is not. Reviewers of the theory submissions to the Journal of Applied Psychology often described authors' constructs as "loosely defined, vague, and confusing" and urged greater precision and specificity. Recent discussions in the literature regarding the precise meaning and dimensions of organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, leadership, and other prominent constructs in applied psychology attest to the difficulty of defining, delineating, and differentiating constructs. A construct that seems clear and meaningful to the author who has been thinking about it for months or years may seem vague and confusing to the reader first exposed to it. The author's duty is to be as clear as possible. The review process can be a great aid in this process, prompting authors to revise and refine their construct definitions. Theory is testable when constructs are clearly defined and specified, and links among the constructs are explained and justified thoroughly, researchers seeking to test the theory are likely to have a very good idea of how to do so. Conversely, when a theory's constructs and propositions are vague and imprecise, two researchers may set out to test the theory but ultimately test very different interpretations of the theory. One person's operationalisation of a construct may bear little or no conceptual relation to another person's operationalisation of the same construct simply because the construct itself is unclear. A number of the manuscript reviews indicated that an author's ideas were un-testable.

Good theory for the Journal of Applied Psychology is theory that can be used to address problems in organizations. Moreover, consistent with the journal's general policy for empirical manuscripts, the concern is with effect sizes. Thus, manuscripts to which the most receptiveness was demonstrated were those that held the potential to address important organizational and societal problems.

The most crucial moment in the current research, is the formation of theory to support and enhance the emerging construct (as noted above) and the development of a model through the convergence of information. It (the formation of theory in this study) is dependent on the convergence of three separate streams of information. Graphically this process can be depicted as in Figure 2.6.

Three streams of information converge to lay the foundation for the formation of a theory applicable to a **meaningful workplace** and eventual guidelines for management practice. All three streams consist of information. Information can be described as knowledge, facts or data. However there is an element or activity that must be added i.e. the interpretation. The first stream of data, in this study, is contained in a meta-interpretation of information that is already refined and presented in research literature. This stream represents and is presented as already interpreted existing knowledge, existing research, facts and research data. In following this route the methodology remains consistent with a phenomenology as research genre and foundation for the current strategy. The second stream consists of interpreted verbatim comments made by employees who voluntary chose to exit the organization for which they worked. The verbatims were collected, categorised by the company and presented in a report. The third stream in the strategic posture of the study represents information that was collected by means of Repertory Grid interviews with selected participants from diverse work backgrounds and organisations. The three streams as indicated will be discussed separately in the following paragraphs. The most crucial dimension of the convergence strategy as presented is the matching of the information from the three different streams to construe a theoretical framework for the **meaningful workplace.**

2.7 ABDUCTION AS AN INTERPRETIVE AND THEORY FORMATION TECHNIQUE

Abduction is the process used to infer to the best explanation for an event or phenomenon.

> It makes its start from the facts, without at the outset having any particular theory in view, though it is motivated by the feeling that a theory is needed to explain the surprising facts…from a hypotheses which seems to recommend itself, without at the outset having any particular facts in view, though it feels the need of facts to support the theory…it seeks a theory. Induction seeks for facts. In abduction the

consideration of the facts suggests the hypotheses. In induction, the study of the hypotheses suggests experiments which bring to light the very facts to which the hypotheses had pointed". (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok, 1983, in Balnaves and Caputi, 2001, p. 37).

The term abduction, broadly speaking is used to indicate the method by which hypotheses are generated. This is especially true in this study.

Abduction is a kind of logical inference described by Peirce (collected papers 1931) as the process of arriving at an explanatory hypothesis. That is to say that to *abduce* a hypothetical explanation *"a"* from an observed surprising circumstance *"b"* is to surmise that **"a"** may be true because then *"b"* would be a matter of course. Thus, to abduce *"a"* from **"b"** involves determining that *"a"* is sufficiently infers *"b"*.

Peirce argues that good abductive reasoning from P to Q involves not simply a determination that, e.g., Q is sufficient for P, but also that Q is among the most economical explanations for P. Simplification and economy are what call for the 'leap' of abduction (Peirce MS L75.329-330, from Draft D of Memoir 27).

2.8   CONCLUSION

Figure 2.6 provides a graphic overview of the foregoing discussion. The discussion represents a dynamic process according to which the purpose of the research program will be pursued.
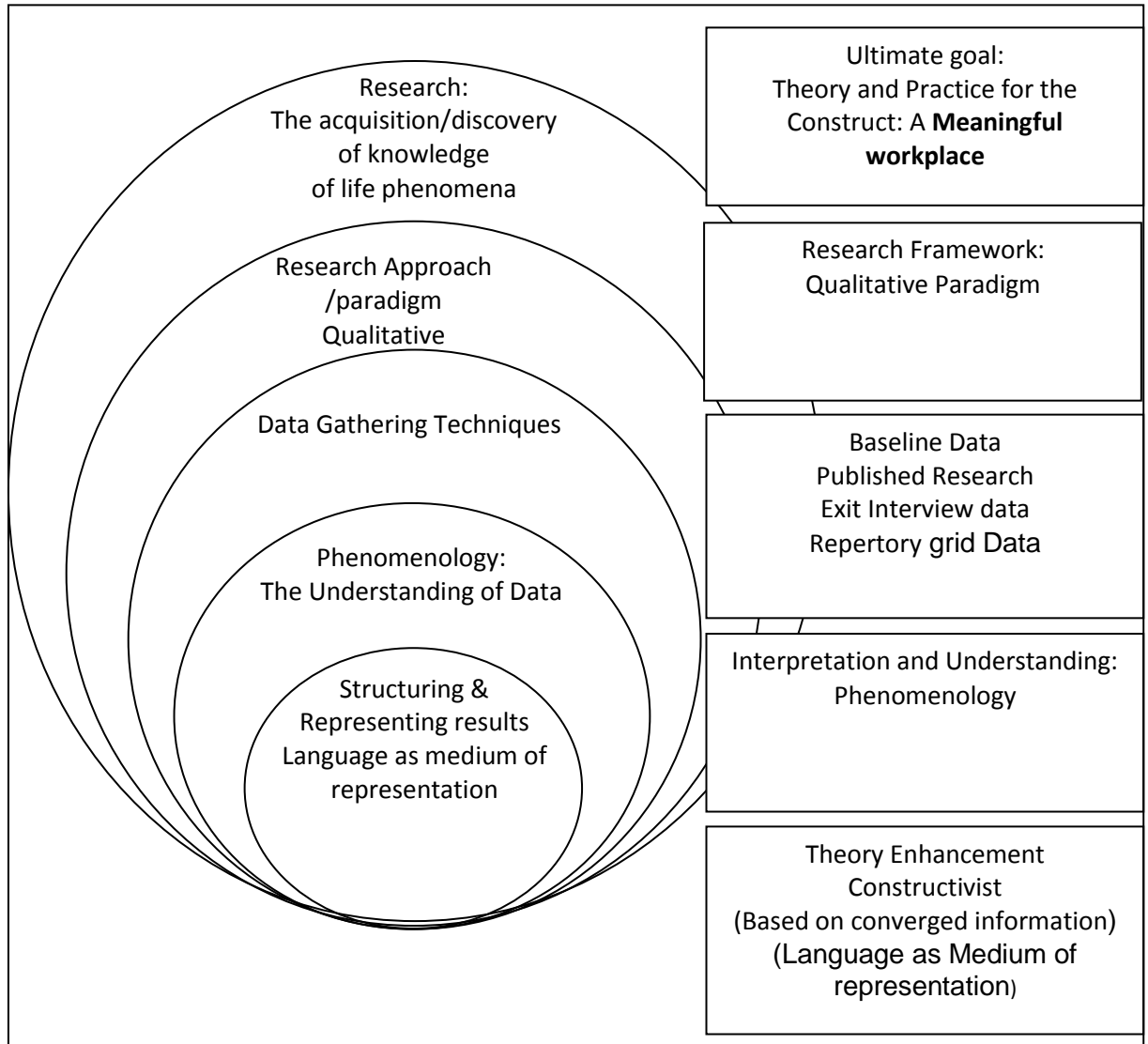
Figure 2.6: A Holistic Perspective

The purpose of this chapter (as stated at the beginning) was to discuss and present the research methodology consisting of a broad goal or ultimate purpose (to enhance theory for the **meaningful workplace**), the research framework (following a qualitative approach), the specific method that will be employed to create such a theory (constructivist), the research genre which serves this project (phenomenological), and an indication of the data sources that will be utilised for this purpose (published research texts, exit interview verbatim responses and Repertory Grid interview information) and closing with a discussion on language as the medium of representation.

It can, with a high measure of confidence be stated that the purpose of this chapter has been achieved. The research methodology was presented, taking into account the different aspects that will inform the study in achieving the ultimate goal of establishing a theory of and guidelines pertaining to the practical implementation of establishing a **meaningful workplace**.