The Dual Technique Model within Case Study Approaches to Cross-cultural Management Research in China

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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates the effectiveness of a dual technique model of interviewing, which combines narrative and depth interview techniques, within the case study method in a cross-cultural management research setting, an Australian MNC operating in China. The case study is acknowledged to be a highly appropriate method for gaining insight into the complicated area of cross-cultural management enquiry in order to generate new theories. In this context, we propose a model which combines the narrative and the depth interview techniques in the interview process, and have illustrated its usefulness with material drawn from the China-Australia cross-cultural research interface.

After establishing the rationale for the model, the discussion focuses on the practicalities of applying it in interviews, in relation to the preparation, warm-up and trust building phases, and in the exercise of personal interviewing skills in cross-cultural research, in this case, the advantage of the interviewer being bilingual.

INTRODUCTION

"Business executives face problems in unique, unstructured, turbulent environments and require a research approach that offers creativity, flexibility and spontaneity" (Milliken 2001). Qualitative research methods have the capacity to provide better understanding and possible solutions to these complex issues (Healy and Perry, 2000). In this paper we argue for the appropriateness of qualitative research methods, specifically the case study method, in cross-cultural management studies. We develop a "dual technique" model as a tool for data collection within the case study strategy. We use the example of an Australian operation in China to demonstrate the effectiveness of the model as a qualitative research tool in a situation where cross-cultural communication skills are also required. The contribution of this paper is to

point out the effectiveness of combining two techniques in the duel technique model for use within a case study and to detail experiences drawn from the actual research in support of this (Gummesson 2005).

THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The case study method was used to investigate the problems created by cross-cultural factors in international business, more specifically in international strategy formation, human resource management, marketing and communication and negotiation in an Australian MNC operating joint ventures in China. The MNC, code named "ABC Group", entered the Chinese market in 1993 and established three joint ventures in Shanghai, Guangdong and Tianjin by 1995. The organisation is a multi-beverage business in Australia with markets across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas and Asia. It is currently turning over 5.1 billion Australian dollars a year. Research was carried out among Australian executives in Australia and Australian expatriates, overseas Chinese and local Chinese staff in its China operations. The project described in this paper was large in scale, with over 75 interviews conducted in a range of international locations: Melbourne, Brisbane, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong. A single researcher with dual language literacy was used throughout the project for consistency of interpretation and cross-linking of information, as aspects facilitating the interview process (Eisenhardt 1989). In the next section the suitability of the qualitative method is argued and the appropriateness of case studies in cross-cultural management research is also presented.

QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE

Qualitative research is a holistic approach that aims to describe an event within its context with the aim to explore and understand people's experiences, feelings and beliefs (Clarke and Jack 1998). It is a distinct field of inquiry that encompasses both

micro- and macro analyses (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004) which draws more on the implicit knowledge (Awad and Ghaziri 2004) of researchers by giving space to multiple epistemological positions. It includes any research types that do not produce findings via statistical procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The landscape of qualitative research is rich because it does not privilege one philosophical or methodological approach within the research process (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). Qualitative approaches have not been popular in the past (Van Maanen 1998), particularly in management research, for the following reasons: 1. It is more difficult to administrate a qualitative project, because the choices involved in data gathering, recording and interpretation are more subjective. 2. The researchers' ability to interact with respondents is one of the major elements in a research process; 3. Qualitative research is more expensive and time consuming. Hence it is a less favourable choice by researchers who are subject to the pressures of change in academic structures in universities in the U.S., U.K. and Australia; 4. Theory-testing research techniques have become fashionable and theory building techniques have fallen out of favour (Van Maanen 1998); 5. The use of computers and the development of computer-aided software in research have made research using large data bases possible. The ability to produce analytical results rapidly has therefore become very attractive to many researchers (Fielding and Lee 1998; Van Maanen 1998).

Repeatedly researchers have observed that qualitative method papers do not get published as easily as quantitative papers (Gummesson 2000; Lee 2001; Gephart and Rynes 2004; Symon and Cassell 2004; Cassell, Symon et al. 2006). One major obstacles is how the "gatekeepers" judge "quality" through the peer review process (Cassell, Symon et al. 2006). Journal article reviewers are often limited in their own personal experience to one style of data collection and analysis, hence may experience

difficulty in appreciating the nature of the contribution to knowledge generated through interviews and different ways of qualitative data evaluation.

In recent years Gummesson (2000) and others such as Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) has recognised that because culturally influenced human behaviour is a key factor in organisational performance, the qualitative method is a more suitable method for studies of human behaviour, especially in a cross-cultural context, than quantitative surveys. Moreover, the current divide between cross-cultural studies in business management and in anthropology has been identified at a level of attention where more collaboration between the two has been advocated; anthropology is seen as providing a natural source of effective management research tools in order to guide the performance of organisations in increasingly cross-cultural contexts (Redding 2004). Arising from this discussion, the suitability of the case study as a particularly method for cross-cultural management studies is argued below, using the context of an Australian business in China as an example which demonstrates its efficacy.

THE CASE STUDY IN CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT

Case study as methodology is broadly used in the social sciences and is originated in anthropological and sociological studies and three major schools of thoughts have provided strong influence in this area: British Social Anthropology exemplified by the work of Bronslaw Malinowski, whose writings on the Trobriand Islanders demonstrated the effectiveness of participant observation (1922); French sociology, exemplified by the family studies of the sociologist and economist; Federic Le Play, and the Chicago School of Sociology, various members of which were exhorted to use direct observation to study the "real" people, the migrants and marginal people, crowding into the rapidly expanding urban landscape of 1920s and 1930s Chicago

(O'Reilly 2005). Participant or direct observation of holistic situations is the methodological themes of these foundation studies.

The case study can demonstrate the lessons learnt in all their intricacy by international managers, as the researcher undergoes the process of sieving through the complexity of data arising from business operations in different cultural, especially cross-cultural, settings. The case study strives to highlight the main features or attributes of social life (Hamel, Dufour et al. 1993) and also explains the causal links in real-life interactions that are too complex for a quantitative survey to cope with (Eisenhardt and Graebmner, 2007). It can describe an interaction in detail and the real-life context in which it occurred by exploring those situations in which the interactions being evaluated have no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin 1994). Hence, case studies can best capture the dynamics of a complex research situation (Morse and Richards 2002; Gummesson 2006) such as cross-cultural management research where there are numerous and frequently unpredictable variables and complexities of interrelationship.

In international management studies, which necessarily involve cross-cultural issues, organisational life can be presented in a similar way to the presentation of social life in anthropological research. For instance, an inductive approach, and the open-ended interview method favoured by the Chicago school (Hamel, Dufour et al. 1993), has the potential to reveal the complex nature of relationship between individuals in an organisation.

The use of qualitative research methodologies, especially the case study approach is also advocated for marketing research which necessarily involves the description and analysis of complex social reality (Healy and Perry, 2000). In an article advocating the use of the scientific paradigm of realism, as opposed to that of positivism, for

marketing research, Healy and Perry (2000)make useful distinctions between the ontological, epistemological and methodological elements of these competing approaches. While the positivist approach assumes that reality is real and apprehensible (ontology) and that the findings are objective and true (epistemology) based on a quantitative survey which seeks to verify hypotheses (methodology), the realist paradigm holds that reality is real but only imperfectly captured (ontology), generating objective findings which are probably true (epistemology), and utilizing cases studies and other, even quantitative methods for triangulation. These are juxtaposed against the more subjective paradigms of critical theory and constructivism, where the reality is constructed by those who participate in it, including the researcher, who researcher with a transformative (critical theory) or passionate (constructivist) agenda and whose findings are subjective in nature (p.119). They conclude that "realism relies on multiple perceptions about a single reality" (p. 125) and is suitable for theory building, rather than theory testing, given the complexity of the world it seeks to explain (p. 125).

Culture is a living, dynamic entity. Identification of groups as possessing specific cultural attributes is often thwarted by the passage of time as the cultural attributes of communities change constantly, especially in the context of dramatic economic development (Gummesson 2006) as is dramatically illustrated in the case of China. Understanding the complex issues in the case study proposed here, which looks at behaviour in a management setting in China requires qualitative methods to describe situations in their natural setting. Cultural change is a complex issue within any socio-cultural context (Chung 2006) and qualitative research is superior in handling this research challenge (Gummesson 2006). Our case study, qualitative approach, using a combined technique which both elicits a narrative description of the informant's

reality as well as probes for the focused details of that reality, aligns with this approach advocated by Healy and Perry in a similar area of social complexity.As an example, China has experienced dramatic change since the "open door" policy in 1978 (Woo and Prud'homme 1999). The influence of Western culture has modified a number of Chinese values within certain groups of the population. To combat the difficulties and overcome the complexity of understanding the consequences of cultural differences among managers, we proposed the following model as an effective tool in qualitative research which uses the case study method.

THE DUAL TECHNIQUE MODEL IN DATA COLLECTION

Based on the narrative theory of Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1991), the following model is proposed and developed for the case study method in a cross-cultural setting to effectively gain the best data from respondents. Since multiple methods in the same case study may give a deeper understanding of the case and data collected (Woodside and Wilson 2003), the model generated encourages researchers to entertain a paradigm shift with enthusiasm rather than with apprehension (Gummesson 2005).
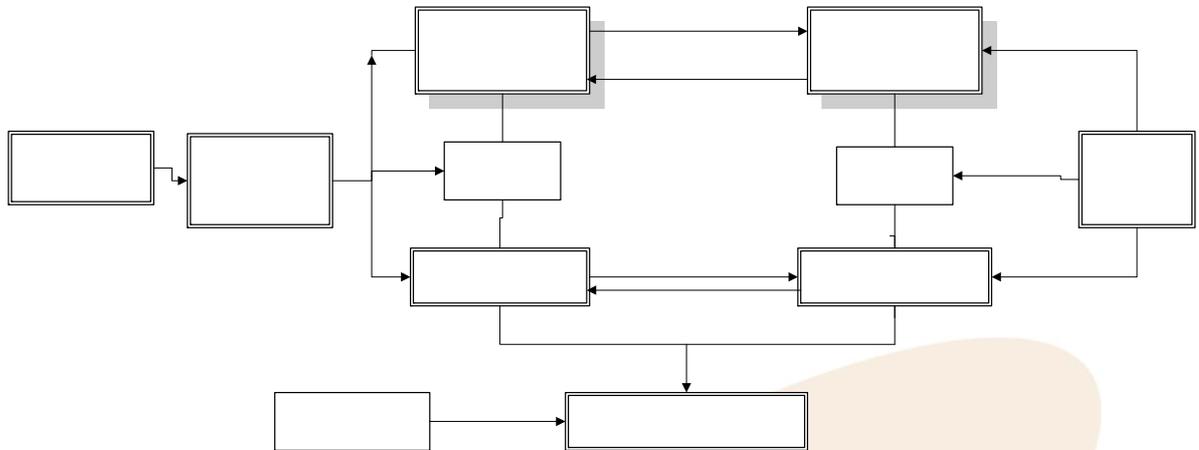
Figure 1 the dual techniques model in case study strategy

According to narrative theory (1984) much can be learnt through storytelling. Storytelling is the best way to explain something that has already happened. Narrative is not only the most suitable form for telling children's fairy tales (Drummond 1986) but also in cross-cultural management studies, and it was found by the researchers to be especially effective in investigating the cross-cultural communication process involving Chinese. By specific questioning and continue to analyse the data collected on the run during the process of the data collection the researcher facilitates the informant to engage in a narrative within which facts are described along a time line so that facts and insights can be gained in their appropriate sequence.

Narratives, which generate historical data, for instance based on memories of career successes and failures and their causes, provide the basis for a quality case study through the depth of articulation they facilitate. They also allow the researcher to gain a clear picture of the identity and role of the teller in critical management events.

Narratives are well suited to complex cases: they are an ideal setting for eliciting a clear timeline. They are themselves deeply related to the dynamics of culture. "Experience produces new thoughts which when turned into narratives have the potential to change cultures" (Drummond 1986). This also makes them ideally suited to the situation being studied here for the Australian operation entered the Chinese market in 1993, giving a longitudinal perspective of its business development, change of shareholding and ownership of the three joint ventures in China. In fact, there is no other better way to capture the series of complex events over time. Thomas and Znaniecki's (1934) advocacy of obtaining life histories as a valuable tool supports this approach.

Our model proposes a dual technique to achieve effective cross-cultural communication during the research: response by informants to a combined approach allowing narratives and depth interviewing during the process of interviewing, and the subsequent analysis which feeds into the next interview. The dual technique method incorporates the benefits of both the narrative and the depth interview methods, ensuring that both quality data (depth) and a substantial quantity of case material (narrative and depth) are collected in the interview process. Although each individual method has been widely used by researchers, the proposed model is advocated as especially effective in a cross-cultural communication situation in order to overcome issues such as cultural barriers, language difficulties, individual differences and situational variations in the interview process. Transcending these is obviously important for capturing the complexity inherent in cross-cultural settings. The increased effectiveness of data collection will result in higher quality data.

We will now explain the process in more detail. Based on narrative theory, at the beginning of an interview narrative techniques will be used to start the interview process. Flick (2002) supports this approach because: "i) the narrative takes on a certain independence during its recounting; ii) people "know" and are able to present a lot more about their lives than they have integrated into their theoretical understanding of themselves and their lives; iii) there is an analogous relationship between the narrative presentation and the narrated." A typical question to start a narrative interview would be "please tell me your story about working in China." Narrative response is then provided by the respondents. For instance, "I started working in China in 1998. It happened because……" In the process of data collection, it was observed that respondents were often incapable of providing a full story or of following a time line which, in this research, often spanned a period of ten years. Because of this, we advocate recourse to the complementary technique of depth interviewing. This can be used within the narrative approach when necessary, for instance, when the respondent answered the initial question with "There is nothing much to tell." The probing aspect of the depth technique ensures a response to the topic introduced by the interviewer. If the respondent responds to the narrative techniques partially, a continuous narrative approach will then be used as the basis for determining when probing, open-ended questions may be applied in parallel to the narrative, or as needed. It is important to point out that because many of the interviews were characterised by the communication between two different cultures, there is no clear cut point when the narrative technique or depth interview technique should be introduced. The interchange of techniques during an interview is determined by the interaction between interviewee and interviewer. A more skilful interviewer will be able to switch between the techniques as required, to maximise the

data collection. In the research under discussion, the interviewer experimented with this approach and found that it yielded rich data.

In the narrative approach, the ability of respondents to relate historic events accurately along a chronological time line can also be problematic. Memory is distorted by the relationship of the respondent to the memory prompting issue. Events with stronger significance for the narrators' relationships are more potent in their memories than those which are weaker. The accurate recollection of time and dates may also be affected by the significance of the stimuli. In other words, a more memorable event will be remembered for a longer period and the story is likely to be repeated more frequently and each time the story is told, a degree of variation is added, according to the memory of its most stimulating moments. And with each repetition, the story will be reinforced in the memory of the story teller. For this reason the dual technique serves as a safety measure in the process of data collection in that the interviewer is able to use probing to keep the respondents on track.

Secondly, individuals possess different capabilities in telling a story. The importance of the way a story is told is encapsulated in the quote "Speak of me as I am" (Shakespeare, Othello, v. ii. 338, cited in Tambling (1991). People subconsciously add fictional details to their storytelling to improve its attractiveness; this is done according to their own perception and judgement. At other times, informants "help" in order to provide perceived desirable data outcomes for interviewers and this process is largely based on their personal interpretation of the interviewer's intent. Other respondents are not capable of telling a full story in chronological order without some probing from the interviewer, unless they are trained to do so. Even when they manage to do part of it, they are not capable of continuing a long process over a long

period of one hour or more, for instance, unless they are really interested in the topic themselves.

Using depth interview techniques in conjunction with the narrative approach helps to keep the respondents on track by guiding their train of thought and is therefore more time efficient. The depth interview is used to enable the researcher to gain detailed insights (Yin 1994) on certain key issues, yet ensure there are no imposed views on the respondent (Denzin 1978), views which may limit his or her articulation of the complex cross-cultural issues being researched. Within depth interviews, semi-structured questions can be used, combining narrative-stimulating questions and non-narrative, open-ended, probing questions. This technique is useful and valuable when time is limited and the respondent has little opportunity to be available to the researcher again. For instance, it can be used when: i) the respondent may have gone off the track when the narrative approach was used as a method; ii) the respondent may need a longer time to open up before providing any valuable data, however remaining time is not sufficient to allow for that; iii) the respondent may be cautious and not provide enough data spontaneously; iv) the respondent may be providing data that is important in his or her judgement, but actually has little value for the researcher. In addition, the dual technique allows the interviewer more control over the interview process than a pure narrative approach and yet has the potential to provide richer material than a pure depth interview approach. In a situation of limited resources (time and/or funds), this model helps researchers to maximise their qualitative research results.

The above model presents a powerful tool to allow the interviewees to freely unfold their stories without the guidance of the interviewer if things are going well.

Sackmann (1991) supports this argument, suggesting that not basing the interaction on a set of structured questions determined beforehand is the only appropriate form of interviewing for cultural studies, in order to allow the interviewer flexibility to draw out appropriate and meaningful responses. On the other hand allowing informants to prepare, especially by providing questions in advance, tends to limit their thoughts, and affects their spontaneity in providing details of events, especially when the interviewees are busy senior executives. As an example, in the earlier days of the research, when a particular senior executive asked for a copy of the proposed questions, it was provided. At the interview, it was clear that he had not read these questions beforehand. As soon as he read the list of open-ended questions, he turned all of them into close-ended questions and then proceeded to provide very brief answers. Spontaneity was destroyed and within 20 minutes the interview was all but over. The interviewer responded by using the probing technique and asked further questions which were not on the list. For instance, "On this other matter in cross-cultural marketing, in the previous interviews you mentioned that data collection for market research was a problem. Would you describe why this was the case? What did you do to resolve the issue?" This extended the interview and gained further data. After this experience, providing questions in advance was deliberately avoided in later interviews.

Probing as a technique to draw out answers is often required when using the depth interview technique, as there are times when business people are reluctant to disclose information without considerable probing. This is more noticeable earlier in the interview before trust has been established between the interviewer and the respondent. The use of a combined approach is supported by De Vaus (2001, p.231) and is consistent with his statement that any method of data collection can be used

within a case study design so long as it is practical and ethical. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of the case study method is that multiple methods of data collection are often employed. The decision to probe and the frequency of probing are based on the type of response from the respondents and the on-the-spot analysis of the answers received. An experienced interviewer should have the ability to consistently analyse the data as the interview continues.

Implementation of the dual technique model vs. effective data collection techniques

The experience from this case study reveals alternatives for researchers when dealing with complexity and unpredictability in field research (Gummesson 2005) which makes the model valuable for collecting empirical data. The subtlety of the interplay between the techniques, whether they are used separately or together, and the inability to clearly define the exact moment when one of the dual techniques may be used during an interview indicates the importance of the model as well as the challenges inherent in its use. The following section discusses relevant techniques that ensured effective data collection in the cross-cultural setting of the case study under discussion, covering the following topics: preparation, establishing trust during the warm-up stage, interview venues, cultural knowledge, interpersonal skills and linguistic skills.

Preparation

The preparation stage for interviews is critical. Preparations include searching for background information on the company/department and its staff, revision of past interview material and/or events, putting together linkages of events and even finding out personal information about the respondents. Preparations can save time, especially if interviewees respond to the narrative technique less positively. Pre-prepared questions can then be used to guide them directly onto the desired topics, such as

"When did you start your first assignment in China?" This approach also results in less repetitive data being collected. At times in the China project, this method also served to reduce some barriers to communication, for instance in building the level of personal trust as some respondents felt that, if their colleagues had had enough trust in the interviewer to speak about the event, so could they. Preparations also helped with the quality of the data collected. Respondents responded well towards the interviewer who was knowledgeable about the company and this motivated them and enhanced their intention to provide quality data. Overall, preparation reduces the time required for an interview and allows more effective and efficient use of the executives' time.

The warm-up period

At the beginning of all interviews, respondents required a warm-up period before they relaxed and started providing useful data. However the length of the warm-up period varied due to several factors: i) the respondent's position in the organisation; ii) the national culture of the respondent; iii) the personality of the respondent.

Senior executives took less time to warm-up to the aim of the interview, while lower level people in the organisation tended to take longer. However senior executives provided data that was more abstract and could be less tangible than executives who had had more experience in actual operations. Existing employees were more guarded than ex-employees, fearing that if information they provided were to be communicated back to senior management or other relevant parties it could impact on their existing position in the organisation. Hence, in such cases, the warm-up period could be extended for 50 percent of the interview time.

No doubt the warm-up process is the period when trust was built between the interviewer and the interviewee (Selnes 1998). This not only affects the talking time,

but also determines the quality and the quantity of data collected. In this project, the level of trust established was observably high between the Chinese interviewer and the Chinese, overseas Chinese and Australian interviewees due to the cultural literacy of the interviewer with both Chinese and Australian culture. Several times when interviews were taken place with expatriate Australians overseas, there was clearly the sense of warmth from these Australians talking from someone "who is from home" especially when the interviewer visited them from Melbourne. When interviews were conducted with Chinese (including overseas Chinese), the demonstration of the interviewer's Chinese language skills was always the first step towards establishing trust. After this, the unspoken message transmitted from the interviewees to the interviewer was "she is one of us."

The interview venues

The quality of results is also closely related to the environmental factors. Problems that occur during an interview can "distort" respondents' responses (Denzin 1978), for example, the location of the interview (office, hotel, café) may relax or agitate respondents (Silverman 2001). In this case study, we found Australian executives usually preferred to be interviewed in their offices, which gave them a sense of control. Chinese respondents often preferred luxury hotel cafes and restaurants, locations which gave a sense of importance to the research project and, therefore, they felt it was worth participating.

Personal situations of the respondents

We found that respondents who were considered to be unsuccessful in their careers were likely to refuse interviews for fear of "washing dirty linen in public" while the successful ones always welcomed the opportunity to present their heroic stories. It

was also found that the latter responded to the narrative techniques better than those who were not successful. Silverman (2001) suggests that the penetration of private worlds of experience requires an extremely delicate approach. Therefore approaching respondents from a variety of backgrounds was such a sensitive undertaking that thorough preparation (as mentioned above) played a critical role. An insensitive approach would have resulted in poor data collection. In terms of the quality and quantity of data, successful respondents also provided more but not necessarily better quality data. The process of collecting was less painful compared to the first group of respondents. Respondents who considered themselves to be unfairly treated (in most cases these people were no longer with the organisation) welcomed opportunities to speak and thus be able to present their side of the stories, however, these stories were often emotionally loaded which made the analysis of data difficult. Therefore, the interviewer paid a great deal attention to the sensitivity with which questions were framed when conducting interviews.

Cross-cultural factors

The cultural in-group factor (Chung 2006) between the interviewer and the interviewee was a major aspect of this research. In addition to needing a shorter warm-up period and showing higher levels of trust, Chinese respondents communicated with much less reservation than Australian respondents regardless of the language used at the time of the interview. An overseas Chinese manager from the Shanghai venture said:

> "*I don't know if I'm saying too much about that really, but I really, you know, feel that.......*"

This type of statement was observed during interviews when the respondents started to realise they might be saying too much or more than what they should say. They often exposed some serious problems about their operations. But unless the person is culturally comfortable in providing sensitive information, useful data may not be collected.

The Australians in general were friendly, warm, open and helpful. An ex-Australian marketing manager who worked for ABC group in both Shanghai and Beijing gave this detailed account:

> "*I used to work for Mr John Smith at the Australian Embassy and my area was food and beverage distribution. So, when he left, there was also a change of government and I didn't feel like working for that government so I left and joined ABC Group. And then, I think Mr John Smith had been there for about three months when I joined and he put me into ABC Group in Shanghai and I worked on in the marketing team and my first job was to work on a launch of the ABC brand in Shanghai. And after that was finished, I then moved to Beijing and started the Beijing office.*"

Australian expatriate managers posted to the China operation tended to take much less time to open up and start providing data than their fellow Australians back in Australia. A note from the diary of an expatriate manager explained the reason: "What happened in China will stay in China." When it was established that the interviewer had rich knowledge of both the Australian head office and a real working knowledge of the Chinese environment, again, as soon as the respondents established that the interviewer 'is one of us', discussions were open and unguarded.

Third country respondents from other cultures varied. English and South African respondents were less open than the Australians and were often reluctant to accept at second interview. Certainly degrees of variation were observed among this group of third country nationals[1].

Cross-cultural interpersonal communication skills

Good interpersonal skills, communication skills and interviewing skills were observed to be critical in the process of the research. The interviewer's high level of interpersonal skills helped dramatically in building the trust between the interviewer and the interviewees thus improving the quality of the data collected. The nature of the primary relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Macneil 1980; Reis and Knee 1996; Selnes 1998) is unlimited and unique and draws on the pool of knowledge from both parties. The context and the management of this unrepeated relationship (Reis and Knee 1996) determine the quality and the quantity of the data to be collected. Eisenhardt (1989) recognised the importance of handling the personal interaction aspect of interviewing well, by suggesting a multi-member investigation team in which one person will only focus on the interview and the personal interaction with the respondent and the other person will take notes and make the observations, removing these burdens from the interaction taking place. Eisenhardt (1989) further explained the rational behind this tactic as the possibility that a researcher may become too involved in the case to the point that he/she becomes less subjective towards the evidence. This is a valid point especially in cross-cultural research. As mentioned previously, when interviewing respondents from the same culture, while the cultural in-group mood helps with building trust and relationship between the

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[1] "Third country nationals are those who are not from China or Australia. This group covers people from European countries, America and other countries. People of Chinese origin coming from all countries, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, are referred to as overseas Chinese in this paper.

interviewer and interviewee, it is possible for the interviewer to become less subjective towards certain evidence. Unfortunately due to resource restraints interviews in this project were only carried out by one researcher.

In addition to interpersonal skills, linguistic skills also played an important role during the interview process. Some of the respondents only spoke one language, Chinese or English. Without her bilingual skill, the interviewer would not have been able to complete this research[2]. By encouraging the respondents to tell their experience and life stories in the language they were most fluent and comfortable with, they were able to fully express themselves using the most appropriate selection of words and phrases, thus facilitating the narrative theory approach. In cross-cultural business management research, it is often found that respondents of different cultures have very different perspective of the same event. In this research, when the same incident was described by Australian expatriates, overseas Chinese and local Chinese, the story line was often substantially different. For example, the senior management viewed the sells of Tianjin and Guangdong plant as a strategic move in order to cut lose; some of the middle management viewed that as personal deviousness aimed at cutting these individuals jobs while the general staff were simply concerned for their lifelihood. To capture, identify and analyse such differences using the bilingual language tool made many of such areas of difference more distinguishable. This was very valuable in the data analysis process later.

The use of interpreters would be a poor solution in cross-cultural interview situations because good quality data is very difficult to obtain through the interpreting process. Subtle linguistic and cultural meanings often cannot be easily translated; thus the

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[2] The use of interpreters adds another layer of difficulty to the collection of rich, authentic data. For discussion of this phenomenon, see below..

richness of the data can be lost. Critical cultural nuances framing the words themselves can also be lost and hence their value diminished. The linguistic ability of the interviewer in this project extended to the production of transcripts, which were all transcribed, kept and analysed in the same language in which the data was collected. Silverman (1993) identifies the linguistic characteristics of field data as their most important attribute in a research process.

The interpretation of data without an understanding of their cultural context may also lead to misinterpretation. Wittgenstein (1968) further supports this principle by pointing out i) the importance of being aware of the context that is associated with words so that they can be understood, ii) the association of words with "knowledge, being, object and etc", and iii) the relationship between the used meaning of words and their original meaning. Based on the above argument, the bilingual interviewer endeavoured to conduct all interviews in the most suitable language for the informant and for the same reason, collected and analysed data in their original English or Chinese format. Back translation is not the solution when aiming to obtain quality data with a strong cultural context. The subtlety of cultural nuances which differ radically between Chinese and Australian English would have been lost in the process. A bilingual, bi-cultural researcher, if available, is the only solution.

CONCLUSION

International management in China is fraught with cultural misunderstandings and conflict. The incidence of expatriate failure and closure of international joint ventures is high. In this paper, we aim to contribute a qualitative research methodology which will help to unravel the causes of cross-cultural miscommunication and hence conflict in corporate circles in China. For this we advocate the effectiveness of the dual technique model, which combines narrative and depth interview techniques, within

the case study method in a cross-cultural management research setting. The model has been tested in research on an Australian MNC operating in China and is illustrated with material drawn from the Australia-China research interface. After establishing the rationale for the model, the discussion focused on the practicalities of applying it in interviews, in relation to the preparation, warm-up and trust building phases, and in the exercise of personal interviewing skills in cross-cultural research, in this case, the advantage of the interviewer being bilingual.

The case study is acknowledged to be a highly appropriate method for unveiling hitherto unexplored situations and gaining insights in order to generate new theories in the complicated area of cross-cultural management enquiry. We hope to make a contribution to the case study approach in such contexts by suggesting this dual technique within the body of qualitative research methodology.

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