

ASSIGNMENT SIX

6.1 Rigour in Research

Rigour is a term used in qualitative research to refer to the quality or state of being rigorous, valid, credible, severe, believable and thorough (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000a; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000b; Shenton, 2002). Rigour further means being true in action and treatment of research data and findings based on strict and logical sequence of conduct, judgment and decision making in the entire research process (Leninger, 1994; Silverman, 2000b). It is argued that if qualitative research rejects the concepts of validity and reliability, we reject the concept of rigour (Leninger, 1994; Silverman, 2000b). Rejection of rigour undermines acceptance of qualitative research as a systematic process that can contribute to the advancement of knowledge (Leninger, 1994; Silverman, 2000b).

Hence, research into the roles of CDs and TPOs relies on insightful literature to establish rigour by considering the methodological trinity of reliability, validity and generalization as well as some of the issues relating to establishing rigour in naturalistic inquiry. In the research rigour, a major concern presents the need for the approach adopted in this study to reject anything that might link qualitative inquiry to the positivist quantitative approach; hence, the rejection of the terms validity and reliability (Peck and Secker, 1999; Whittemore et al., 2001). Therefore, it is through rigorous processes that the researchers attempted to achieve high level of validity and reliability.

The study considered rigour as a way of demonstrating integrity and competence (Aroni et al., 1999) and as a way of demonstrating the legitimacy of the research process (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001). This was to eliminate the danger that research may become fictional journalism, worthless as contributing to knowledge (Morse et al., 2002). As a qualitative research, rigour was placed within the epistemology.

Even though the concept of rigour is perceived as an empirical analytical term and therefore does not fit into an interpretive approach (Silverman, 2000b; Slevin and Sines, 2000; Wainwright, 1997; Webb et al., 1966), the researcher in this study relied on the concepts of Aroni *et al.* (1999), who suggest that concern about the demonstration of rigour is due to a struggle for

legitimacy in a discipline that is dominated historically by the positivist paradigm. Thus, the researcher considered it as a means of representing reality and legitimising the findings about the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC. Rigour was further considered in this research as a dimension of demonstrating the researcher's integrity and competence in handling the multi-dimensions of the study topic in relation to economics, political sciences, and social sciences.

Rigour was observed in the research as the means to show how ethics played a major role despite the Critical Theory paradigm that the study adopted. This was in line with Webb et al. (1966) who suggest that 'the standards for quality in interpretive social science are also standards for ethics' (p.287). The attributes of rigour, which spans all research approaches including a study into the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC, include the construction, application and operationalisation of attributes that require innovation, creativity and transparency in qualitative study (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It therefore implied to this qualitative study that the researcher had to qualitatively rely on his personal creativity but in a transparent manner with the CDs and TPOs to achieve high level of rigour.

6.2 Ensuring Trustworthiness in Research

Trustworthiness in this research was based on the question "How congruent are the findings with reality?" (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, p. 67) Ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Wainwright, 1997). Hence, this research ensured high level of trustworthiness through a number of creative steps as required by rigour. These include considering: the background, qualifications and experience of the researcher (Slevin and Sines, 2000), the adoption of well established research methods, the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations, random sampling, triangulation (Arminio and Hultgren, 2002; Cutcliffe and McKenna, 1999; Denzin, 1989) ensuring honesty in informants, iterative questioning, negative case analysis, frequent debriefing sessions, peer scrutiny of the research project, the researcher's "reflective commentary (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000a; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000b; Leninger, 1994; Silverman, 2000b), member checks, thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and examination of previous research findings (Donmoyer, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Kvale, 1995). Hence, all these approaches confirm the level of trustworthiness exhibited in the study of roles of CDs and TPOs.

6.2.1 Background, qualifications and experience of the researcher

In a qualitative research, the credibility of the researcher is important in since it is the person who is the major instrument of data collection and analysis (Lincoln, 1995). A scrutineer's trust in the researcher is also of equal importance to the adequacy of the research procedures themselves. Patton adds that arrangements by which the investigator is funded should also be addressed (Patton, 1979). Any approvals given to the project by those providing access to the organisation and individual participants should also be made explicit (Shenton, 2002) . Based on all these views, the researcher should first of all be understood as a PhD student with versed knowledge in conducting qualitative research that is linked to not only economics but also social sciences and political sciences. The researcher could not assume that the CDs and TPOs could trust him in his research hence embracing a research approach like ethnography helped to create the trust between the study population and the researcher. Critical Theory as the fundamental paradigm in the research was adopted to further understand the CDs and TPOs should the respondents fails to portray the expected trust levels. The research was adequately funded after its approval on the basis of relevance to current diplomatic relations in the GCC. Hence, there should be no worries on inadequate data and information.

6.2.2 The adoption of well established research methods

Just like other previous social studies (Dervin et al., 1976; Yin, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) ; Shenton, 2002; Silverman, 2001), this research adopted similar qualitative data collection and analysis procedures and practices that support its trustworthiness. The researcher considered a number of research approaches to analyse data but majorly on the Grounded Theory paradigm. In this paradigm, approaches like ontology, epistemology, and methodology were considered part of ensuring trustworthiness in the entire research. Based on ontology concept, the reality about the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC was considered in the dimension of history and formed by values that are crystallised over time. By adopting the constructivism approach, the researcher considered that reality about the role of CDs and TPOs can be locally constructed based on experience shared by many participants in the study. Hence, this led to the development of both historical and relative realism, which can be collectively considered to add much trustworthiness in the research findings.

Based on epistemology concept, the investigator and the investigated must be linked (Pitts, 1994), which in this study was evident in the economic profession of the researcher and the research topic that was connected to economic dimension. Based on this link, the researcher subjectively acknowledged that historical values influence the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC hence the economic history found relevance in achieving trustworthiness in this research. Basing constructivism approach on Critical Theory further required the researcher to create findings as the investigation proceeds (Silverman, 2001).

Methodological approach in the Critical Theory dimension prompted the researcher to consider dialogue with the study population including CDs and TPOs in the GCC. The methodological approach in this study further required that the researcher not only created a consensus with the study population (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) on the roles of CDs and TPOs but also through individual constructions as the research progresses.

6.2.3 Early familiarity with the culture of participants

Before the researcher could embark on first data collection and dialogue with the study population, an initiative was taken to develop early familiarity with the culture of participants (Stake, 1994). This may be achieved via consultation of appropriate documents and preliminary visits to the organisations themselves. “Prolonged engagement” (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.76) between the investigator and the participants was key to this process so that the researcher could gain adequate understanding of CDs and TPOs within the cultural context of the GCC. This helped to establish a relationship of trust. The researcher share similar cultural background with the CDs and therefore has adequate understanding on personal and organisational cultures of the TPOs. Intensive and extensive literature review was one approach that the researcher employed to gain more knowledge and understanding of CDs and TPOs. This was reinforced by preliminary visits to the TPOs considered in the study. However, the researcher observed great care not to be immersed in the local national and organizational cultures of the TPOs so that the professional judgments arrived at could not be influenced.

6.2.4 Random sampling

The researcher employed random sampling approach to recruit the TPOs. Hence, even if the CDs were recruited on the basis of purposive sampling, a random approach that was used to recruit

the TPOs could help the study to eliminate researcher biasness (Silverman, 2001). Random sampling also helps to ensure that any “unknown influences” are distributed evenly within the sample (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). With random sampling as a way of achieving trustworthiness, the researcher was able to gather multiple voices, exhibiting characteristics of similarity, dissimilarity, redundancy and variety (Lincoln, 1995) , which could collectively help to understand the role of entire body of CDs and TPOs in the GCC. However, great care was observed to ensure that the CDs and TPOs were actually from the GCC so that the findings could exhibit high assurance. This was based on the concept that a random sampling procedure provides the greatest assurance that those selected are a representative sample of the larger group (Pitts, 1994).

6.2.5 Triangulation

Triangulation may involve the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups and individual interviews, which form the major data collection strategies for much qualitative research (Yin, 1994). Based on this fact, this research employed diverse qualitative data collection and analysis approaches hence exhibits high trustworthiness on the adequacy and reliability of the findings. According Poston-Anderson and Edwards (1993), the use of different methods in helps to compensate for individual limitations of the approaches. The researcher further considered to access supporting information from the literature on the commercial diplomacy. The researcher ensured that opportunities to examine any documents referred to by informants during the actual data collection were seized to shed more light on the roles of the CDs and TPOs.

Another form of triangulation may involve the use of a wide range of informants (Dervin et al., 1976). This was achieved in this research through the use of various data sources. The individual viewpoints and experiences in serving as CDs in TPOs were verified against others hence a rich picture of the study aim and objectives was constructed based on the contributions of a range of people and documents (Dervin et al., 1976). Here, the research examined documents created corporately by each participating TPO as well as those relating to the organisations but produced externally. The researcher considered site triangulation (Shenton, 2002) by considering participation of informants within several organisations so as to reduce the effect on the study of particular local factors peculiar to one institution (Shenton, 1981) .

6.2.6 Assurance of informants' honesty

The researcher employed tactics to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing data (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Here, every CD who was considered for the study was first given the opportunity to refuse to participate. This was to ensure that the data collection sessions involve only those who were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer relevant data freely to this research. The researcher encouraged participants to be frank from the outset with the aim to establish a rapport and indicate that there are no right answers to the questions that will be asked (Patton, 1979). Additionally, the researcher assured respondents of his independence status in the study of role of CDs and TPOs. The participants were further granted the permission to withdraw since this could add further approval on the trustworthiness of their views to the study questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

6.2.7 Iterative questioning

Besides the strategies outlined above, specific ploys may be incorporated to uncover deliberate lies (Dervin, 1983). These might include the use of probes to elicit detailed data and iterative questioning. Hence, the researcher ensured that he returns to matters previously raised by an informant and extracts related data through rephrased questions. Hence, in cases where contradictions emerged, the researcher perceived them as falsehoods hence discarded the suspect data.

6.2.8 Frequent debriefing sessions

The researcher had sessions of frequent debriefing with the supervisor. Through discussion with the supervisor, the view of the researcher was widened. Hence, such collaborative sessions were used to form the basis of discussing alternative approaches (Brewer and Hunter, 1989). Since the researcher employed constructivism approach, the frequent meetings with the supervisor provided a sounding board for the researcher to test his developing ideas and interpretations. Highlights on the probing from others may help the researcher to recognise his own biases and preferences.

6.2.9 Peer scrutiny of the research project

Opportunities for scrutiny of the project by colleagues, peers and academics should be permitted in a trustworthy research (Bouma and Atkinson, 1995). On this note, this study was well supported by existing peer studies, which the researcher used to establish literature gaps in the role of CDs and TPOs. Colleagues also scrutinised the subject of this research and confirmed its relevance in the context of GCC. Here, the fresh perspective that such individuals brought allowed the researcher to base his methodology and methods on objectives, questions, and observation on CDs and TPOs. Hence, the overall research design that was developed based on peer scrutiny was strong to achieve trustworthiness in the results.

6.2.10 Researcher's "reflective commentary"

Besides the peer scrutiny, the researcher is supposed to evaluate the project, again as it develops (Stake, 1994). In this research, this was achieved through a reflective commentary (Stake, 1994), which was partly devoted to the effectiveness of the techniques that have been employed. The researcher employed this approach to trustworthiness by recording the researcher's initial impressions of each data collection session, patterns appearing to emerge in the data collected and theories generated. This helped to develop "progressive subjectivity", which is mainly concerned with the researcher's own developing constructions considered critical in establishing credibility.

6.2.11 Member checks

Member checks are considered the single most important provision that can be made to strengthen a study's credibility (Preece, 1994). Checks relating to the accuracy of the data may take place "on the spot" in the course, and at the end, of the data collection dialogues (Preece, 1994). Hence, the researcher ensured it at all stages of the study. The researcher put emphasis on whether the respondents consider that their words match what they actually intended. Another aspect of member checking that this research used involve verification of the researcher's constructed theories and inferences formed during the dialogues.

6.2.12 Thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny

A detailed description in the research area is an important provision for promoting credibility. This helps to convey the actual situations that have been investigated and the contexts that surround them (Silverman, 2000). In this view, the research collectively considered CDs and TPOs as one rich unit that the researcher could base his questions. The research further considered the economic, political and socio-cultural environment in which the CDs and TPOs discharge their roles in promoting trade in the GCC. This implies that the constructed concepts on the roles of the CDs and TPOs were not only based on organisational contexts but also the external environment.

6.2.13 Examination of previous research findings

The ability of the researcher to relate his or her findings to an existing body of knowledge is a key criterion for evaluating works of qualitative inquiry (Erlandson et al., 1993). Hence, in further attempt to achieve trustworthiness in this research, *the* researcher took time to examine how the findings relate with past studies on the subject of role of CDs and TPOs.

6.3 Reflexivity in Research

Reflexivity involves examining different conceptualisations of self when collecting and analysing data. Construction of meanings as was portrayed in this research requires something to be constructed, the researcher as a constructing subject, and an object or a community that constructs the researcher (Poston-Anderson and Edwards, 1993). Hence, self-reflexivity, which basically lies in the researcher's personal thoughts. There is also reflexivity that involves acknowledging the constructive elements without giving precedence to any part of the process since construction requires a continuum of interaction (Chen and Hernon, 1982). It implies that both objective and subjective reflexivity form part of the entire reflection in the study.

Reflexivity involves intense scrutiny about how we know about or understand something. It involves an iterative and interactive dialogue about past experience in relation to present perspectives and future possibilities (Dervin et al., 1976). It is about providing interpretations of data and issues raised in the field, which in this study was not simply by reporting reality about the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC.

Criticisms are part of reflexivity and involve self-centredness, self absorption and isolationism (Yin, 1994). Hence, reflexivity in this research entailed considering oneself, as a researcher, being parts of the wider economic, social and political context of CDs and TPOs. In the ethnographic view, which this research employed, reflexivity draws together several levels regarding: whether the researcher is known to be a researcher by all those involved, by some or none, what is known about the research and by whom, which activities are engaged in and which are not?, how does this locate the researcher in the group and group membership?, what is the orientation of the researcher? (Silverman, 2001)

6.3.1 Self-reflection in Relation To Methods and Methodological Approaches

In an article encouraging researchers to be reflexive about how they analyse other people's accounts of their lives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), this research focus on the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC. The researcher majorly employed reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. The reflexive data analysis will be considered ideal for this study to achieve its aim and objectives owing to the fact that it is acknowledged within social science research (Merriam, 1998). The researcher considered reflexive analysis in this study due to its widespread recognition that it can make the study make meaning from the collected data rather than found them (Merriam, 1998). However, reflexivity has not been translated into data analysis practice in terms of the difficulties, practicalities and methods of doing it (Shenton, 2002). Therefore, the researcher relied on the assumption built into many data analysis methods that: the researcher, the method, and the data are separate entities rather than reflexively interdependent and interconnected (Lincoln, 1995). Hence, the methods presented in the study of the role of CDs and TPOs continue to be presented as a series of neutral, mechanical and de-contextualized procedures that are applied to the data and that take place in a social vacuum.

The use of the insider-outsider continuum as a heuristic device with doctoral students was key to study the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC. Based on this notion of insider to outsider position, this study asserts its reflexology due to its heuristic views (Shenton, 1981). On this basis, the researcher considers himself as an outsider researcher to the role of CDs and TPOs who possesses no prior knowledge about how CDs and TPOs operate to inform the final reflections that will be made. This gives more reliability to this study owing to fact that the view will directly come from internal players and neither influenced by the researcher in any manner apart

from using the existing theory to gauge and interpret the gathered practices, which can depict their role.

The perceptive analysis that has been taken by the researcher in the role of CDs and TPOs was initially triggered by professional and occupational moves of the researcher while doing the research. To make the study exhibit much reflectivity, the researcher considers very illuminating methodology that covers spatial, economical, sociological and psychological considerations, which are linked to both regional and international relations that the GCC has with member, neighboring, and international countries. The grounded theory approach chosen for the study enabled the researcher not only to have adequate data to compare and contrast but also to notice the strengths and weaknesses of informants, which must be reflexively treated to make the study portray high level of reflexivity. Adoption of varying analysis approaches at every stage of the research analysis would further show admirable reflexivity in the entire research.

The researcher's understanding of how the data analysis processes, and projects as a whole, were influenced by epistemological, ontological and theoretical concepts as well as other personal, interpersonal, emotional, institutional and pragmatic influences. In this view, the time and distance from academic notions related with doctoral studies (Pitts, 1994), which the researcher took permitted more reflexivity about the entire research processes.

Moreover, intense methodological and epistemological musing on reflexivity can run counter to the aims and time lines of the institutional organizations that fund research projects (Ringwald, 2004; Richardson, 2000). Reflecting on this research reflexive processes therefore deals with questions for about the possibilities and limits of reflexivity. Here, the researcher considered building and enhancing reflexivity into the research methods and processes, and by creating appropriate times, spaces and contexts of the roles of CDs and TPOs to be reflexive. At the same time, this study treated reflexivity to be within the limit of methods and methodology applied. The researcher further considers reflexivity within the dimension of how far we can know and understand what shapes our research at the time of conducting it (Silverman, 2000b) given that these influences may only become apparent once we have left the research behind and moved on in our personal and academic lives (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

6.3.2 The 'Reflexive Turn' in the Social Sciences

The 'problem of reflexivity' and the ways in which 'our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others' (Denzin, 1997: 27) arises through the recognition that social researchers are integral to the social world.

The interpretive and critical discourses that were adopted in this research recognise that knowledge and understanding are contextually and historically grounded, as well as linguistically constituted (Webb et al. (1966; Ringwald, 2004). This is why the research considered historical, economic, political, and social context of CDs and TPOs in the GCC. The 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences has contributed towards demystification and greater understanding of theoretically and empirically based knowledge construction processes (Webb et al. (1966; Ringwald, 2004). The partial, provisional and perspectival nature of knowledge claims is recognised. There is increased awareness that '*how* knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to *what* the claims are' (Slevin and Sines, 2000, p.422). In this view, the development of concepts on the role of CDs and TPOs was regarded as a social activity, which is culturally, socially and historically justified.

6.3.3 Reflexivity and Research Practice

It should be noted that the implications of theoretical and philosophical views on reflexivity, which helped this research to construct knowledge for empirical sociological research practice remain under-developed (Wainwright, 1997). Abstract, analytical and philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge and arguments about research methods are disconnected and 'moving in opposite directions (Aroni et al., 1999; Ringwald, 2004; Labaree, 2002; Le Gallais, 2003). Moreover, this theoretical-empirical divide can be misleading since both theorists and empirical researchers are in the business of constructing knowledge.

This was a qualitative research and was not exempted from applying reflexivity. Here, the attention was drawn to the importance of recognising the social location of the researcher as well as the way in which emotional responses to respondents could shape interpretations of their views. To achieve this, the researcher considered the voice-centered relational method of data analysis (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). Situating oneself socially and emotionally in relation to respondents is an important element of reflexivity (Peck and Secker, 1999).

The reflective approach revolves around a set of three or more readings of the interview text. One of these readings involves a 'reader-response' element in which the researcher read for himself in the text (Whittemore et al., 2001). During such process, the researcher placed himself, his background, history and experiences in relation to the role of CDs and TPOs. The researcher reads the narrative *on his own terms*, listening for how he responds emotionally and intellectually to the informant's views person (Brown, 1994: 392).

In practical terms, a 'worksheet' technique is used, which the researcher lays out the respondent's words in one column and the researcher's reactions and interpretations in an adjacent column (Gilligan et al., 1990; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). This helped the researcher to examine how and where some of his views might affect the interpretation of the respondent's words. This reading is based on the assumption that locating ourselves socially, emotionally and intellectually allows us to retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between the respondent's narrative and our interpretation (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001; Morse et al., 2002). As a researcher, self reflections and position on the role of CDs and TPOs would be drawn between what the existing concepts purport and what practice reveal. However, to make literature have relevance in reflexivity but should be placed in relation to the GCC as well as based on evidential practices in the GCC region by these CDs and TPOs.

6.4 Conclusion

Research into the role of CDs and TPOs need to be explicit about how and why the researcher chose specific legitimizing criteria in ensuring the robustness of the inquiries. Hence, the research considered rigour from diverse literature support by considering the methodological trinity of reliability, validity and generalization and some of the issues relating to establishing rigour in naturalistic inquiry. The study considered rigour as a way of demonstrating integrity and competence the researcher considered it as a means of representing reality and legitimising the findings about the role of CDs and TPOs in the GCC. Rigour was adopted to demonstrate the researcher's integrity and competence and as a means to show how ethics played a major role despite the Critical Theory paradigm that the study adopted. The attributes of rigour, which span this research, include the construction, application, and operationalisation of attributes that require innovation, creativity and transparency.

Trustworthiness in part of rigour in ensuring credibility, which in this research was based on the question “How congruent are the findings with reality?” The research ensured high level of trustworthiness through a number of creative steps as required by rigour. These steps considered: Background, qualifications and experience of the researcher, The adoption of well established research methods, Early familiarity with the culture of participants, Random sampling, Triangulation, Assurance of informants’ honesty, Iterative questioning, Frequent debriefing sessions, Peer scrutiny of the research project, Researcher’s “reflective commentary”, Member checks, Thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and Examination of previous research findings.

Reflexivity is part of rigour in this research, which requires something to be constructed, the researcher as a constructing subject, and an object or a community that constructs the researcher. Self-reflexivity plays a major role in acknowledging the constructive elements without giving precedence to any part of the process. Reflexivity in the research involves intense scrutiny about how we know about or understand something. Thus, Reflexivity in this research entailed considering oneself, as a researcher, being parts of the wider economic, social and political context of CDs and TPOs. In self-reflection in relation to methods and methodological approaches, the researcher employed reflexivity in qualitative data analysis to make the study make meaning from the collected data rather than found them. Based on the insider to outsider position, this study asserts its reflexivity due to its heuristic views.

The perceptive analysis in the role of CDs and TPOs was initially triggered by professional and occupational moves of the researcher. Adoption of varying analysis approaches at every stage of the research analysis further show admirable reflexivity in the entire research. The time and distance from academic notions related with doctoral studies, which the researcher took permitted more reflexivity about the entire research processes. The researcher considered building and enhancing reflexivity into the research methods and processes, and by creating appropriate times, spaces and contexts of the roles of CDs and TPOs to be reflexive. The interpretive and critical discourses that were adopted in this research recognise that knowledge and understanding are contextually and historically grounded, as well as linguistically constituted.

However, it should be noted that the implications of theoretical and philosophical views on reflexivity, which helped this research to construct knowledge about the role of CDs and TPOs remain under-developed. The researcher considered the voice-centered relational method of data analysis. The reflective approach revolves around a set of three or more readings of the interview text on the researcher's own terms, listening for how he responds emotionally and intellectually to the informant's views person. Succinctly, self reflections and position on the role of CDs and TPOs would be drawn between what the existing concepts purport and what practice reveal.

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