

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 The Approach

Due to the lack of prior research on the suitability of existing change theories in non-Western, emerging economies, the desire to understand transformation within organisational contexts and the sensitive nature of data needed, a qualitative approach has been chosen (Yin, 1984). The choice of this approach has also been influenced by the focus of the study. The focus is the events associated with the transformation of companies over time.

I use a multiple longitudinal case design (Newman & Nollen, 1998) to capture the experiences of companies spanning from 1980 when Zimbabwe attained its independence to 2000.

In order to understand the thought processes underlying major decisions made along the way, it was necessary to include the perspectives of major stakeholders like business executives, worker opinion leaders, the media and customers.

This study is, therefore, an inductive study using grounded theory, rooted in case study methodology, to examine how the chosen Zimbabwean organisations engaged in change.

Strauss & Corbin (1990:24) define the grounded theory approach as “a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon”. This involves inducting insights from field based, case data.

Grounded theory has been selected since the study is looking at a rarely explored area for which extant theory does not appear to be useful. Brown & Eisenhardt (1997:2), (quoting from Glaser & Strauss, 1967), point out that “in such situations, a grounded theory-building approach is more likely to generate novel and accurate insights into the phenomenon under study than reliance on either past research or office-bound thought experiments”.

The results from this study are insights into a theory/model of organisational transformation suitable for companies in Zimbabwe, and more broadly, in emerging economies. It was also expected that the product(s) would be, and it is, consistent with the argument Leedy (1997:163) makes: “the theory is ‘grounded’ in that it is developed from the data, as opposed to being suggested by the literature; that is, theory is an expected outcome from, rather than the starting point for, the study”.

3.1 The Research design

Exhibit 3.1: Process of Building Theory from Case Study Research

| STEP | ACTIVITY | REASON |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Getting started | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of research question; • Possibly a priori constructs; • Neither theory nor hypothesis. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses efforts; • Provides better grounding of construct measures; • Retains theoretical flexibility. |
| Selecting cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specified population; • Theoretical, not random, sampling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constrains extraneous variation and sharpens external validity; • Focuses efforts on theoretically useful cases i.e. those that replicate or extend theory by filling conceptual categories. |
| Crafting instruments & protocols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple data collection methods. • Qualitative and quantitative data combined • Multiple investigators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthens grounding of theory by triangulation of evidence. • Synergistic view of evidence • Foster divergent perspectives and, strengthens grounding. |
| Entering the field | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlap data collection and analysis, including field notes; • Flexible and opportunistic data collection methods. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speeds analyses and reveals helpful adjustments to data collection; • Allows investigators to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features. |
| Analysing the data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within-case analysis; • Cross-case pattern search using divergent techniques. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains familiarity with data and preliminary theory generation; • Forces investigators to look beyond initial impressions and see evidence through multiple lenses. |
| Shaping hypothesis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iterative tabulation of evidence for each construct; • Replication, not sampling, logic across cases; • Search evidence for 'why' behind relationships. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharpens construct definition, validity, and measurability; • Confirms, extends, and sharpens theory; • Builds internal validity. |
| Enfolding literature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison with conflicting literature; • Comparison with similar literature. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds internal validity, raises theoretical level, and sharpens construct definitions; • Sharpens generalizability, improves construct definition, and raises theoretical level. |
| Reaching closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical saturation when possible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ends process when marginal improvement becomes small. |

Source: Eisenhardt 1989:533

Exhibit 3.1 summarises what Eisenhardt (1989:533) conceives as the process of inducting theory using case studies. Eisenhardt (1989:532-3) argues that “this roadmap synthesizes previous work on qualitative methods (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1984), the design of case study research (e.g. Yin, 1981, 1984), and grounded theory building (e.g. Glauß & Strauss, 1967):”

The process involves eight steps ranging from the specification of the research questions to reaching closure. Eisenhardt (1989:548-9) concludes: Firstly, “theory developed from case study research is likely to have important strengths like novelty, testability, and empirical validity, which arise from intimate linkage with empirical evidence”. Secondly, this process is “particularly well-suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate”.

On the basis of these remarks, the process above was adopted to inform the research design since the roadmap is quite robust and fit for use in this study.

The adoption of this process was stimulated by Eisenhardt’s (1989:549) challenge to other researchers. The challenge is that since “most empirical studies lead from theory to data”, other researchers should realise “the accumulation of knowledge involves a continual cycling between theory and data”. Hence, some researchers need to “complete the cycle by conducting research that goes in the less common direction from data to theory...”.

Consonant with the roadmap above, the eight steps of the design for this study are outlined below.

3.1.1 Getting started

The first step of the design process concerned the definition of the research question and a possible priori specification of constructs.

The key research question is: **Do existing theories, of how organisations change, apply to organisations in non-Western, emerging nations?**

From the literature on change, there were twelve tentative constructs that were used as a basis for exploring this question. Ten of these fall under the challenges of initiating, the challenges of sustaining, and the challenges of redesigning the transformation (Senge, 1999; Chowdhury, 2000).

Initiation of a change effort refers to the start-up of the effort. Three tentative constructs under initiation included **time** (time available for the effort), **help** (the kind and quality of help provided), **relevance** (the extent to which the effort was considered relevant) and **walking the talk** (the credibility of the leader(s)).

Sustenance of the change initiative refers to maintaining the momentum of the change. The tentative constructs under sustenance included **fear and uncertainty** (how fear and uncertainty were managed), **measurement** (how progress was measured and assessed), and **belief in the change effort** (the extent of polarisation in belief about the effort).

Redesigning refers to developing the capacity of people to reshape the change process taking into account the interdependencies within which they operate. The tentative constructs included **governance** (power and accountability of actors), **diffusion** (how learning pervaded the company during the change), and **purpose and strategy** (rethinking company purpose and strategy).

Two other possible constructs came up during the literature search: **triggers of transformation** and **best practices of transformation**.

The twelve constructs were initially used to design the semi-structured interview and focus group discussion guide as reflected in Appendix 1. The semi-structured interview guide was used to begin the capturing of experiences of the chosen companies under the twelve tentative constructs. This guide also provided a frame for the other data collection methods used. However, as the iteration between data collection and analysis continued, two more constructs (**key players** and **success**) surfaced. The data collection instrument was therefore modified to include these other two possible constructs resulting in fourteen tentative constructs.

3.1.2 Selecting cases

To explore the key research question, multiple case studies were conducted. In this context, each case is considered analogous to an experiment in traditional hypothesis testing research. Multiple cases, then, are analogous to multiple experiments. This permits a 'replication' logic (Yin, 1984), "in which the cases are treated as a series of independent experiments that confirm or disconfirm emerging conceptual insights" (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997:3).

The initial four cases were selected from a population of Zimbabwean companies in four business sectors.

Zimbabwe was selected since it is an emerging economy currently in a state of decline. However, it has huge opportunities to be a strong economy. In the Economist of 24 April 1999, anonymous authors suggest that there is every possibility that emerging economies will, in the long run, do better as a result of their crises. In this regard, the

Zimbabwean company experiences may be laboratories from which to learn about the challenges of organisational transformation in emerging economies.

The initial four sectors chosen were financial services, mining, agriculture and tourism.

Building theory from case studies relies on theoretical sampling in which cases are chosen for theoretical, not statistical, reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, the sectors were chosen to fill in theoretical categories of industry and provide examples of polar types (Eisenhardt, 1989). Towards the late 1990's, the financial services sector in Zimbabwe was successful whereas the other sectors were declining. This sampling plan was designed to build theory given the lessons of success and failure.

The initial multiple cases were selected based on the combination of accessibility and cross-case diversity factors (Sabherwal, Hirschheim & Goles, 2001). In this study, cross-case diversity covers company size, industry, and performance issues.

One company was initially chosen from each of the sectors mentioned above. This number is consistent with the minimum cases Eisenhardt (1989:545) suggests when she retorts: "..., there is no ideal number of cases, a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works well. Fewer than 4 cases, it is often difficult to generate theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be unconvincing, unless the case has several mini-cases within it, ...".

Due to problems faced in getting access into the mining company initially, the case was dropped from the study for reasons mentioned in this section below. The study cases still cover four sectors, with a specific slant. The four sectors now are agriculture, manufacturing, financial services, and tourism.

Pseudonyms are used for both company and individual confidentiality. The initial company code-names were changed as it was perceived the code names were not masking the companies enough. There was also a need to mask the case to replace the mining company and to mask further the two companies in the same industry.

The code names for the study cases are now CROP, FINANCE, LEISURE and PLEASURE. CROP is agro-industrial and represents both the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. FINANCE represents the financial services sector. LEISURE and PLEASURE represent the tourism sector. Whereas LEISURE was once a parastatal, PLEASURE has been a part of a conglomerate that has been and continuous to be unbundled.

CROP and a mining company had been selected as representative of a global conglomerate. Permission to study the two companies was granted at Group level. However, the leaders of the two companies had a final say on accessibility. CROP leadership allowed the study to continue. The mining company leadership were hesitant to allow access and set out conditions that would otherwise have restricted and clouded data collection and analysis. The mining company was consequently dropped from the study and replaced by PLEASURE from the tourism industry.

PLEASURE was considered a suitable replacement as it would allow for within industry (with LEISURE also from the tourism industry) comparison as well as represent another conglomerate. Access was easy as I was involved in running a company-wide transformation process for PLEASURE. The study allowed not only data collection and analysis but also confirming emerging themes and testing of the emerging theory.

CROP covers the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, is small but part of a global conglomerate.

FINANCE is relatively new in the financial services sector in Zimbabwe, has been turned around and has grown large of late. FINANCE has also earned a partnership with another company in the same sector in South Africa and is poised for global expansion.

As highlighted above, LEISURE and PLEASURE are both in the tourism sector. Both are part of two Zimbabwean owned Groups of companies.

3.1.3 Crafting Instruments and Protocols

Multiple data collection methods are employed. These include interviews, focus group discussions, observations, archival sources and intensive literature search. The triangulation that is made possible by "multiple data collection methods provides stronger substantiation of constructs." (Eisenhardt, 1989:538).

Qualitative evidence is combined with quantitative evidence in a synergistic way. Besides indicating relationships that may be less obvious to a researcher, quantitative evidence can keep researchers "from being carried away by vivid, but false, impressions in qualitative data, and it can bolster findings when it corroborates those findings from qualitative evidence" (Eisenhardt, 1989:538). At the same time, qualitative data is useful for understanding the rationale behind those relationships revealed in quantitative data. Qualitative data may also suggest directly those theoretical insights to be strengthened by quantitative data (Jick, 1979).

Of special note is that focus group discussions were held particularly to capture data from shopfloor workers who are unskilled. This is consonant with the recommendation by Hofmeyr, Templer & Beaty (1994) that, given the problems of accurately measuring attitudes at the unskilled level in the organisation, qualitative methods such as focus groups be used to complement other methods.

The composition of focus groups was in some cases multi-level and cross-functional and in others for employees at the same level. This approach permitted rich conversations on the various issues and provided an opportunity to observe the interpersonal interaction dynamics in the companies. Data collection was opportunistic.

Multiple investigators were employed to enhance the creative potential of the study. The convergence of observations from multiple investigators enhances confidence in the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). The two other investigators were kept out of the field altogether and assigned the roles of resident devil's advocates. This strategy allowed for a very different and possibly more objective eye to the evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Observations were made during site visits and focus group discussions.

Archival data was drawn from a variety of company documentation including annual reports, workers' committee and management meeting minutes, as well as media reports. Media reports about the companies assisted in understanding the forces exerted on the companies by various stakeholders.

3.1.3.1 Semi-structured interview and focus group discussion guide

The semi-structured interview and focus group discussion guide (Appendix 1) includes questions on the punctuated equilibrium paradigm, initial stages of changes, sustenance of the changes, and redesigning of the changes.

3.1.3.2 Protocols

Samples of written requests to gain entry into a company (APPENDIX 2), invite individuals to participate in interviews or focus group discussions (APPENDIX 3), and potential research assistants (APPENDIX 4) are attached.

3.1.4 Entering the field

A variety of data were collected based on the fourteen constructs from a variety of sources for each company. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and from company documentation as well as media reports. Data collection overlapped with data analysis. This enhanced flexible data collection to trap the emergence of new themes to improve resultant theory.

Observations were captured as field notes. There were running commentaries against the field notes. The running commentaries were in the form of hunches about relationships, cross-case comparisons, anecdotes and informal observations. Such observations provided real-time data as presented by activities such as lunches, tea breaks, product demonstrations and meetings.

Interviews provided an opportunity for participants to relate their stories of how the organisation evolved. Probing questions were mostly in the form of WHY questions to search for more insights.

For CROP, annual reports and media reports in company files from 1980 to 2000 were the platform for a one-week in-depth study in the company. The week provided ample time to make direct observations of the mill, office and field tours.

During the week, 5 personal one-on-one interviews as well as 5 focus group discussions were conducted. Each of these was 1.5 hours long giving a total time of 15 hours for interviews and focus group discussions

A total of 39 staff {3 (from same department) + 9 (from across functions and levels with 1 white) + 11 (middle managers with 1 female and 1 white) + 5 (from across functions and levels) + 11 (shopfloor workers)} participated in the 5 focus group discussions.

Several visits to FINANCE and informal discussions with staff and ex-employees pointed in the direction that annual reports and strategy documents were comprehensive sources of data for the company turnaround. Time was therefore devoted to in-depth analysis of the annual reports from 1995 to 2000 and strategy documents.

One senior executive who was part to the turnaround and is now with another financial institution confirmed that the evidence from the two documentation sources sufficiently saturated the issues. The same sentiment was expressed by three other ex-employees who were followed up for evidence. Repeat discussions were held with these ex-employees to confirm/disconfirm the evidence from documents.

The first executive interviewed in LEISURE confirmed and substantiated information contained in an annual report and the prospectus for listing. The interviewee expressed that reliable data would be got from ex-staff members who had witnessed the changes and provided leads.

Two ex-staff were followed up and willing to provide one-on-one interview evidence. A total of 3 (1.5 + 1.5) hours were spent on interviews in LEISURE.

Four LEISURE units were visited for observations and informal discussions held with customers in the units.

Focus group discussions were the primary source of evidence for PLEASURE. This was because the first three one-on-one interviews provided only indicators of what had happened and company documents were not readily available. A transformation process that I was running for the whole organisation provided an opportunity to engage 359 organisation members in learning about their organisation.

Two hours were set aside for each of the 11 groups to use the unstructured focus group discussion guide to recreate the history of PLEASURE. The total focus group time was 22 hours.

Participants for each group were drawn from the 4 units. Of the 11 groups, 3 groups were constituted by 86 (29 + 29 + 28) middle managers, 7 groups by 261 (15 + 25 + 48 + 48 + 45 + 36 + 44) shopfloor workers and 1 group by 12 executives.

All groups held discussions in Shona, English and Ndebele. Necessary translations were made to keep all participants engaged.

I also relied on my experiences as a Group Training Manager for the conglomerate from 1995 to 1997 to confirm/disconfirm the evidence. During that time I trained staff in PLEASURE in Zimbabwe and Botswana and interacted with most staff in the company.

One informant indicated that all company documents were archived at the time of the hostile take-over and were not available. The informant managed to eventually avail a few files and folders after about one month of searching. The files, labelled 'Strategy', and folders contained unit-by-unit budgets and a few references to strategy.

A rich source of data was the former financial director who also provided two documents in the form of masters' degree study group assignments detailing experiences in PLEASURE.

3.1.5 Analysing the Data

The data are analysed in two stages: firstly, building detailed case study write-ups for each company; and secondly, comparing across cases to construct conceptual frameworks.

3.1.5.1 Within-case Data Analysis

All transcribed interview responses were entered into a database indexed by interview number, and question number and responses. Next, all responses to the same question were collected from the individual interview database as a single response in a composite database. The responses from focus groups were treated similarly.

With the information from the two composite databases, observations, company documentation and media reports, a case description for each company was made based on the constructs. This analysis provided intimate familiarity with each case as a stand-alone entity, allowed the unique patterns of each case to emerge and accelerated cross-case comparisons (Eisenhardt, 1989).

At this stage of the analysis, two research assistants, playing the roles of devil's advocates, individually read through the original evidence and formed independent views of each case. The views were then used to cross check the emerging story for each company.

The analytical methodology used in this study can be described as iterative, replicative and triangular. I alternated between data collection from visits to companies and building theory from the data collected. New lines of investigation were opportunistically determined. This was followed by new explanations for the new data and a development of new theory to existing models.

The iteration between building theory and data collection was repeated until data saturation was achieved. There were repeat discussions with some of the respondents in the same companies in order to trace unfolding events over time.

Although the same semi-structured interview guide was used across the four companies,

data collection became particular to each company on the basis of initial evidence. For example, most data was available in annual reports and strategy documents in FINANCE and focus group discussions were the most appropriate source in PLEASURE.

New theory was used as a basis for teaching Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) Masters' Degree students change management.

The new theory was refined during data collection in PLEASURE as I provided consultancy services in a company-wide transformation process.

The new theory became theory-in-use as it was tested and further refined in 2 financial institutions, code-named TEST 1 and TEST 2. In TEST 2 I provided consultancy services in transformation for all the six hundred staff whereas in TEST 1 I provided consultancy services for strategic planning.

In TEST 2, at the end of each of the 16 three-day sessions, participants commented that the theory was relevant to TEST 2. Visits to TEST 1 and informal discussions with employees in TEST 2 are confirming that the organisations have started applying the theory with great excitement. Both organisations have also adopted the integration of servant leadership principles into their business operations.

3.1.5.2 Searching for Cross-case Patterns

Using the constructs as defining categories, a search for cross-case patterns was done at two levels. The first level was paired comparisons and the second was searching for patterns by data source.

Points of convergence and divergence formed most of the basis for cross-case analysis.

Overall, the idea behind the two levels of cross-case search tactics was to allow the investigation to go beyond the first impressions. This improved the likelihood of obtaining an accurate and reliable theory or model that closely fitted with the data.

3.1.6 Shaping Hypothesis/Measuring Constructs and Verifying Relationships

Challenges, tentative themes, concepts and possible relationships between constructs emerged from the within-case data analysis, the cross-case paired and data source comparisons, and overall impressions. This emergent frame was systematically compared with evidence from each case reflecting the iteration between theory and data.

The first part of shaping the theory was the sharpening of constructs. The definitions of the constructs were refined and evidence measuring the construct built in each case.

The second part in shaping the theory was the verification of whether the emergent relationships between constructs fitted with the evidence in each case.

Eisenhardt (1989:542) points out: "In replication logic, cases which confirm emergent relationships enhance confidence in the validity of the relationships. Cases which disconfirm the relationships often can provide an opportunity to refine and extend the theory".

The strength and consistency of relationships within and across cases were judged and further assessed by two research assistants. Above all, the exhibits and figures display the evidence and procedures fully in Chapter 4. This will permit other readers to apply their own standards when reviewing the evidence.

3.1.7 Enfolding Literature

Eisenhardt (1989:544) suggests: "An essential feature of theory building is comparison of the emergent concepts, theory, or hypothesis with extant literature. This involves asking what is similar to, what does it contradict, and why".

A broad range of literature was examined in order to identify that literature which conflicts with the emergent theory as well as that which discusses similar findings. Conflicting literature was considered in order to increase the confidence in the findings. Such consideration deepened insights into the emergent theory and conflicting literature and sharpened the limits of generalizability of this study.

Dealing with literature on similar findings created an opportunity to tie together similarities in concepts normally not associated with each other. "The result is often a theory with stronger internal validity, wider generalizability, and higher conceptual level (Eisenhardt, 1989:544).

3.1.8 Reaching Closure

The iteration between theory and data was stopped when theoretical saturation was reached. Eisenhardt (1989:545) defines theoretical saturation as "the point at which incremental learning is minimal because the researchers are observing phenomenon seen before".

The final products of this study are a theory/model of organisational transformation suitable for Zimbabwean companies in particular, and also a prescription as a general theory/model for emerging economies.

3.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter reflects that this is a longitudinal, multiple case study based on Eisenhardt's (1989) process of building theory from case study. The theory development process is summarised in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1: A Summary of the Theory Development Process

| Date | Case Data Collection | Theory Development |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| October 2000 | Started organisational transformation literature search & found study promoter. | |
| May 2001 | | Presented background and setting of study at colloquium. |
| October 2001 | | Presented review of related literature at colloquium. |
| November 2001 | Prospect of studying a global company failed. Attempts to study another global company in the same industry failed. | |
| February 2002 | Four companies identified for study signalled accessibility. | Presented research methodology at colloquium. |
| July 2002 | One week in CROP. | Tentatively defined constructs; Developed data collection instrument; Started iteration between data collection and analysis. |
| July 2002 - August 2003 | Field work in CROP, FINANCE, LEISURE. | Redefined constructs; Sharpened framework for data collection and analysis; Captured emerging challenges and emerging themes. |
| July 2002 - November 2002 | Several attempts to get access into mining company failed. | Assessment of possible reasons of failure to gain access resulted in resolution to find alternative company. |
| February 2003 - March 2003 | | Used emerging theory as basis to teach ZOU Masters Degree students change management. |
| March 2003 | | Presented initial findings of study & emerging theory at colloquium. |
| April 2003 | PLEASURE became fourth company for study replacing the mining company. Testing elements of emerging theory outside the 4 cases. | PLEASURE executives accepted data collection and testing of emerging theory. Used & tested emerging theory as basis for 'strategy formulation' consultancy work in a financial institution (TEST 1) |
| April 2003 - September 2003 | Field work in all 4 PLEASURE sites. | Used & tested emerging theory as basis for 'transformation' consultancy work & data collection in PLEASURE. |
| July 2003 - November 2003 | Testing theory outside the 4 cases. | Used & tested theory as a basis for transformation consultancy work in another financial institution (TEST 2). |
| August 2003 | Field testing for & confirming saturation. | Presented within-case data analysis & emerging theory at colloquium. |
| November 2003 | | Presented cross-case data analysis and theory at colloquium. |
| November 2003 | | Thesis completed. |