

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

This chapter outlines the structure of the empirical study. It provides a description of the participants, an explanation of the measurement instrument, an explanation of the method used to collect the data and the approach used to analyse the data.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the method by which this study was conducted.

#### **4.1 PARTICIPANTS**

A purposive sample was drawn from a population of psychologists who are engaged in organisational consulting and who therefore have contact with the different leadership styles being studied. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) purposive sampling increases transferability of the study and maximises the range of information that can be obtained about the object of study. Since the study is an exploratory, qualitative one, the sample size was allowed to be small (Payze, 2004). The targeted sample size was 5 psychologists, and the actual sample size was 4. The participants in the focus group had all trained in the systems psychodynamic stance, which facilitated the process of inquiry. The participants were all registered with the South African Health Professions Council's Board for Psychology in the categories industry, clinical and counselling.

#### **4.2 MEASUREMENT**

The focus group is the measurement instrument used for this study. This measurement instrument is useful as it enables the collection of a large amount of information in a limited period (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). To structure the focus group discussion, two forms were drawn up; both listing the leadership styles (as defined by Kets de Vries & Miller, 1991). The one form sought to elicit response with regards to defining the different leadership styles and the other form elicited response with regards to how these leadership styles would cope with and deal with change in organisations. Both forms had

sufficient space for participants to make their own notes during the discussion, to ensure that their individual thoughts would not be lost during the flow of the discussion. The design of the forms aimed to structure discussion and each form had only one question (Annexure A).

### **4.3 DATA COLLECTION**

A focus group was planned, arranged and presented for ninety minutes. A focus group is defined as a planned and well organised discussion designed to obtain the perceptions on a defined topic by a group sharing and responding to views, experiences, feelings and perceptions in a non-threatening environment (Brewerton & Millward, 2004). The purpose of which is to gain information, perspectives and empirical field texts about a specific research topic, and its rationale is to provide a socially-oriented interaction, similar to a real life situation, where participants freely influence one another, build on one another's responses and thus stimulate a collective and synergistically generated thought, feeling and experience (Cilliers, 2005). Focus groups allow space for people to get together and create meaning among themselves and has the effect of shaping and reshaping opinions to develop a completely new set of data (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The participants were personally invited to take part in the focus group and the criterion for selection to participate was extensive experience in organisational consulting, as well as being trained in and having a thorough understanding of the systems psychodynamic perspective. A venue for the focus group was secured prior to the session at a location accessible to those who were invited to participate. The tape recorder was set up prior to the participants' arrival. The focus group required that a lot of attention be given to the role of facilitator (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) and therefore this focus group discussion was led by a skilled facilitator / psychologist and the entire discussion was recorded and thereafter transcribed. This was done to increase the reliability of the study.

The primary task was to explore how the five leadership styles deal with change. The session was opened by the facilitator and all participants introduced themselves and their

psychology registration category/ies as requested. The motivation for the research was explained to the participants and the primary task defined. Each participant was given the two forms. The first question put to the focus group was to define the five leadership styles, so that the group could talk from the same understanding. The second question posed to the group was how these leadership styles would cope with change: “In your experience as a psychologist and consultant to organisations undergoing change, how do the five different styles cope with change differently.” This approach ensured internal consistency. The focus group discussed the leadership styles, one at a time. Before progressing from one leadership style onto the next style the facilitator would confirm that the focus group had completed their discussion and was ready to move on. Once all the leadership styles had been discussed, the session was closed by the facilitator, the participants were thanked and the recorder was switched off. Thereafter the data was transcribed and the transcripts checked against the voice recording by an independent party to confirm accuracy of the transcript.

#### **4.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data analysis procedure and interpretation was done in accordance with the systems psychodynamic stance (Czander, 1993). Content analysis was used as it was established that it was sufficient to uncover the themes and connections. Content analysis is defined by Holsti (1969, cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2001) as any technique used for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of the data. Babbie and Mouton (2001) mentioned two types of content analysis, conceptual analysis and relational analysis. For the purposes of this study conceptual analysis was used because it is useful in establishing themes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Palmquist (1993, cited by Babbie & Mouton, 2001) outlined eight steps in conceptual analysis, namely:

1. deciding on the level of analysis
2. deciding on how many concepts to code for
3. deciding whether to code for existence or frequency of a concept
4. deciding how to distinguish between concepts

5. developing rules for the coding of texts
6. deciding what to do with the data that is irrelevant
7. coding the data
8. analysing the results

In following these steps, it was decided that the level of analysis be descriptive characteristics of the five leadership styles. The number of styles is limited to the five leadership styles determined in the Kets de Vries and Miller (1991) study. The existence, and not the frequency, of descriptions for each of the styles, it was decided, would be coded. The concept (i.e. the description of the different leadership styles) would be distinguished first by the styles and then it would be categorised into either the cognitive, affective, motivational or interpersonal dimensions. These constructs were thought to best describe the styles as it covers what the subjects think, feel, and what they are motivated by, as well as how they would relate to others. In other words it covers intra-personal as well as inter-personal aspects (Cilliers & Wissing, 1993). These would also serve as the rules to guide the coding of the information gathered.

For the purposes of data analysis the following definitions were used (Cilliers & Wissing, 1993; Hall & Lindzey, 1970; White & Watt, 1981) to categorise the behaviours:

- Cognitive: this relates to the individual's thought processes, thinking and thinking patterns, as well as his perceptions and how he interprets information;
- Affective: this relates to the individual's emotions and how he feels 'on the inside';
- Motivational: this relates to how he manages to get something (including tasks) done and his observable behaviour, and includes what drives him to move or act;
- Interpersonal: this relates to how he relates to others, the nature of his relationships and how he acts and interacts with others.

This enabled the researcher to establish a clear definition of the five leadership styles in terms of these constructs, as well as a description (using the same constructs) of how these leadership styles cope with change.

The data elicited by the first question (defining the five leadership styles) was read through several times, and for each of the styles the definitions provided were sorted and categorised into the cognitive, affective, motivational and interpersonal dimensions. The participants' definition of each of the five leadership styles were integrated and checked against Kets de Vries and Miller's (1991) typology. The definitions were found to be congruent to the literature, which led to the conclusion that the behavioural interpretations in question two by the chosen psychologists, have reliability and validity.

Data elicited from question two (i.e. how the different leadership styles deal with change) was also read through several times before being categorised (as above) in terms of the cognitive, affective, motivational and interpersonal dimensions. The behaviour listed within each leadership style was interpreted using the systems psychodynamic approach as described in chapter 2 with specific reference to the relevant concepts. The findings for each of the five leadership styles were integrated to develop a profile for each of the styles. This integrative profile was compared to the definitions provided by the focus group in answer to the first question as well as existing literature (notably Kets de Vries & Miller, 1991) to establish how responses to change were different or similar. Conclusions were offered and the research project ends with the research hypothesis.

#### **4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the methodology of the empirical study. It set forth a description of the participants, an explanation of the measurement instrument and the method used to collect the data, as well as an explanation of the method used to analyse the data.

The aim of the chapter was to describe the method used to conduct this study.