The Importance of Qualitative and Unobtrusive Research Methods within the Broader Concept of Meaning-Making

Christelle J Auriacombe[a*], Natanya Meyer[b], [a]School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, [b]Sarchi Chair Entrepreneurship Education College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, South Africa,

This article focusses on the interrelationship between unobtrusive research methods and theory during the process of meaning-making in qualitative research. The article unravels the dynamics of meaning-making when using unobtrusive methods to develop an analytical framework, in the context of the broader debates and issues relating to qualitative research methodology. The methodology was based on a comparative desktop study to identify and assess the current state of the debate. It entailed a comprehensive literature survey of authoritative methodologists to conceptualise and contextualise the area of investigation. It was found that the limitations of the dependence on empirical techniques may in some cases hamper meaning-making. The conceptual analysis method could be more credible than survey findings as it supplies the reader with unobtrusive research techniques that study social behaviour to eliminate bias and promote conceptual and contextual analysis. The article concluded that qualitative science aims to develop concepts to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena represented by the concepts themselves and, to develop generalisable and valid theories. It is recommended that triangulating unobtrusive methods with other methods in a qualitative design – in terms of interpreting, conceptualising and abstracting – enhances meaning-making in Social Sciences to contribute to new knowledge.

Key words: *Conceptual Analysis, Literature Review, Methodology, Qualitative Research, Unobtrusive Research Techniques/Methods.*

JEL Classification: Z00

Introduction

The qualitative researcher constantly reflects, interprets and compares new information with what is already known and understood (Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012). When most qualitative researchers decide they need information for a research project, literature sources, surveys and interview projects immediately spring to mind. There is still an over-reliance on data that is derived from reactive social research methods, such as interviews and questionnaires. When reactive social research methods are compared to unobtrusive research methodologies, several advantages can be identified in favour of the latter. Unobtrusive research methodologies underpin the importance of existing knowledge, the ontological and epistemological foundations upon which the researcher's worldview is based and, the critical reflexive process by which new knowledge and direction are contextualised to the individual context of the researcher. However, the importance of existing knowledge, the researcher's background and stance (ontology and epistemology) and conscious engagement with him/herself is a critically reflective process to develop new knowledge and direction and is underpinned by unobtrusive research methodology. During the past decade, one of the most notable advances in methodology has been the increased use of unobtrusive research techniques as an alternative or enhancement to empirical survey research and is a valuable tool to provide useful information for qualitative research projects. In some cases, researchers have neglected the use of unobtrusive measures to analyse and interpret information to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena that concepts represent. Furthermore, Klofas and Cutshall (1985), Auriacombe and Schurink (2012) and Rossman and Rallis (2012) mention that it can be used to provide independent data sources to test theories, develop typologies, models and new theory or challenge existing findings. However, novice qualitative researchers are often afraid to conceptualise and risk interpreting and moving their analysis beyond the descriptive level. Contention pervades amongst qualitative researchers' perception of how best to understand and generate meaningful knowledge of the subjective meanings and interpretations of actors. How researcher beliefs play into this and how they should be moderated to provide a meaningful interpretation is also a matter on which little corroboration exists.

However, qualitative researchers' perceptions of how to best understand respondents' subjective meanings and how researchers' interpretations and beliefs of how knowledge should be generated are not always in line. Auriacombe and Schurink (2012) state that qualitative researchers diverge in their epistemological, ontological and methodological beliefs, as well as in their choice of specific methods. Besides, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue that many qualitative researchers, in most cases, would acknowledge that people's social meanings cannot be distant from the world around them and are tied to a particular context and perspective. The contextual perspective of the researcher frames an observation in the referential framework of their subjective interpretation of the social context of a phenomenon. Furthermore, it considers what takes priority, how the researcher reacts, and how the phenomenon is analysed,

interpreted and meaning derived and converted from data to text. However, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) argue that one's understandings or perceptions are not free of one's worldview, the influence and impact of earlier knowledge and experience, including cultural expectations and influences. Experiments, interviews, and questionnaires necessitate interaction between the researcher and the respondent. Within this context, the latter react to an inquiry created by the former. In contrast to this, unobtrusive research techniques do not require the aforementioned direct interaction, since the information used is gathered through recorded public documentation (Auriacombe, 2016). Public records such as books, research articles, published statistical records, judicial and archival records, census or election results, statistics on crime and educational data do not require participant consent to be accessed (Máté & Darabos, 2017; Sadaf et al., 2018). This type of data includes statutory, regulatory or policy documentation, institutional publications, solicited and unsolicited forms and documents, newspaper viewpoints, private sector data published by organisations, history and medical documents and other types of scientific records.

Consequently, participants are not aware of their participation in the study and in many cases, some types of errors are avoided (Bless & Achola, 1990; Auriacombe, 2007, 2016). Unobtrusive research techniques have the unique ability to study social behaviours without directly affecting it (Babbie, 2001). Although arguments can be made of the context in which the primary data was collected, this method helps reduce primary researcher bias and promotes contextual and conceptional analysis (Huysamen 1994). Although some researchers argue that unobtrusive methods can be used in isolation, Auriacombe, (2007) specifies that its practical value is higher when applied as a complementary research method. Large variations exist between data compiled employing the survey method, for example using questionnaires, and data derived from pre-existing records. The former only provides the properties of a group of individuals from a single moment in time and is an aggregate of separate information. However, the latter allows the researcher to retrieve data concerning a particular individual, event or occurrence (Bless & Achola, 1990). Many types of unobtrusive research methods are used in research studies, which include analysis of existing statistics and data, content analysis, historical/comparative analysis, conceptual analysis and document analysis. Auriacombe (2007, 2016) mentions that content analysis and analysis of existing data can be highly quantitative, while conceptual analysis, documentary analysis and historical/comparative analysis are generally qualitative.

This article aims to provide observations on enhancing meaning-making to promote conceptual and theory development. It addresses *inter alia* the following questions: how can a researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological conventions influence meaning-making? Furthermore, the role of previous knowledge and theory in meaning-making to create new knowledge and theory is investigated, identifying which conceptual analysis classifies as an

unobtrusive research method. Lastly, what combinations of analytical processes can be used to apply the data?

Methodology

Secondary data analysis by way of a desktop-based study has a rich intellectual tradition in the Social Sciences. In a similar vein, the methodological approach of this article is based on a desktop analysis by way of conceptual analysis to determine how an idea or concept relates to other philosophical problems (Bowen, 2009). Desk research is another name for secondary research where the author reviews what other researchers have done in the research project's domain. It is not about collecting data but instead about the role of the researcher carrying out desk research to review previous research findings, ideas and concepts to gain a broad understanding of the field. The basic idea is that a precise definition is necessary before one can investigate its meaning and relationship to other ideas and concepts. Undeniably, this is what generates understanding and expands knowledge within any subject area (USC Libraries. 2019).

Conceptual Clarifications

According to Schmitter (2009), various concepts can be normative with regards to the positive and negative assessments made by researchers as well as the different responses gained from that which they describe. Normally it is found to be quite difficult to separate a concept and its context, and not so much understanding its underlying meaning. The majority of concepts are derived from previous assumptions and owe their roots to other concepts. As a result of the aforementioned, Schmitter (2009) points out that the fundamentals from which these concepts are derived determine their value and probability.

For this article, it is essential to have an understanding of the following concepts:

Research can be explained as a systematic process of investigation to gain evidence which could provide a precise explanation or representation of a phenomenon (Mouton, 1996). When starting the design process of a research project, it is vital to select appropriate techniques and methods that suits the specific research study's goals and objectives. Mouton (1996) opines that studies should use different techniques and methods as each is different in its way and that each should be deemed suitable for achieving the specific objectives. Furthermore, Mouton (1996) contends that several different research methodologies can be used to understand and analyse social phenomena. A researcher does not only choose the appropriate techniques and methods, but also the methodological paradigm and whether the research will follow a qualitative design, quantitative design or a mixed method approach (combination of both), or decide to make use of unobtrusive research techniques. Research can be considered as a

systematic approach, including a rigorous study of a subject in most cases, and leads to the discovering of new information or to reach a new understanding which could potentially contribute to the existing scientific body of knowledge. Hale (2012) opines that science depends on both novel ideas and accumulating empirical findings that challenge prevailing theories. Mouton (2001) mentions that it is imperative to note that research methodology and design are not the same and are thus two entirely different aspects of a research project.

The methodology can be described as part of the research that explains and describes the reasons for the use of particular research methods by a researcher. An example would be describing the reason a qualitative method would be more appropriate to use than a quantitative method for a particular study. Schwandt (2007) defines the methodology as the concept of how a certain analysis should ensue. Also, a methodology should include the values and assumptions that form the foundation of the study as well as the criteria the researcher used to interpret the data and draw his resulting conclusions (Schwandt, 2007). It is generally accepted that a particular study will be influenced in various ways by the chosen methodological framework (Schram, 2006; McAleer et al., 2018). It is for this reason that a researcher needs to ensure that there is an amalgamation between the research methods chosen and his theoretical framework (Auriacombe, 2008).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as being transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary and even occasionally counter-disciplinary. It intertwines the humanities, social and physical sciences and can be many things at the same time. It is multi-paradigmatic in application and researchers implementing this method are sensitive to and aware of the value of this multidimensional approach. Users of this approach are dedicated to the naturalistic perspective and understanding human experience in an interpretive, understanding manner. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that this approach is essentially political and shaped by numerous ethical and political adherences. They further state that qualitative research pays attention to two issues at the same time. Firstly, it is drawn to a broad, post-experimental, interpretive, postmodern, feminist and critical feeling. Secondly, it is shaped to more closely define humanistic, post-positivist, positivist and naturalistic formations of human experience and the analysis thereof.

Auriacombe, 2008 contends that qualitative research could be seen as an accumulative term for different approaches, each having its methodological principles and theoretical background to address the aim of the research. Breuer and Schreier (2007) see qualitative research methods and methodology as a way of understanding how closely the methods are linked in which researchers using these methods conceptualise their own thoughts within the research they are doing. In this regard, qualitative research could fit in along a continuum with two dimensions. The first dimension emanates from a holistic, slightly paradigm-like notion, and the second by situational opportunistic and pragmatic methodological practices.

An unobtrusive research method or measure (also known as a nonreactive measure), is any method of data collection that directly removes the researcher from the interactions, events, or behaviour being investigated; for example, perusing public archival documents is an unobtrusive measure because the conditions under which the data is collected are not influenced by an intruding researcher (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) go on to state that unobtrusive measures avoid the contamination that might arise when investigators and research participants meet in data collection situations. The individual is unaware of forming part of the research, hence there is little chance for manipulating or producing biased results.

Maxwell (2005) describes conceptual analysis as a series of expectations, concepts, beliefs, theories and assumptions describing the particular research, and is normally seen as a way of providing a reader with an explanation of what the research study consists of. In addition, it is often agreed that the views, interrelationships and scholarly literature surrounding the particular variables form the basis of the research focus point (Zongozzi & Wessels, 2016). In essence, conceptual analysis can be seen as the means of defining concepts, refining research goals, substantiating research decisions made, developing relevant and realistic research questions, providing supportive arguments, evaluating and explain the theoretical framework, as well as clarifying the data collection and analysis methods employed. The term conceptualising includes not only the research problem but also includes the applicable conceptual framework and research design. For this reason, Auriacombe (2016) explains that conceptualising can be seen as a means of reasoning, where various distinct concepts or cases are studied to develop a pattern and ultimately lead to the creation of a conceptual category. Furthermore, Auriacombe (2016) points out those complex concepts can be distinguished in two ways. Firstly, a general theoretical explanation is built from a researcher's preferences, experiences and assumptions. Secondly, through drawing information from a generalised theory, various realities are analysed and accessed on how they relate to the theory and altering the theory according to the results gained from the analysis.

Previous Knowledge and Theory's Role in Meaning-Making

Qualitative researchers are known to associate themselves with their own epistemological, methodological, ontological and axiological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Depending on which one of the aforementioned assumptions social researchers pertain to, their research questions could produce varying answers (Mouton, 2001). For this reason, the role previous research and experience play in determining a researcher's perception cannot be denied. As a result, a researcher needs to understand how their perception and worldview (ontology) of how they believe the research should be conducted (epistemology) could influence their research and the interpretation thereof (Vrasidas, 2012). With regards to the aforementioned, it could be

assumed that every research question will most likely have a multitude of different answers Auriacombe (2009). The researchers' chosen research approach could be influenced by both the way he/she views reality (ontology) and how he/she believes that social studies can be undertaken (epistemology). In short, based on a researchers' belief the same study could be analysed and interpreted in various ways.

A researcher's philosophical beliefs are more than just theoretical or conceptual methods enabling them to collect specific types of data and responding to the certain research question(s). When taking a specific philosophical posture, it results in making certain assumptions about the nature of truth, human behaviour and representation of the 'other'. Schurink (2012) states that a philosophical approach can always be disputed by those who hold different approaches to the representation of the research findings. A researcher's personal experience dictates how they conduct and interpret their research. With this being said, existing theories and research are also used in the research process and do form part of the conceptualisation and interpretation of the current research. As Creswell (2009) reiterates, the findings of previous studies that are related to the research study and its conceptual framework are all surmised in the literature review of a particular study. Consequently, it is important that the qualitative part of a study incorporates current trends in the research field as well as contributes both theoretical and methodological aspects to the study (Lamont & White, 2005). Therefore, Glaser (2004) describes the key objective of qualitative research as a method of providing new conceptual concepts explaining the central social themes whilst still referring to the fundamental research focus. According to Saldana (2011), research decisions are tied together through both the theoretical and methodological aspects that are the conceptual framework. Also, the conceptual framework is ever evolving as the research progresses and more and more views and insights about the study are collected and analysed.

A research design, placed within a conceptual framework, will often consist of a central core and two different parts even though all the elements of a research design are known to be interconnected. The first sections of a research design normally focus on the theoretical background of the study (Maxwell, 2005). The various research questions formulated in a study are seen as the core of a research study, whereas the methodology forms part of the second section of the study. In other words, the first section of a particular study revolves around what the study is about, and the second section deals with how the study is conducted (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). However, it is important to note that these two aforementioned sections should not be viewed as isolated sections since they are indeed interrelated in the formulated research questions (Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012). In reality, there is a direct relationship between the theory and methodology of a study and the research questions of the particular study. It is for this reason that Babbie (2007) surmises that the theory and methodology of a study add details to the research question to ultimately explain the essence of the particular study. Furthermore, the research question dictates what information and theories are relevant to the study (Babbie,

2007). In line with Babbie (2007), a comprehensive study is formed by the chosen conceptual framework, as mentioned earlier.

With this being said, the opportunities and relationships that form part of understanding a particular study are intricate, with various interrelating themes. More importantly, where a researcher finds himself in the meaning-making process will determine his perspectives in a study. This is because during this process a researcher's experiences and perspectives are interrelated with existing literature. Adding new knowledge and insight into a particular research field is one of the more important aims of a study. In addition to considering the many ways of answering the formulated research questions in a study, new ways of understanding the research area are also brought forward due to the progressing nature of the meaning-making process (Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012).

Conceptualising Qualitative Research Through Unobtrusive Methods

Breuer and Schreier (2007), state that qualitative research, from a pragmatic viewpoint, is theorised as a process of answering research questions through the application of designated methods. Whether or not this pragmatic view will bring about a greater understanding regarding the 'life-world' of researchers' subjects, remains questionable. Qualitative research can be stripped back to as little as a situational problem-solving strategy when it is removed from the network of constitutive assumptions such as the ontological and epistemological, resulting in a set of procedures that can be taught and followed as steps.

Auriacombe (2009), highlights that researchers have to develop a research design that is well-conceptualised and promotes the inclusion of data analysis and reflexivity within their methods to relay theoretical concepts. According to Glaser (2004), this is an often-unattainable challenge as the excitement of generating one concept is all some need or can handle. Some researchers are not familiar with the process of conceptualisation though continuous comparison while coding, collecting theoretical information, sampling and analysing. This process includes writing up theoretical memos until the concept reaches saturation. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) argue that the challenges are about making choices about which research design or approach to use and to determine how the research must be integrated with the researcher's worldview, why the research is significant in the sophisticated discourses that exist in the academic domain and finding the correct manner in which to conceptualise the topic.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), claim that following the paradigmatic perspective, a researcher's philosophical concerns and approach to building knowledge should entail the selections of a fitting research methodology. The authors further add that the constant interaction between qualitative research theory and methods, which results in the production of knowledge that is both rich in theory and culturally contextual, is evidence that qualitative

research comprises an all-inclusive approach and is conceptualised as a process-driven, reflexive method. It also includes the selection of a suitable research strategy to achieve the objectives of the scientific undertaking. For example, objectivists are determined and motivated by the conviction that the meaning that the 'other' contributes and provides meaning to their worldview, and is best represented through an approximation of 'objective reality'. In contrast, constructivist researchers believe that there is no real truth 'out there', and that the inmost experiences of the 'other' could be represented best through a story-like reality that varies continuously. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) thus opine that epistemology is embedded within the ontology and more specifically the philosophical perspective or underpinning of the researcher. The authors further maintain that it is more than a mere concept or a series of methods that can simply be followed and that qualitative research is an intellectual and rigorous process that can be seen as a creative craft that the practitioner not only reports on, but also develops.

As a social science skill, the process of conceptualisation in qualitative research implies that learning and research should take up the process of actively constructing knowledge, a procedure where new information is combined with the insights and prior knowledge of the researcher(s) (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Thus, the researcher enters a process of meaning-making where their current level of knowledge, insight and understanding is deepened to a level of conceptual saturation (Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012). Qualitative research makes use of interpretive frameworks, analytical strategies and material practices. Consequently, qualitative researchers install a wide range of interconnected explanatory or interpretive practices, providing an improved understanding of the subject matter under discussion. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) opine that each research attempt provides a more refined understanding of the world from a different view. The authors further state that qualitative research follows an interpretive, naturalistic style. It follows an inductive reasoning procedure, whereby the researcher's experience intertwines with the literature, various meaning-perspectives, interrelationships between role-players and the environment and the methodological and theoretical frameworks all merged into a conceptual framework (Auriacombe, 2016). Yet, one's interpretations are not free from personal perceptions, cultural impacts, worldviews and the effect of prior experience and knowledge (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Towards Building a Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Glaser (2004), suggests that the core of social science theory is in the formation of clear concepts and that these concepts guide researchers' thinking and theorising. In general, researchers have some knowledge of what and how the specific research study will be conducted; this can be in the form of a tentative basic conceptual framework. The conceptual framework provides the researcher with a structure to reflect on, analyse and interpret observations. It informs the researcher which step will follow next, how to spot or identify new

information and to gradually improve or refine the data gathering and analysis procedures. A systematic approach assists the researcher to understand the full concept, as well as the different fragments forming the whole. By using a conceptual framework, the researcher methodically discovers new information, reaches novel conclusions of the associations between various constructs and comprehends a more profound level and holistic understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It allows the researcher to move beyond a mere description of 'what', 'why' and 'how'. It can be explained either graphically, or in the narrative format including the main factors and aspects to be studied, different concepts or variables and the supposed relationship among them (Vaughan, 2012). The thoughts on which the study is constructed change over time and the conceptual framework matures further as novel information is collected and assessed.

Maxwell (2005) reasons that the conceptual framework of an empirical study refers to a system of concepts, expectations, assumptions, theories and beliefs guiding the researcher and is usually regarded as an explanation posed to reach a better understanding of the issue under investigation. Furthermore, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) state that the objective of a conceptual framework is to determine and evaluate goals, improve or develop realistic and applicable research questions, validate arguments, elucidate the theoretical framework and logic or reasoning used, describe ideas, justify choices and direct data collection, analysis and interpretation. The conceptual framework is the operationalisation function of the theoretical framework within a study and therefore constitutes a complex part of the research design. Rossman and Rallis (2012) opine that qualitative researchers employ a conceptual framework to develop typologies, models and theories using a bottom-up approach. The authors add that conceptual framework structures logically outline the schools of thought that provide focus and direction to the central concepts from theory, key findings from research, authoritative statements and professional wisdom to serve as guidelines to complete a research project (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

An analytical framework or model arises from a conceptual and theoretical framework to facilitate the analysis process and it can be created through 'concept-mapping' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Among others, concept-mapping can take the form of an abstract framework that maps out the associations between concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a causal system of variables or influences, an analytical framework is a valuable tool in the scientific inquiry process and is most appropriate for mapping associations in studies of complex social occurrence. Generally, analytical frameworks disclose possible patterns and causal associations between different variances or variables (Ackron & Auriacombe, 2016). Consequently, analytical frameworks include research instruments, potential solution patterns, possible models, as well as methods for grouping complex information (Imenda, 2014). Furthermore, these frameworks or models map out the possible dimensions or vantage points that researchers can use in their research analyses (Ackron & Auriacombe, 2016). Conceptual

and analytical frameworks have their origin from an epistemological paradigm that a researcher applies when investigating a given research problem or objective. Such frameworks also institute a structure that systematically directs the research. Auriacombe (2016) states that a theoretical framework lies on a broad cognitive scale of abstraction. As such, it is extrapolated from a conceptual and contextual framework, where the literature study discloses the causal relationships between relevant concepts and processes.

Conclusions

Designing qualitative research is a dynamic process. The limitations depending on empirical techniques hamper meaning-making. Based on real life experiences, researchers (and other people) are constantly conceptualising and thus using interpretation to make sense of the world. The conceptual analysis may be more credible than survey findings, as unobtrusive research methods study social behaviour, which could lead to eliminating bias and promote conceptual and contextual analysis. Qualitative researchers should use critical analysis when following a paradigmatic approach. This includes reflexivity and inductive theory to develop a conceptual framework guiding their studies. Fundamentally, an inductive strategy suggests that one starts with the data collected from the topic under investigation and from that, infer general principles or theoretical statements. Notably, unobtrusive research methods based on secondary research data collection instruments help guide a research project. Moreover, conceptual analysis helps the researcher to examine and continuously reflect on the elementary methodological and theoretical assumptions made. Planning and implementing the research within a holistic and systemic conceptual framework may enable a researcher to gain insight and understand deeper emotions, behaviour or perceptions of participants within the reseach. In addition, it may enable the researcher to more clearly understand the relationships between participants' realities, and how certain aspects relate to the bigger picture or broader phenomenon being investigated. Observing social phenomena through an analytic, holistic or reductionist view, and by pursuing to find systems-integrated solutions that are based on the connections between theory, methodology and practice, may lead to a deeper understanding of the social phenomena. Moreover, it could provide feasible and practical solutions to social problems (Patton, 2008, Oláh et al., 2018).

The conceptual analysis develops novel theories and generates theoretical insights and implications that advance the study and practice of Social Sciences disciplines. It develops new approaches to conceive novel constructs and relationships about a phenomenon, problem or solution and integrates multiple theoretical perspectives into a cohesive new theory (integrating inter- and intra-disciplinary theories). It also challenges the existing theory and advances new philosophical foundations.

There are several advantages to secondary analysis. From a conceptual-substantive point of view, where from data collected at different times on similar issues, the historical context could be better understood, and change could be better described and explained. Secondary data also provides opportunities for replication and improves measurement. Also, research findings gain more credibility if they appear in some studies. Rather than to engage in several studies personally, the use of data collected by others can be implemented. The availability of long-term data (over time) also allows the researcher to utilise longitudinal research designs. A researcher can discovery baseline measurements and findings in studies conducted long ago and locate similar data collected more recently. Indeed, primary data can be compared with the data collected in earlier studies to provide a follow-up perspective (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). Secondary data may be the only source available to study certain research problems. It may also be used for comparative purposes and is less costly to obtain than primary data.

REFERENCES

Ackron, J. & Auriacombe, C.J. 2016. A Critical Analysis of the Approach to Local Economic Development (LED) in South Africa. *Administratio Publica*, 23(3): 141-165.

Auriacombe, C.J. & Schurink, E. 2012. Conceptualising Qualitative Research through a spiral of meaning making. *Administratio Publica*, 20(3): 144-169.

Auriacombe, C.J. 2007. Unobtrusive research methods: critical issues. *Journal of Public Administration*, 42(6): 458-471.

Auriacombe, C.J. 2008. *UJ Internal Handbook. Research design and methods for essays, dissertations and theses*, Johannesburg, University of Johannesburg (UJ).

Auriacombe, C.J. 2009. *Methodology Class Lecture Study Guide for Honours Students. 2005-2009,* Department of Public Governance. Johannesburg, UJ.

Auriacombe, C.J. 2016. Towards the construction of unobtrusive research techniques: Critical considerations when conducting a literature analysis. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 9(4):1-19.

Babbie, E. 2001. *The Practice of Social Research.* (9th Ed.). Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Thomson Learning.

Babbie, E. 2007. *The Practice of Social Research*. (1st Ed.), Belmont, California, Thomson Wadsworth.

Bentz, V.M. & Shapiro, J. J. 1998. *Mindful Inquiry in Social Research,* Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage.

Bless, C. & Achola, P. 1990. *Fundamentals of Social Research Methods: An African Perspective,* Lusaka, The Government Printer.

Bowen, G.A. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal 2009*, 9(2), pp.27-40.

Breuer, F. & Schreier, M. 2007. Issues in Learning About and Teaching Qualitative Research Methods and Methodology in the Social Sciences. Forum. *Qualitative Social Research*. 8(1). http://www.qualitative_research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/216/477. Date of access: 2 May 2012.

Creswell, J.W. 2009. *Research Design*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). 1998. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research, Theories and Issues*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2000. Strategies of inquiry. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2005. Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research.* (3rd Ed.). London, Sage, pp. 3.

Eriksson, P. & Kovalainen, A. 2008. *Qualitative Methods in Business Research,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Frankfort-Nachmias, C. and Nachmias, D., 1992. Research methods in the social sciences, (Edward Arnold, London). *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*.

Glaser, B.G. 2004. Remodeling Grounded Theory. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: *Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2). http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/http://www.qualitative research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/607/1316. Date of access 2 May 2012.

Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* London, Sage.

Hale, CD. 2012 Chapter 9 Research Design. Undated. Qualitative Methods. http://www.charlesdennishale.com/books/eets_ap/9_Qualitative_Research_Designs.pdf. Date of access: 2 May 2012.

Hesse-Biber, S. & Leavy, P. 2006. (Eds.) Introduction.. In Hesse-Biber, S. & Leavy, P. (Eds.). *Emergent Methods in Social Research within and Across Disciplines*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 5.

Huysamen, G.K. 1994. *Methodology for the Social and Behavioural Sciences,* Halfway House, Southern Book Publishers.

Imenda, S. 2014. Is there a conceptual difference between theoretical and conceptual frameworks? *Journal of Social Science*, 38(2):185-195.

Klofas, J. & Cutshall, C. 1985. Unobtrusive Research Methods in Criminal Justice: Using Graffiti in the Reconstruction of Institutional Cultures. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency. https;//journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs//10.1177/0022427885022004005. Date of access: 4 January 2018.

Lamont, M & White, P. 2005. Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research. http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/ses/soc/ISSQR_workshop_rpt.pdf. Date of access 27 June 2012.

Máté, D., Darabos, É. 2017. Measuring the accuracy of self-assessment among undergraduate students in higher education to enhance competitiveness. Journal of Competitiveness. 9 (2: 78-92.

Maxwell, J.A. 2005. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. (2nd Ed), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, pp. 123.

McAleer, M., Oláh, J., Popp, J. 2018. Pros and Cons of the Impact Factor in a Rapidly Changing Digital World. *Journal of Reviews on Global Economics*, 7:280-296. https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-7092.2018.07.25, http://www.lifescienceglobal.com/independent-journals/journal-of-reviews-on-global-economics/volume-7/85-abstract/jrge/3289-abstract-pros-and-cons-of-the-impact-factor-in-a-rapidly-changing-digital-world

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis.* (2nd Ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Mouton, J. 1996. *Understanding Social Research,* Pretoria, Van Schaik Publishers.

Mouton, J. 2001. How *to Succeed in your Master's and Doctoral Studies: A South African Guide and Resource Book,* Pretoria, Van Schaik.

Oláh, J., Kitukutha, N., Haddad, H., Pakurár, M., Máté, D., Popp, J. 2019. Achieving Sustainable E-Commerce in Environmental, Social and Economic Dimensions by Taking Possible Trade-Offs, *Sustainability*, 11(1):89:1-22., https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010089

Patton, M.Q. 2008. *Utilisation-Focused Evaluation*. (4th Ed.), Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.

Rossman, G.B. & Rallis, S.F. 2012. *Learning in the Field*: *An Introduction to Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Sadaf, R., Oláh, J., Popp, J., Máté, D. 2018. An Investigation of the Influence of the Worldwide Governance and Competitiveness on Accounting Fraud Cases: A Cross-Country Perspective. Sustainability. 10(3): 1-11.

Sadle River, NJ, Pearson Prentice Hall.

Saldana, J. 2011. *Understanding Qualitative Research: The Fundamentals*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Schmitter, P.C. 2009. The Confessions of a Repeat-offending and Unrepentant Conceptualist. *Participation*, 33(2):13-15.

Schram, T.H. 2006. *Conceptualising and Proposing Qualitative Research.* (2nd Ed.), Upper

Schurink, E. 2012. The Philosophy of Qualitative Research. Undated. http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/Evanthe-389163-philosophy-qualitative-research-quali-quest-part-1-know-yourself-fin-product-training-manuals-ppt-powerpoint/. Date of access: 18 May 2012.

Schwandt, T.A. 2007. *The Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry,* Thousand Oaks, Sage.

USC Libraries. 2019. https://libguides.usc.edu/humanitiesresearch/conceptual. Undated. Humanities Research Strategies: Conceptual Analysis. Date of access 13 January 2018.

Vaughn. L. 2012. Meaning Based Inquiry. http://www. *laurenevaughan.com/files/mblvaughan.doc.* Date of access: 2 August 2012.

Vrasidas, C. 2012. Undated. Making the Familiar Strange – and Interesting – Again: Interpretivism and Symbolic Interactionism in Educational Technology Research. http://vrasidas.intercol.edu/RMET.pdf. Date of access: 3 May 2012.

Zongozzi, J.N. & Wessels, J.S. 2016. Variables Influencing Case Study Research Design in Public Administration: A Conceptual Framework. *Administratio Publica*, 24(2):212