

stakeholders at the annual meeting. It is rooted in trust and is ethically shaped over time. The character of an organization is continually fostered by its employees in every external and internal action. It is a reflection of the healthy attitude those employees have towards the organization. Balmer and Gray (1999:173), Devine (2001:42) and Einwiller and Will (2002:103) agree that an organization plays a crucial role when it comes to winning talent. What potential learners look for most is a “great organization” that has at its core an appealing culture and inspiring values.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter started by conceptualising reputation, and then highlighted factors that contribute to good reputation and exposed causal aspects to bad reputation. It was necessary to investigate how schools and community members benefit from schools with good reputation. How reputation is managed at schools was also explored.

The next chapter deals with the research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

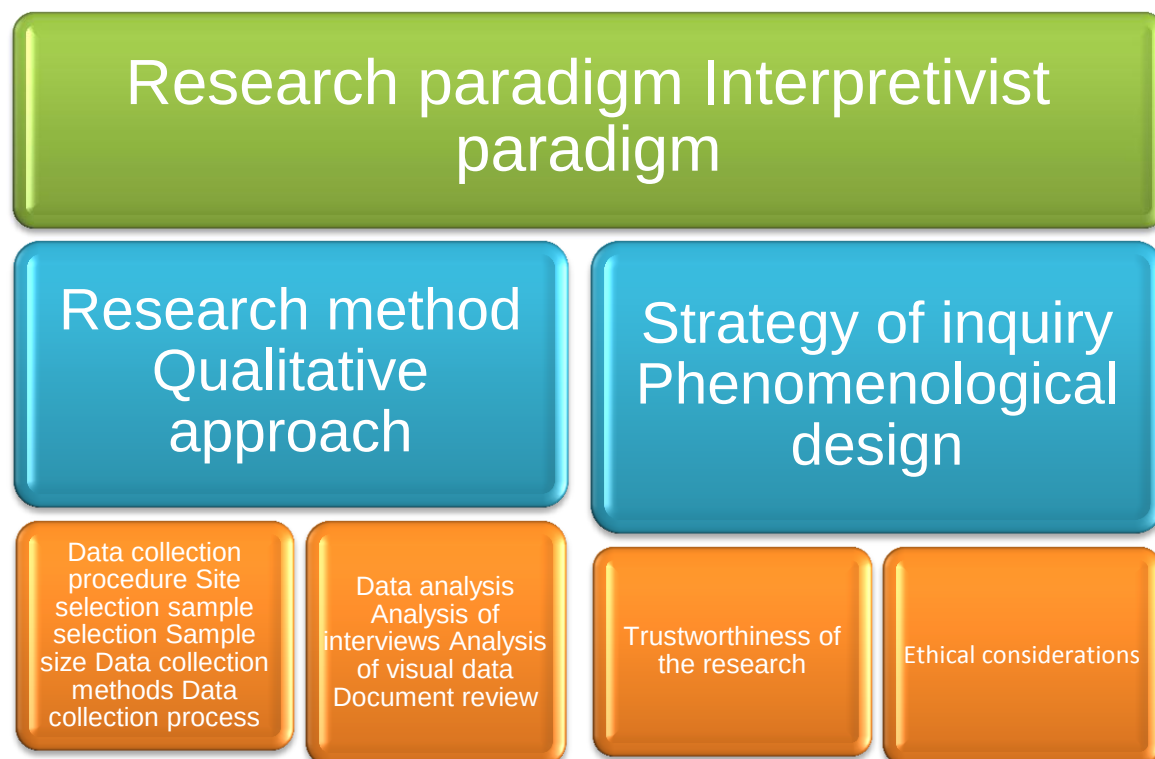
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The central endeavour of this research is to understand the perceptions of internal and external stakeholders on how reputation is managed in schools in the Fezile Dabi district.

Chapter one of the study consisted of an orientation to the study. Attention was based on background of the study, motivation to the study, an aim and objectives of the study, research methodology, trustworthiness and the ethical considerations. Chapter two highlighted elements that play a role in the reputation of a school; taking into consideration factors that lead to bad reputation and reputation management at schools. The layout of this chapter is indicated in the figure below:

Figure 3.1: Summary of chapter 3



The research paradigm guiding this research is discussed below:

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The definition of the research paradigm was given in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.6.2.1). This section will describe how the interpretivist paradigm was employed in this research.

The use of interpretivist paradigm in this research was based on three beliefs. The first belief is that the paradigm consists of people's subjective experiences (Neuman,

2003:76). The data from the participants' subjective experiences was collected by means of interviews. A field research was conducted where many hours and days were spent in direct contact with the participants. Transcripts, conversations and audio tapes were studied in detail to gain a sense of subtle non-verbal communication and to understand the interaction in its real context. The themes I developed in Chapter 4 were derived from the field through in-depth examination of the phenomenon of reputation management in schools in Fezile Dabi.

In addition De Vos *et al.* (2011:8) say this paradigm can also be referred to as a phenomenological approach, as it is an approach that aims to understand people. The phenomenological approach is discussed below (*cf.* 3.4).

De Vos *et al.* (2011: 6) indicate that the interpretive social science can be traced to the German sociologist Max Weber and the German philosopher Dilthey, who argue that there are two fundamentally different types of science, the natural sciences and the human sciences. The former type is based on abstract explanation. The latter is rooted in an assumed understanding of everyday lived experience of people in specific historical settings which is one of the reasons for the choice of this paradigm.

The second belief is that access to reality whether given or socially constructed is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meaning (Myers, 2009). The use of interpretivism in this research was underpinned by observation and interpretation. The working definition for observation included the collection of information about events such as curricular and extra-curricular achievements, matric and ANA results. Interpretation meant to make meaning of that the collected data by drawing inferences. Thus, I tried to understand the phenomenon of reputation management through the meanings that participants assigned to them.

The third belief is that of the richness and depth of explorations and descriptions (Nieuwenhuis, 2010: 60). Multiple sources of data were used as indicated in sections below. Six months was spent on the field collecting verbal and non-verbal data from the participating schools.

The research paradigm informed the method of research, data collection procedures and strategies, participant selection and data analysis and interpretation.

3.3 RESEARCH METHOD

The method of research for this study is qualitative in nature. The qualitative research was used as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning participants in this research ascribe to reputation management in schools. I achieved this understanding by analyzing the many contexts of the participants, their meanings of situations and events.

I interacted with the internal stakeholders in their natural environment, which are schools. I wanted to take in as much of the school environments and settings in which the participants worked, as I can. The settings are described under site selection (*cf.* 3.5.1). The interviews were conducted at schools after teaching time. The observation was done by means of visual data and document review. The use of multiple sources of data collection was based on the belief that social life is complex, therefore one strategy of inquiry will not be enough to unveil many layers of meaning in a phenomenon.

As a qualitative researcher my aim was not only to understand the meaning that participants attached to the events, situations and actions and of the accounts they give of their lived experiences regarding reputation management in schools but also to understand the context within which the participants operated.

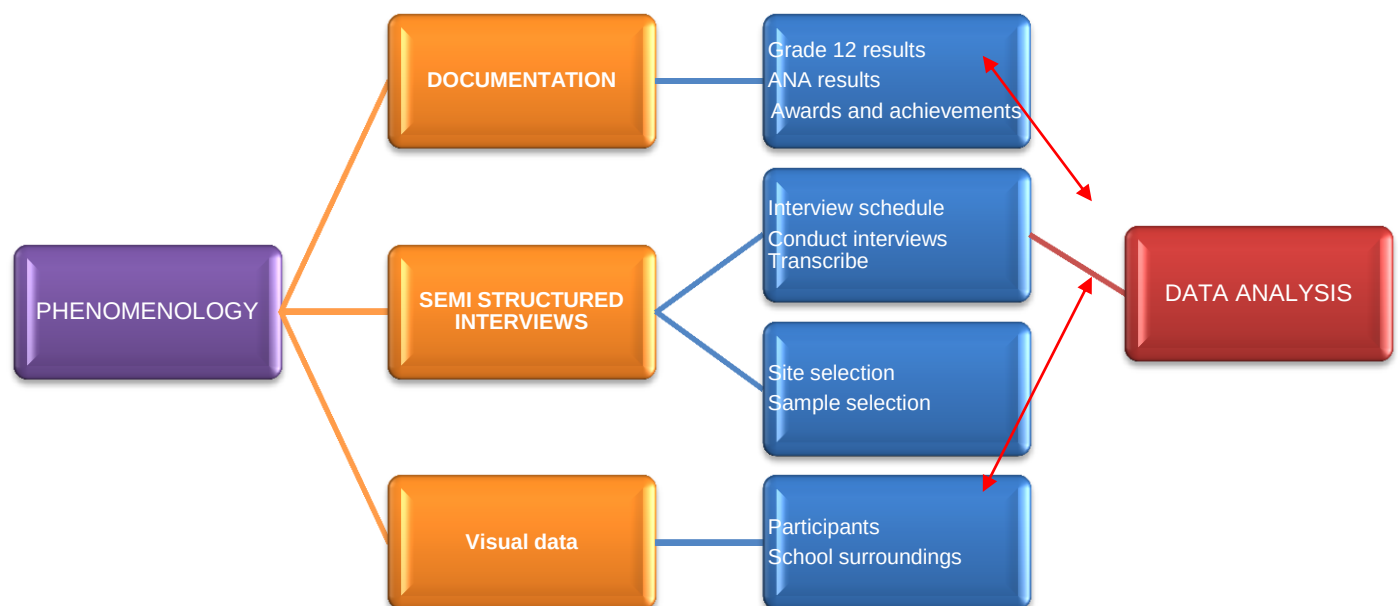
3.4 STRATEGY OF INQUIRY

As mentioned in Chapter 1 the research design for this study is phenomenology. As this study was primarily phenomenological it was therefore underpinned by the principles of phenomenology which focuses on ascertaining and articulating vital characteristics of a certain phenomenon which in this research is reputation management in schools, as it really is.

According to Creswell (2007: 57) and Bentzand Shapiro (1998: 96) the researcher utilizing this approach reduces the experiences to a central meaning or the essence of the experience and the product of the research is a description of the essence of the experience being studied. In order to understand the participants' experiences, I had to enter their life world and place myself in the shoes of the participants. This was mainly done by means of naturalistic methods of study, analyzing the conversations and interacting with participants.

De Vos *et al.* (2011) further add that researchers using this strategy mainly utilize long interviews with up to ten people as methods of data collection. Multiple individuals (*cf.* 3.5.2.1) who had experience of how reputation is managed at schools were identified. The diagram below summarizes the research methodology used in this study.

Figure 3.2: Summary of research method



The observation and interviews are key data collection tools used in phenomenological studies (Aspers, 2004). The information on the tools used in the collection of data and the procedure followed is presented in the section below.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

My role as a qualitative researcher was to be the primary instrument of data collection. In order to do this I had to become immersed in the research and school setting.

Data collection creates a crucial element of any research because it does not only give a description of what data could be collected and how it should be collected but it also constitutes the basic information from which conclusions are drawn (Best & Kahn, 2003:254; Bassey, 1999:81; Bryman & Cramer, 1999:5). Some of the multiple data collection techniques suggested by Yin (2003), which include documentation, archival records, interviews and direct and participation observation were used in this research.

According to Sheiderman and Plaisant (2005) interviews can be productive since the interviewer can follow certain issues of concern that may lead to focused and constructive suggestions. I made use of the interviews to formulate an opinion about how reputation was managed in schools. De Vos *et al.* (2005:299) opine that the advantage of interviews is that one can obtain rich data when in-depth interviews are conducted.

The type of interviews that were used in this research were semi-structured. I used a set of predetermined (*cf.* Appendix 3) open-ended questions. The questions were intended to guide me so that the same areas were covered with each participant. As the semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe for more clarity, they also provided the interviewees an opportunity to elaborate on information they felt was important.

Semi structured interviews were used in the collection of data, which were mainly one to one interviews. De Vos *et al.* (2010: 287) say interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research. De Vos *et al.* (2010: 296) also maintain that in general, researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain

detailed picture of participants' beliefs about, or perceptions or account of, a particular topic. Maree (2011: 87) adds by saying, the semi structured interview is commonly used in the research projects to corroborate data emerging from other data sources, which comprised of photographs and documents in this research.

Semi-structured interviews give the researcher and the participants much more flexibility. I was able to follow up particular interesting avenues that emerged in the interview, and the participants were able to give a fuller picture. My reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews were based on the rationale to obtain the participants' perceptions, feelings, thoughts and concerns about the management of reputation in their schools. It was also necessary to get information about their future expectations, to verify and extend the information obtained from other sources, and to verify and extend the premonitions and ideas developed by the participants or by me.

An interview guide was used in this research. McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 351) maintain that in the interview guide approach topics are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the sequence and wording of the questions during the interview.

The topics in the interview guide for internal stakeholders were based on the conceptualisation of corporate reputation as a multi-dimensional construct (Walsh *et al.*, 2009). Questions were asked on emotional appeal, product and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment, social responsibility and financial performance (*cf.* 4.3). The questions for external stakeholders (*cf.* Appendix 4) were also based on the dimensions above.

I also tried to understand the participants' interpretations in a non-interfering manner by collecting visual data. Photographs are regarded as supplementary techniques by McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 359). McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 359) argue that photographs are especially useful for validation, as they document non-verbal behavior and communication and can provide a permanent record. Ball and Smith (2002) indicate that images are seen as additional source to those that are text-based. They become another piece of the researcher's armoury along with field notes and

other forms of data (Banks, 2001). The visual data in this research is documented together with the text-based data. The rationale behind taking photos was not to disturb learners and school staff but to provide a visible depiction of the school surroundings and events. These photos were therefore, taken outside school hours when all learners and educators had left. Photographs that were taken in this research were of the school surroundings, reception area, security gate, the school achievements and awards.

Document review was done to supplement interviews and photographs. The review of documents is an un-obstructive method rich in portraying the values of the participants in the setting (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003).

3.5.1 Site Selection

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:234) sampling is described as taking a portion of a population or universe and considering it representative of that population or universe. Sampling is done to increase the feasibility, cost effectiveness, accuracy and manageability of the prospective survey.

I selected four sites for the study, two primary schools and two secondary schools. Three schools; one primary and two secondary schools were situated in the same township whilst one school was situated in a different township. The aim of selecting these schools was based on the rich data which I expected to unearth from them.

All of the above mentioned schools are classified as disadvantaged schools because of the lack of resources such as science lab, school hall, sports ground as well as school libraries and also that they were classified under Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 schools. Although there were such challenges most of these disadvantaged schools had managed to produce good results. This was evident in the matric results of school C and School D.

School A

This school is situated in the township of Phiritona next to Heilbron. It is built in semi face bricks and has 25 classrooms. The school was established in 1982 and the enrolment number was 854; there were twenty six educators including the schools management team. The male and female split was 8 males and 18 females.

The motto in school A is “funda uthole ulwazi” this was in Zulu and can be translated as “learn so as to gain knowledge”. Their vision is to educate and develop learners to face life challenges with pride and be worthy citizens of the country. The mission was a commitment to create an environment that would develop learners to their full potential in their intellectual, physical, emotional and social endeavours and involve all the stakeholders for the development of the school.

The school was selected because of its long history as an education entity within the Phiritona area; furthermore the school was the only school that was offering two languages in the area, it is beautiful, welcoming and has a well maintained reception, staff parking lot and surrounding area.

Figure 3.3: Surroundings in school A



This picture indicates school A's main administration entrance with its emblem on the wall. The entrance leading to the administration block was had flowers and trees. The

physical environment was well looked after. It was a no fee school and the only primary school offering isiZulu and Sesotho languages. The school had received trophies and awards for participation in sport and music.

Figure 3.4: Trophies in school A



Sampling in School A

I interviewed 4 internal and 1 external stakeholders from school A. The internal stakeholders comprised of the principal, one head of department, one educator and one clerk. The external stakeholder, a parent was selected because he was an active member of the School Governing Body who also had children attending in this school.

School B

The school is situated in Zamdela Township next To Sasolburg. It is situated in a developing informal settlement and was surrounded by Reconstruction and Development Programme houses. This school was built by one of the big companies in Sasolburg as part of their Community Social Investment initiatives. The school was established in 1994 and had 1415 learners enrolled in 2012. There were forty four

educators including school management team. The male and female split was 9 males and 35 females

The motto in school B is “we shall overcome” and the vision is to produce skilled life-long learners to face the outside world through quality teaching and learning. The mission was a commitment to the provision of quality teaching and learning, sound guidance, values and skills throughout learners’ developmental stages and promotion of excellence.

The school was selected because of a big number of grade 1 learners (244) enrolled in 2012 in this school, it was an indication that parents liked to enrol their learners at school. The school was regarded as the best performing primary school in the area because it obtained a certificate for best performing school in 2008 from the Free State Department of Education and an award of R100 000.

Figure 3.5: An award for best performance in school B



This photo shows the award school B achieved in 2008 for well- performing primary school. The criteria for selecting the best primary school in the Fezile Dabi district was based on learner performance in all the grades, cleanliness of the surroundings and the commitment of educators in their work.

The school is built with face brick and the entrance leading to the administration block had a well-kept lawn, flowers and shrubs. In the back yard there was a sports ground which was used by the learners to practice for sporting activities. These facilities contributed to the schools' high achievement in extra-curricular activities. The school was doing well in both music and soccer competitions. The picture below depicts the evidence.

Figure 3.6: Achievements in extra-curricular activities in school B



The photo above shows trophies awarded to school B for achievements in music and soccer.

The school was better resourced because it had a school library; a well-equipped play ground for learners, a big parking lot for educators and visitors. This was the only school with a library as it was donated by the same company that built the school. The only challenge was the absence of a school hall. The security of the school was tight and the fence was well maintained. The physical environment was very clean and there were no papers on the ground. The flower garden was well maintained and well looked after.

Figure 3.7: Surroundings in school B



The photo indicates the clean well-kept surroundings at School B.

Sampling in School B

I interviewed 4 internal and 1 external stakeholders from school B. The internal stakeholders consisted of the principal, one head of department, one educator and one clerk. The external stakeholder was selected because she was an active member of the School Governing Body and a parent who registered two of her children at this school.

School C

The school is located in Zamdela a township in Sasolburg. The school is very old within the Zamdela area. It was established in 1977 and the first secondary school in Zamdela. The school contributed a lot in educating prominent leaders such as educators, nurses, lawyers and highly respected citizens in Sasolburg. It was also one of the biggest secondary schools in the area with an enrolment of 1442 learners, with fifty five

educators including the school management team. The male and female split was 23 males and 32 females.

The reason for selecting school C was that the school had been in existence for 35 years and over the years had grown to accommodate 1442 learners with a matric pass rate that was increasing: from 75% in 2009 to 95.6% in 2011 (*cf.* 4.3).

The school is built with semi face bricks but the physical environment was not well maintained. The main entrance was not so welcoming because there were a lot of papers lying around. The physical surroundings were also not well maintained.

Figure 3.8: Picture showing untidy surroundings in school C



The picture indicates the dirty school surrounding in School C. At the back of the school yard there was a small vegetable garden which did not serve its purpose as it was also neglected.

Figure 3.9: A vegetable garden in school C



The picture above shows a neglected vegetable garden in school C. Most schools in this area had food gardens. The idea of food gardens is encouraged by the Department of Education as its purpose is to supplement the food used in the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) which was rolled out to schools in disadvantaged communities in 1994.

The school was awarded a school hall for good performance in Mathematics by the Free State Department of Education in 2010. The performance progress of this school is discussed in Chapter 4.

Sampling in School C

Four internal stakeholders were interviewed: two school management team members, one educator and one clerk responsible for finances and human resource. Only one parent was interviewed as a representative for parents.

School D

The school was established in 1999 and has an enrolment of 1175 learners starting from grade 8 until grade 12. The number of educators is forty comprising of 11 males and 29 female educators, it was a big school.

The motto in school D is “rebuild together for achievement” and the vision is to strive for life-long learning in relation to excellence. The mission statement was a commitment to strive to instil high level of commitment, morale, participation, performance and discipline. The school also committed itself to enhancing sound working and interpersonal relationships, accountability, transparency and make communication the corner stone of its dealings with stakeholders.

School D is located in Zamdela Township. This school was the last school to be visited as it was still under construction and the staff and learners were using the first completed part of the school building. The administration block, principal, deputy, HOD and clerk office are still under construction. The school management team was using temporary offices and store rooms to perform their duties.

Figure 3.10: School D under construction



The main entrance was not so welcoming because the construction was in process. The entrance was not well maintained, due to construction but the surroundings were clean. The school was surrounded by shacks as it was situated in an informal settlement and the road leading to the school was gravel which made it difficult to access the school during heavy rains.

School D had good grade 12 matric results over a three year period. Pass percentage in 2009 was 75.4% in 2010 a pass rate of 74,4% and in 2011, 77.7% were obtained

The school had an opportunity of getting money from the Lotto Foundation which donated money for the erection of a tennis court and the school bought a soccer attire. This benefited the school by making sure that sporting activities were accessible to learners.

Sampling in School D

I interviewed four internal stakeholders: Deputy Principal, Head of Department, 1 educator and 1 clerk. Only one external stakeholder (parent) who had a child registered at the school was interviewed.

How the sample was selected in this study is discussed below

3.5.1.1 Sample selection

De Vos *et al.* (2011:234) described sampling as taking a portion of a population or universe. Sampling was done to increase the feasibility, cost effectiveness, accuracy and manageability of the empirical research. My focus was on the selection of information-rich informants from schools that were perceived as having good reputation based on high enrolment, excellent academic performance and .in extra-curricular activities. The schools mentioned above fitted the criteria. The selection criteria were therefore purposive in nature.

De Vos *et al.* (2010: 202) indicate that in purposive sampling, a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some feature or process that is of interest for a particular study. Sampling in this research was based entirely on my judgment, in that the sample was composed of elements I judged to contain the most characteristics as indicated earlier on.

3.5.1.2 Sample size

The actual number of schools that took part in this study was four in all, two primary and two secondary schools in the Fezile Dabi District. Twenty participants took part in this study.

Table 3.1: Sample

No of schools	Schools	No of participants	Schools
4 (2Primary and 2 Secondary Schools)	A	5 participants	1 parent, 1educator, 2 SMT members, 1 clerk
	B	5 participants	1 parent, 1 educator, 2 SMT members, 1 clerk
	C	5 participants	1 parent, 1 educator, 2SMT members, 1 clerk
	D	5 participants	1 parent, 1 educator, 2 SMT members, 1 clerk
	4 schools	20 participants	4 parents, 4 educators, 8 SMT members and 4 clerks
TOTAL		20	

Regarding the table above:

- Out of all the participants as indicated above, the gender split was as follows: 15 females and 5 males. Males were from the following schools 2 (School A), 1

(School C) and 2 (School D) in school B no males were interviewed, this was due to their unavailability.

- Different educators in their respective post levels were interviewed, 4 post level one educators and 4 SMT members

3.5.2 Data collection process

Permission to conduct research was sought from the Department of Education in the Free State province. A reply granting permission was received a few days later. I had to approach the school principals to request them for their permission for the research to be conducted at their schools. Schools were phoned to inform them about the research before letters of request could be delivered. The school principals were briefed about the possibility of including their schools in the research. I then personally delivered the letters requesting permission. After the permission was granted I had to start with the process of building a rapport with managers and educators. From my experience as principal, school personnel is sceptical about research, even after researchers have told them about the aim of the research. I have realised that the people that do not trust researchers are those, who do not understand the process of research. Building trust was crucial for this research to succeed. I relied on the school staff's participation for data. I met with individual educators on an informal basis and told them that I will be at their school for some time to collect data for my study. During the second visit I set down with each of them to discuss dates, times and their preferred venue for the interview.

3.5.2.1 Data capturing

I bought a new tape recorder to record the data from interviews. This was mainly because I did not trust myself that I could be able to pose questions and write the responses while trying to understand what the interviewee was saying. After all, I am a novice researcher and it was for the first time that I interviewed people. My intention was to capture everything that the participants said. I took out the tape after each interview and labelled it: school A or B to make it easier for me to store the data for later

use. I had to check the tape recorder before interviewing the next participant to avoid mishaps. The use of a tape recorder is supported by McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 355) as they say that tape recording the interview ensures completeness of the verbal interaction and provides material for reliability checks.

It was still necessary for me take notes even if I was tape recording the conversation. The field notes helped in reformulation of questions and probes, I could also take note of non-verbal communication. I used the field notes to verify information from the tapes.

3.5.2.2 Transcribing

I transcribed the data after each session with participants. I tried to avoid forgetting what transpired during the interview and did not want to lose touch with the information. I started by listening to one tape, write what was said, rewind to check if I did not miss some information. There were times when the participants were not audible. In such instances I would write what I heard and live out the rest. I would schedule an appointment with the participant concerned for his or her assistance. The participants were more than willing to assist. The transcribing process was strenuous but I wanted to do it myself so that I could familiarise myself with the data. I transcribed the data verbatim.

I had to read the transcripts several times to give myself enough time to think about the responses to each of the questions, what these responses meant and also went back to participants and asked them where the meaning was not clear.

I also had to write descriptions of each participant and the school setting. I intended to provide a narrative picture of the setting and the events that took place in it. These descriptions are provided in the section above (*cf.* 3.5.1). The transcripts and the descriptions of participants and settings helped me in understanding the context. The section below presents the analysis of data.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Creswell (2009: 184), data analysis is an ongoing course involving unceasing consideration about the data. After the data was collected from different sources, the next stage involved analyzing them by some form of coding. There are three types of coding indicated in the literature (Cohen *et al.* 2007: 368). Data analyses involved methods of breaking down data into smaller functional parts to expose their distinctive features so that meaning could be made. Leedy and Omrod (2005: 150) are in accord with this process of breaking down data into their essential fragments but further indicate that associate uses can be made between conceptions, thereby providing the foundation for new images. The views of McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 364) that qualitative data can be broken down by means of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest were considered in this research.

Two types of coding used in this research included open coding and axial coding. In open coding I identified codes without being restricted, with a purpose to discover chunks of meaning. I had to maintain an open mind that allowed for the detection of the unexpected along with inquisitiveness that did not allow for final ending, even after I read the texts and identified the codes from it.

The second type was that of axial coding. During axial coding I had a strong focus on determining codes around a single category I looked for connections and approaches that relate to a category. For example in a category of “workplace environment”, I searched for clues about beautiful surroundings, cleanliness of the surroundings, anything about toilets, and emotional impacts from sessions.

3.6.1 Analysis of interview data

Interview data analysis in this research was done in stages. The **first stage** was intended to make sense of the raw data. I started by printing out the transcripts so as to have a hard copy of the interviews. I then read the transcripts several times, I started to make sense of the data. It was then that I was able to identify universal features. I

started highlighting the common aspects that were coming out of the data in dissimilar colours, common aspects started to emerge. Codes were then developed directly from examining the transcripts.

I grouped the common codes by sketching out connections between them. Each group of codes was given a common name which was called a category. I wrote all these categories on a flipchart. The codes were also written under each code. This was done to check if there was a mistake in categorising for an example where codes would be grouped under a wrong category. Spreading the categories out in front of me so that I could draw lines to indicate how they were connected helped in reducing mistakes. Words from the text were used to name the categories.

I went back to the transcripts read them again to check for quotes that support each of the categories. These categories or themes were used to separate the data into main ideas. I had to discuss the themes and the supporting statements with the supervisor to check if they made sense.

Identifying themes was not the end; I had to go through them several times to check how they connect with my study. The **second stage** therefore, included thematising. This was done with an intention to bring some order and construction into themes identified. I had to rearrange some themes after I realised that they were not related to the topic of my study, these themes were put under different themes. The themes were then clear and were supported by quotations from the transcripts. I still had to refine them several times until I was happy that they were correctly placed; they addressed the research question (What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding how schools in Fezile Dabi manage reputation?); and there was no data lost.

The **third stage** was about determining the course of action regarding the analysis. The inductive method was used in identifying themes in this research. The main purpose of using the inductive process in the analyses of qualitative data according to MacMillan and Schumacher (2006: 364) and Nieuwenhuis (2010: 99) allows the research findings to emerge from the regular, central or noteworthy themes innate in the raw data. The

emergence of these themes should occur without the restraints forced by a more structured theoretical course.

The table below shows the inductive process employed in this research in the classification of themes:

Table 3.2: The coding process in inductive analysis

Reading through transcripts and documents	Identification of codes	Group the codes to form categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Read transcripts to identify quotes that support the categories
Many pages of transcripts (pages)	Many codes identified	20 themes	16 Themes	6 themes

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2002: 266)

The sixty pages of the transcripts could not be attached to this dissertation as the document would be too big, transcripts of data obtained by means of in-depth interviews from two schools is attached (*cf.* Appendix 4).

The data yielded six themes as indicated below:

- Schools showed effectiveness in the provision of their service (*cf.* 4.3) –This theme did not come as a surprise to me, as I indicated earlier on that this was one of the reasons these schools were chosen. What I was not sure of was how this linked with reputation management.
- Schools having emotional appeal (*cf.* 4.3) – This theme pertains to trust, loyalty and respectability as indicated in the literature. I expected schools to have

emotional appeal based on their academic outcomes. Although I have this theme not all of its aspects were articulated by participants.

- There was a strong focus on workplace environment and climate (*cf.* 4.3) in almost all the schools- I was also expecting this, as this was another reason why I chose the schools.
- School managers provided effective leadership in both core and extra-curricular activities (*cf.* 4.3) but failed to manage beyond the school – My assumption was that managers are able to manage the two important concepts mentioned but fumble when it comes to managing beyond the boundaries of a school. My assumption was confirmed in this theme.
- There were external factors that lead to bad reputation in some schools (*cf.* 4.3)- I was expecting this theme because of the experience I have regarding working with communities. I was also expecting school managers in these schools to come up with solutions to the problems before they could erode the good reputation.
- Schools used several strategies to build reputation (*cf.* 4.3) - I realised that schools were using the same strategies that worked in the past and there was no creativity regarding the establishment of new strategies to build reputation. I was not expecting this, my assumption was that because these schools were perceived as the best they should be using other strategies than other schools.

3.6.2 Analysis of visual and data from documents

Photographs are regarded as complementary techniques by McMillan and Schumacker (2006:359). These authors also indicate that photographs are useful for corroboration of data, as they record non-verbal behaviour and statements and can provide lasting evidence. Photographs were used to authenticate data that was collected by means of interviews and documentation.

Documents that were used in this research included ANA results for primary schools, Matric results for high schools, emblems and vision and missions of the participating schools.

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to ensure trustworthiness in this research I had to address credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility –Credibility refers to the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006:91). Mills (2011: 104) maintains that credibility is alternative to internal validity. The goal of ensuring credibility is to demonstrate that the inquiry ensured that the subject was accurately identified and described. Credibility in this research was assured by means of triangulation. Data from multiple sources was collected. The data from these sources were corroborated, that is cross checking data from interviews, photographs and documents collected from schools. These sources included interviews, documentation and photographs. A referential adequacy as suggested by Mills (2011:104) was established. I tested the analysis and interpretations against the documents I collected and the photographs.

Transferability- Transferability refers to the belief that reputation management is context bound. The belief led to the collection of a detailed descriptive data that permitted comparison of a given context to which transfer might be contemplated. I also developed detailed descriptions of the context as I believed that in order to ensure transferability the reader must identify with the setting.

The understandings of the descriptive data and of contexts can be transferred to new contexts in other studies.

Dependability- Dependability refers to the stability of the data. To address the issues of the dependability of my data I used overlap methods, that is three different methods of data collection that were used in such a way that the weakness of the other was compensated by the strength of another. For an example the visual data contributed to my understanding of the data collected by means of interviews with the participants

I also established an audit trail to enable the reader to understand the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. As part of the audit trail, the statements of the methods used to collect and analyse data, interview schedule, transcripts and coding process (*cf.* Appendix 5).

Conformability- Conformability refers to the neutrality or objectivity of data. I ensured conformability by making use of stakeholders' checks and also giving participants a chance to verify the analysis and the findings of the research. Participants were given back the transcribed data, to check as to whether their data was not misconstrued.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 334), a trustworthy research engages not only choosing participants and effective research method but also observing ethical measures.

Permission to conduct the research at Fezile Dabi District primary and secondary schools was sought from the District's Policy and Planning unit and the Ethics Committee of the North-West University (*cf.* Appendix 6). The Policy and planning unit is the one that is responsible for authorizing research projects in the district. The principals were informed about the nature of the research. I sought permission from individual participants to conduct the interviews.

Informed consent –I first had to tell the participants about the study, what I intended to investigate, the method that was to be used. I gave the participants time to think about what I told them about the study and their role and ethical consideration before making their decision. It was important for me to give them time to gain an understanding of what the research entailed before agreeing to participate. I also gave them a chance to ask questions regarding the research and their role. After a week I went back to the participants. When they agreed to participate I then assured them of confidentiality regarding the information, and anonymity regarding their identities and their schools.

I made it a point that the settings and participants were not identifiable in print. Thus, locations and features of settings were typically disguised to appear similar to all other schools, and I coded names of the participants and places. Participants both internal and external are indicated in numbers, schools in letters of the alphabet. The use of numbers and letters was done to protect the participants' confidence from other persons in the school setting and also from the general reading public. School names were deleted from the emblems, the motto, vision and mission can be from any school in South Africa.

Permission to conduct research- The Free state Department of Education has established a research unit in the provincial office, for the purpose of coordinating all research done in schools within its jurisdiction. In conducting this research, a letter of request (*cf.* Appendix 1) was written to this unit, and their letter accepting to the request was received (*cf.* Appendix 2) few days after, the letter further pledged support to the study, with the hope that the findings would be shared with the department. A final copy of this dissertation will be submitted to the Free State Department of Education as per request and the participating schools will be told about the research findings in a meeting that will be held with them after this dissertation has been accepted by the North-West university.

The letter of approval was shown to each principal of the participating schools. I also told them that my research was not going to interfere with the smooth running of the school as it was conducted after teaching time. I also told them that their names will not be explicitly written in print, their views will be treated as confidential, and that the names of their schools will not be identified in print. This commitment, contributed positively to the interview atmosphere, because it gave them freedom to openly and comfortably air their views.

No deception – Data in this research was not fabricated, all data indicated came from the responses of the research participants in the form of interviews, documentation and photographs. The data was also not manipulated to support a personal position. All participants gave consent to the audio taping of the interview data.

No plagiarism – The data from the literature review was not plagiarized, all sources were indicated and are authentic.

The domain specific ethical issues in this research relate to research methodology and design. Interviews as data collection method in this research were done only with informed consent, explicit confidentiality agreements and the application of a rigorous analytical process to ensure that valid and supportable conclusions were drawn.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter explained how the process of empirical research unfolded from beginning to end, starting with the research paradigm, research design, and the research method. Issues that gave the study legitimacy such as ethical considerations, selection of sites and trustworthiness, amongst others, were also dealt with. This chapter gave an overview on how the empirical research was planned and ultimately implemented on the ground.

The next chapter deals with data analysis and interpretation.