

Convergent interviewing: a tool for strategic investigation

Wil Williams* and Duncan Lewis

University of Glamorgan Business School, UK

- This paper explores the application of a relatively under-reported qualitative research method known as convergent interviewing.
- Specifically it examines the practical relevance of an adapted version of this technique in practitioner-orientated strategic management research.

Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

One of the problems with many consultancy or academic research projects in the strategy field is that sometimes the client does not always know exactly what they want researched (Reige and Nair, 2004). Even if the client has an idea of the potential outputs and outcomes at the outset of a study, these are likely to evolve as the research develops, unexpected findings emerge or circumstances change (Rao and Perry, 2003). A feature of strategic management research is the complexity of the situations being examined (Stacey, 1996; Beinhocker, 1997; Courtney *et al.*, 1997; Pascale *et al.*, 2000; Kurtz and Snowden, 2003). Strategic issues are often not the product of one factor but the result of a myriad of interconnected dependent and independent variables (Beinhocker, 1997). In these circumstances researchers often have to adopt an inductive model where theory evolves from research undertaken. Grounded theory, of which convergent interviewing is an example (after Glaser and Strauss, 1967; in Burns, 2000,

p. 433) is one instance of an inductive approach.

A feature of strategic management research is the complexity of the situations being examined

Convergent interviewing has emerged as a qualitative technique that attempts to address research topics that lack theoretical underpinning (Dick, 1990). It is also argued that the convergent interviewing technique is an inductive, flexible, evolving research instrument (Dick, 1990). Whilst the academic field of strategic management cannot be accused of theoretical shortcomings, there might be some tangible benefits to be derived from adoption of a research instrument that specifically offers the researcher or consultant enhanced flexibility to aid the understanding of complex situations. We therefore offer this paper as an innovative application of this technique in terms of consultancy and strategic management research. What follows is presented in three parts. First, we outline the

*Correspondence to: Wil Williams, Strategy Department, Welsh Institute for Competitive Advantage, University of Glamorgan Business School, Trefforest, Rhondda Cynon Taff CF37 1DL, UK.
E-mail: wwillial@glam.ac.uk

broad principles of convergent interviewing as a methodology. Second, we illustrate the application of the technique for both strategic management in academic and consultancy outputs. Third, we offer concluding thoughts on the applicability of the technique for strategic management researchers.

Convergent interviewing explained

A chosen methodology is informed primarily by the context of the study. However, it is also essential that a researcher's ontological and epistemological positions are recognized, as are the potential influences of such positions (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1994; Hughes and Sharrock, 1997). The importance of fitting the research methodology and methods to the appropriate context has been identified by a number of writers including, for example, Silverman (2001) and Flick (2002).

We contend that much, if not all, organizational strategic research takes place in a socio-economic context and therefore it often has to adopt an essentially qualitative approach. This does not discount the importance of quantitative research in this field, but it acknowledges the importance of subjective elements that contribute to strategic decisions. Qualitative research is often associated with terms such as: soft; flexible; subjective; political; case study; speculative and grounded (Halfpenny, 1979; in Silverman, 2001). Abercrombie *et al.* (2000) simply define qualitative analysis as the study of the human condition. It is often, but not always, contrasted with quantitative research traditions and a positivist epistemology (Abercrombie *et al.*, 2000, p. 284). Silverman (2000) distinguishes between qualitative techniques that are data-gathering and those that are analytical in nature. Qualitative approaches can address both inductive, grounded research and deductive, exploratory study (Gummesson, 2000). It is broadly agreed (Fields, 1988) that within the various approaches to data gathering in qualitative research the following examples of key research techniques can be identified:

observation; interviews; focus groups; questionnaires; case studies (including ethnographic studies and action research); oral histories/stories; documentary review (including textual analysis) and visual analysis.

To these qualitative techniques, analytical qualitative techniques such as content analysis and discourse analysis (Fields, 1988) can be added. In some situations different terminology is applied to similar techniques depending on the perspective of the researcher or writer. Silverman (2000) identifies four main categories of qualitative research: observation; analysing texts and documents; interviews; recording and transcribing. The last category should not really be considered as a stand-alone method, but instead might be viewed as a means of operationalizing participant observation or interviews. Convergent interviewing, as its title suggests, falls into the third of Silverman's categories of qualitative research — interviews, but also incorporates elements of the first category, observation.

Dick (1990) coined the term '*convergent (or convergence) interviewing*' in the 1980s. As Reige and Nair (2004, pp. 74–75) indicate, convergent interviewing is highly suitable for exploratory, inductive research. Dick (1990, p. 2) describes convergent interviewing as '*A way of collecting qualitative information about people's attitudes and beliefs through the use of interviews*'. Dick (1990) also describes it as an action research technique, although he also recognizes convergent interviewing as a *modus operandi* that can be used for 'pilot research' as well as a generalist tool in the armoury of the qualitative researcher. Convergent interviewing has also been described by Rao and Perry (2003) as an '*in-depth interviewing technique with a structured data analysis process*' (p. 237).

Dick (1990) distinguishes between 'content' and 'process' in convergent interviewing. He views the content of convergent interviewing as unstructured but the process as semi-structured. The structure in the process is derived from an embedded, ordered route of design and analysis. He outlines a cyclical procedure: design; data collection; analysis and

interpretation, that he claims is common to all forms of qualitative research, including convergent interviewing. However, certain forms of qualitative research utilize multiple cycles that include: redesign; data collection; reinterpretations; redesign; etc. (see **Figure 1**). Using this method, the research process continues until each element of succeeding data does not alter the interpretation of the situation. It might therefore be thought of as a reductionist iterative process.

The convergent interviewing process is summarized in **Table 1**. Dick (1990, p. 1) believes that interviews should be conducted on a one-to-one basis. Where a number of interviewers are involved, they should compare findings. This addresses a major crit-

icism of qualitative techniques, namely, interviewer bias. Where a qualitative piece of research is the product of an individual's views on a particular subject, that person's findings might be coloured by any number of factors (Dick, 1990, p. 4). Initially, interviews are unstructured, but as the number of interviews and the richness of data improves, questions can become more focused to expose key findings. This allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a situation. Convergence can also occur naturally within an interview as an interviewer explores particular issues as they emerge. Interviewers will tend to filter information as they interview, trying to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between interviewees. In a sense convergent interviewing legitimizes this natural tendency by making it an explicit part of the research strategy. In a strategic context this might revolve, for example, around issues such as differences or agreement about stakeholder understanding or strategic intent.

Dick describes convergent interviewing as cyclical in nature (see **Figure 2**), in that it allows refinement of the question, the answers and the method applied (Dick, 1990, p. 2). He describes the process of convergent interviewing as a series of 'successive approximations' (Dick, 1990, p. 3).

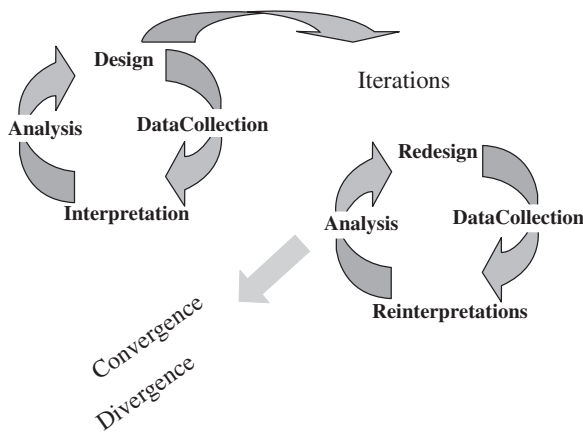


Figure 1. Convergent interviewing process.
Source: After Dick (1990, p. 3).

Table 1. The convergent interviewing process

1. The research topic is identified
2. Key themes for interviews are identified by
 - (a) Reference to the literature
 - (b) Reference to key informants — the clients or the research team
3. Interviewees are identified — normally experts in the area of research
4. Interview takes place
5. Key issues are identified
6. Interview schedule is amended in light of interview findings
7. Interviews are concluded when convergent themes are identified

Source: Nair and Riege (1995); in Rao and Perry (2003, p. 237).

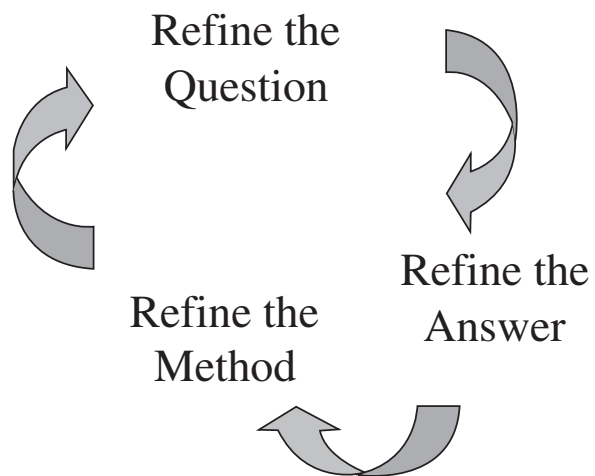


Figure 2. Convergent interviewing process of successive approximations.
Source: Dick (1990, p. 3).

It is important for the strategic management researcher or consultant to distinguish between what Dick describes as '*content*' (i.e. the topic being researched) and the '*process*' (i.e. convergent interviewing), as these can come together over the course of a research project. He states that it is important that the researcher keeps their interpretations open for as long as possible. To this end the interview should begin with as open a question as possible, only later moving on to specific issues. Dick (1990) suggests that the initial questions should almost be content-free. Later questions should be used to remove discrepancies and ambiguities. Thus, within a structured data analysis process, the initial interview content (the questions) should be unstructured. The structured process could be open to adjustment through the course of a research project, as the target population might be expanded. For example, where it is identified that there has been inconsistency in views about elements in the strategic decision-making processes in an organization, interviewers can focus their questioning to explore areas of discrepancy. Continuing this example, different individuals or groups in organizations may have diverse perspectives on sources of strategic direction in an organization. By focusing on this element in the process (i.e. questions) in successive interviews, areas of clear convergence or divergence can be established. It is argued that because of the complexity of strategic situations this process is essential.

Dick (1990) describes the structure of convergent interviewing as a dialectic process, where disagreements and agreements are used to identify patterns of convergence and divergence. This is self-evident in the process, but acknowledging the fact is important when considering the method. He states, '*Convergence and discrepancy provide ways of identifying the needle of informative data in the haystack of irrelevancy*' (Dick, 1990, p. 10). It is important to maintain a healthy respect for both patterns of data, as they could be equally significant. Dick specifically proposes that, in each interview, the researcher actively tries to disprove emerging explanations of the

data. He claims that if this technique is used systematically it will provide the study with objectivity when refining subjective data (Dick, 1990, p. 11). In a strategic context, a chief executive's view, if divergent from perspectives of other levels in the organization, might indicate a fundamental failure at the strategic apex of an organization. If strategy should be examined from multiple perspectives as Mintzberg *et al.* (1998) would argue, different stakeholders may have very different yet valid perspectives on a strategic issue.

A series of convergent interviews in a typical study would be continuously modified with refinement of the content and process. According to Reige and Nair (2004), interviewing will terminate '*when a stable pattern of clear agreements or disagreements emerges between all or most of the interviewees, and where different opinions and beliefs can be explained*' (p. 75). The development of a progressive report, which can be amended after each interview, is a useful vehicle for production of research findings. To allow a strategic assessment to be made and strategic change to be managed it is important that some 'firm' foundations of evidence and structure are established. Convergent interviewing allows the strategy researcher to establish some basis for further examination or change.

Validity and reliability

Issues of validity and reliability cannot be ignored when utilizing qualitative techniques (Silverman, 2000, p. 1) and convergent interviewing is no exception. Reliability is described by Hammersley (1992) as '*the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions*' (p. 67). Furthermore, Silverman warns of the dangers of this form of measurement of reliability as a different context might elicit an alternative finding (2001, p. 225). Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 10) identify that reliability can be achieved through consistency in procedure. It is here

that convergent interviewing proves its worth as a method that offers the strategic management researcher a clear and established procedural basis with which to address potential problems of reliability.

Issues of validity in convergent interviewing, as they do in all forms of qualitative research, centre on 'anecdotalism' (Silverman, 2000, p. 10). Qualitative research is often criticized for being merely 'anecdotal' or 'illustrative' and conducted in casual or unstructured ways (Mason, 2002, p. 1). Kirk and Miller identified two types of 'anecdotal error' in terms of validity of qualitative data. A type 1 error occurs when a researcher believes a statement is true when it is not, whereas a type 2 error is the opposite, when a statement is rejected although it is true (Kirk and Miller, 1986, pp. 29–30). Rao and Perry (2003, pp. 240–241) identify three types of validity measures: namely, construct, internal and external, that can and should be applied to research that utilizes convergent interviewing. *Construct validity* is established through practical approaches to the subject (Emory and Cooper, 1991; in Rao and Perry, 2003, p. 240). *Internal validity* refers to the casual relationship between variables (Zikmund, 2000; in Rao and Perry, 2003, p. 240). Finally, *external validity* relates to the generalizability of the study.

It must be noted that the notion of validity comes from quantitative research and therefore, in certain respects, the concept of validity might not be applicable to the same extent when considering convergent interviewing. Convergent interviewing, as with most forms of qualitative research, generates large amounts of data which makes analysis both difficult and complex. Turner (1983) suggests a 'solution' to this problem by ensuring the data is firmly grounded in theory where interrelationships between data and theory can be clearly established (Turner, 1983, p. 333). However, this is not always the case when using convergent interviewing. Convergent interviewing allows researchers to identify theory through inductive, rather than deductive logic. The process explicit in convergent interviewing assists the researcher in finding

their way through the mass of data produced by the process to identify the key issues pertinent to the subject being studied. It is here that the technique of convergent interviewing might prove most useful to the strategy researcher and consultant. The complexity of strategic processes, often with multiple interpretations by stakeholders, requires a flexible research framework in respect to the boundaries of the research content, whilst maintaining some structure to the process.

The complexity of strategic processes requires a flexible research framework

Advantages and disadvantages of convergent interviewing

Rao and Perry identify three main benefits of convergent interviewing (2003, p. 238): first, as a method for quickly converging on key issues in an area of emergent research; second, as an efficient mechanism for data analysis after each interview; third, as a method for recognizing the end-point for research. Both Rao and Perry (2003, p. 237) and Dick (1990, p. 3) clearly identify that the main advantage of convergent interviewing compared to in-depth interviews is its ability to refine content and the process of the interview and to focus in on broad research issues. Rao and Perry (2003, pp. 237–239) critique convergent interviewing against in-depth interviewing, case research and focus groups and clearly establish the main strength of convergent interviewing is its progressive nature, that allows a research theory or theme to emerge from successive iterations of the interview process. This facet of convergent interviewing is invaluable when researching strategic issues.

Woodward identifies limitations of the convergent interviewing method (Woodward, 1996; in Rao and Perry, 2003, pp. 239–240).

First he, like Dick (1990), highlights the potential for interviewer bias. Second, Woodward believes that researchers need to have prior knowledge of the research subject so that they can contribute to the '*... meaningful information to the exploratory research...*', however, this may once again result in researcher bias. Reige and Nair identify prior knowledge as a key issue in the use of the technique (2004, p. 76), whilst Woodward (1996) has concerns that convergent interviewing on its own may not be sufficient in terms of validity to provide results that can be generalized.

Despite these criticisms we maintain that as a technique, convergent interviewing has much to offer the strategic management researcher. Faced with the complex intertwining of variables from multiple sources, the strategy researcher must take into account copious perspectives quickly, analyse them with integrity and offer potential solutions and observations. To this end, we decided to adopt the technique of convergent interviewing to two research projects with the aim of undertaking some formal evaluation and observation. It is to these examples we now turn.

The research projects

The convergent interviewing method was applied in two UK public sector commissioned research projects. The aim of the first project was to evaluate the provision of services by a public-sector funded development agency. The aim of the second project was the development of a community regeneration strategy for a county region. Both projects took place in highly politicized environments with multiple stakeholders. A key reason for the research team's involvement in both projects was their perceived objectivity as both client organizations were some geographic distance from the research team's base. All the members of the research team had knowledge of the localities and their socio-economic underpinnings, which was important in understanding the individual complexities of each project.

Essentially the same methodology and method were applied in both projects. The only difference was that in the second project, the development of a community regeneration strategy for a county region, a larger research team of six interviewers was utilized, compared to only four interviewers for the first project. In both cases a project director liaised with the clients and oversaw the direction of the project, although all the members of the research teams were actively involved in the development and consideration of the method.

In both projects the clients identified the research aims but did not specify the methodology, methods, or provide any indication as to the themes that they wished to see emerge from the data-gathering processes. Both academic and grey literature (mainly in the form of reports and minutes of meetings) were consulted by the research teams. Lengthy discussions were also held with both sets of clients, after which key themes were identified, agreed upon and noted by the research team. This information provided interviewers with background to the issues that they might encounter in sessions with key respondents. However, the researchers were always mindful of the very 'emergent' nature of strategic issues on the ground.

The research team and the client jointly identified key respondents. Deciding on the sampling frame is a critical element in the convergent interviewing process. '*In qualitative research like this [convergent interviewing], the sampling method is purposeful rather than random*' (Patton, 1990; in Rao and Perry, 2003, p. 242). Care was taken to ensure that a wide spread of views was canvassed. Importantly, the research team identified 'politically neutral' respondents who were interviewed at the outset of the process in an attempt to avoid initial potential bias. Additional informants were identified during the process of data gathering. In addition to key respondent interviews the process utilized focus groups. Focus groups were used because of the nature of some of the stakeholder groupings whose views needed to be gained. Resource con-

straints and research timings also influenced the selection of focus groups as an appropriate data-gathering mechanism. It is important to note that the use of focus groups is a departure from the conventional convergent interviewing technique; however, the same dialectic process was applied, where disagreements and agreements are used to identify patterns of convergence (agreement) and divergence (disagreement) in both focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

In both cases the research teams underwent thorough briefings on the process and content throughout the projects. This was essential to ensure that the teams were fully conversant with the process and content being adopted. This is a necessary prerequisite for convergent interviewing, as a 'rogue' interviewer might invalidate findings. The focus groups and interviews with key respondents were conducted in as free-following a manner as was possible under such conditions. This follows the advice of Silverman (2001) who argued that questions should be as open-ended as possible to ensure 'authenticity' (p. 13). In both projects the lead questions were framed as openly as possible. For example:

Can you tell us about the performance of XXXX organization?

Can you tell us what you think of the community regeneration strategy in XXXX?

The initial project involved three focus groups and nine key respondent interviews. The second project consisted of seven focus groups and fifteen interviews. All focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Usually three members of the research team would attend a focus group (two interviewers and a scribe) and two would conduct an interview. The interviewers acted, as Dick suggests, independently of each other but in parallel (Dick, 1990). The same open-ended questioning approach adopted in the interviews, was adopted in the focus groups. As themes surfaced, interviewers explored emerging aspects of the study.

A strict method of reporting findings from each focus group and interview was established. This involved interviewers making outline notes of key issues that came out of meetings. Notification of these issues would then be passed to the project manager who had an overview of the research being undertaken. This allowed relatively easy identification of emergent themes and convergent and divergent thoughts on those themes from respondents. Focus groups are particularly useful where multi-perspectives are required but the researcher has limited resources, although, it must be noted that focus groups have inherent dangers in terms of group dynamics. Regular research team meetings allowed interviewers to discuss findings and for the project directors to amend the process and content with the full commitment and understanding of the research team. Transcripts of meetings were only used for confirmation of assertions or to quote exemplar statements about particular issues.

As the number of focus groups and interviews increased, an iterative review of the process and content was conducted, which allowed the research team to focus on key convergent or divergent themes until they were satisfied with the validity and reliability of their observations. In both projects, draft reports were produced and discussed with the clients, which also included some of the key stakeholder groupings. Feedback and comments were received before the final draft was delivered to the client.

Findings and discussion

Both projects were well received by the clients and stakeholder participants. Client feedback suggests that our method of convergent interviewing did indeed identify the main issues and represented the 'reality' of the situations being researched. We do not make claims that either project provided complete solutions for the clients, but that the technique of convergent interviewing was effective in providing a progressive mechanism for reduction of uncertainty (Philips and Pugh,

1994; in Reige and Nair, 2004, p. 73), which is a key facet for any strategic research project.

As experienced researchers, the research team involved in both studies were able to make comparisons with other recently used methods and found the convergent interviewing technique useful for a number of reasons. First, the structure of the process gave some certainty in projects that were nebulous and potentially without boundaries. Convergent interviewing provided a rationale for the research teams to establish boundaries for their research around the convergent or divergent themes. Second, the process also allowed for limited resources to be used efficiently and effectively. Focus groups and interviews had tangible objectives and means of reporting findings. Linked with regular research team meetings, this allowed bias to be identified and an element of objectivity in the study. The convergent and divergent views of researchers in these meetings were an invaluable element in the research process, allowing for creative and emergent interpretative discussion that nevertheless retained objectivity as a result of the method.

There has been some discussion in the literature (Reige and Nair, 2004; Dick, 1990) about the use of divergent information. Initially, Dick suggests that it should be discarded. However, as Reige and Nair indicate, divergent information, in particular circumstances, should be utilized (Reige and Nair, 2004, p. 78). These studies highlighted this perfectly, where individual respondent's divergent views opened up avenues for further research by the team and produced some useful and illuminating findings.

Woodward's concerns (Woodward, 1996; in Rao and Perry, 2003, pp. 239-240) regarding the convergent interviewing technique were recognized by the research team before the research design phase and during interview training. However, as already illustrated, the main issue of bias was felt to have been addressed by the use of convergent interviewing, particularly with the use of focus groups and interviews. By gaining multiple convergent or divergent interpretations of

views, the research team could be confident in the validity and reliability of their findings.

The danger of bias through prior knowledge of the subject was overcome to an extent by attempting to ensure that one member of the interviewing team had little prior knowledge of the situation, organization or individual interviewee's perspective. Obviously, as the research on both projects progressed this became more difficult. However, in the early phases of these projects this objectivity was essential as certain research team members had been intimately involved in discussion with the client and examination of client documentation.

The three types of validity measure identified by Rao and Perry (2003), namely construct, internal and external validity, were addressed by using a number of techniques. Construct validity was achieved through triangulation of focus groups, interview questions and primarily through the very nature of the convergent interview process. As described, the interview content and process was re-evaluated and re-designed through the interview programme. Internal validity was a difficult standard to meet. However, the convergent interviewing process relies on casual relationship identification. This was achieved through detailed and rigorous analysis of the data by the project team. Woodward's (1996) concerns must be recognized, that convergent interviewing on its own may not be sufficient in terms of external validity to provide results that can be generalized. Both sets of findings were presented as generalizable only to the situation being examined and as such should not be held up as models for '*similar*' situations so as to establish '*theory*'. However, the repetitive nature of the process might be considered as a form of generalization of the findings. Reliability in the form of consistency in this study was achieved using a structured process of interviews. The structured process of recording, writing and interpreting data also added to the method's reliability. The use of multiple interviewers working in parallel in the design and conduct of the interviews also contributed to the reliability of the interview data.

The research teams acted as a 'steering group' (a term used by Dick, 1990) in the design, analysis and evaluation of the focus group and interview content and process. As Rao and Perry (2003) identify, validity and reliability in qualitative research comes through forms of cross-checking and convergent interviewing is a method where cross-checking of data is a fundamental feature of the process. The use of multiple interviewers, it is argued, is an additional source of validity and reliability in the process.

The holistic nature of strategic management is such that its study invariably involves a multitude of perspectives, factors and agents. The boundaries of any strategic research project are transient and, as such, can rarely be firmly set when designing the method. The content of strategic research is often a moveable but rich feast that requires structure in its process so as to allow some foundation for findings to emerge. In the two cases outlined above it was found that convergent interviewing was a valuable tool in researching this type of complexity.

Concluding remarks

For projects where there is little or no academic theory, where it is unclear which body of theory can be brought to bear, or where there is little precedent in terms of established practitioner routine, convergent interviewing is a highly applicable tool in qualitative strategic research. The projects and processes described here deviate from the established practice as detailed by writers such as Dick (1990) and Rao and Perry (2003) largely through the use of focus groups. However, we would argue that the essential characteristics that underpin convergent interviewing make

it a sufficiently powerful method in the type of situation described here.

The apparent success of the projects, evidenced by the positive reactions of the clients and key stakeholders, reaffirmed the utility of convergent interviewing in inductive, albeit 'commercial', multi-variant research, i.e. research that may have a number of academic and non-academic foci. Dick (1990) offers for any experienced researcher a valuable observation, '*The best time to design the data-collection procedures is at the end of the program*' (p. 7). Convergent interviewing, to an extent, addresses this issue. Where the area of research does not clearly sit within one particular field of study and therefore the research question or methodology and method may not be at all clear, or the researcher cannot conduct a pilot study, a multi-cyclical approach to research, such as convergent interviewing, might be more appropriate. We argue strongly, based on the experience of the cases outlined above, that convergent interviewing should find its place in the toolkit of the strategic management analyst and consultant, if only because the very nature of strategic analysis provides a complexity of terrain unseen by functional specialists.

Research into strategic issues lends itself to inductive qualitative methods such as convergent interviewing. The use of multiple and experienced researchers was invaluable in gathering, but more importantly evaluating and synthesizing data. This allowed the findings to be presented with some confidence in terms of their validity and reliability. Convergent interviewing was particularly useful for identifying the 'boundaries' and therefore key themes, which should be applied to studies with amorphous margins.

The removal of discrepancies in interview responses is where a main advantage of convergent interviewing is gained. Dick (1990) describes content analysis of interview transcripts as '*masochism*' (p. 9), and all of those experienced researchers involved in the studies described here were glad to have avoided such an approach. To that end, through the convergent interviewing process,

*Convergent interviewing is
a highly applicable tool in
qualitative strategic
research*

the minutiae of transcript evaluation and synthesis and the comparatively time-consuming process of content analysis was not only avoided but justifiably dispensed with.

Whilst Dick sees convergent interviewing as part of the repertoire of the action researcher, it is felt that it is worthy of consideration by all qualitative academic and practitioner researchers. In the field of strategic management research, where variables are often many and unclear, convergent interviewing might just assist the analyst and consultant. Accepting that the use of focus groups might be criticized by the convergent interviewer purist, we would contend that they were a necessary and valuable addition to the technique. Anything that can contribute significantly to the reliability and validity of a study's findings is at least worthy of careful consideration and at best laudable of practical application.

Biographical notes

Wil Williams is a Principal Lecturer in the University of Glamorgan Business School. Wil is Head of the Strategy Field and a leading member of the Welsh Institute for Competitive Advantage.

Duncan Lewis is The ACAS Professor of Workplace Futures and Head of the Department of Strategy.

References

- Abercrombie N, Hill S, Turner B. 2000. *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*. Penguin: London.
- Beinhocker E. 1997. Strategy at the edge of chaos. *The McKinsey Quarterly* (1): 22–40.
- Burns RB. 2000. *Introduction to Research Methods*. Sage Publications: London.
- Burrell G, Morgan G. 1979. *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life*. Heinemann: London.
- Courtney H, Kirkland J, Viguier SP. 1997. Strategy under uncertainty. *Harvard Business Review* 75(6): 67–81.
- Dick R. 1990. *Convergent Interviewing*. Interchange: Brisbane.
- Easterby-Smith M, Thorpe R, Lowe A. 1994. *Management Research — An Introduction*. Sage Publications: London.
- Fields EE. 1988. Qualitative content analysis of television news: systematic techniques. *Qualitative Sociology* 11(3): 183–193.
- Flick U. 2002. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications: London.
- Gummesson E. 2000. *Qualitative Research Methods in Management Research*. Sage Publications: London.
- Hammersley M. 1992. *What's Wrong With Ethnography? Methodological Explorations*. Longmans: London.
- Hughes J, Sharrock W. 1997. *The Philosophy of Social Research*. Longmans: London.
- Kirk J, Miller M. 1986. *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications: London.
- Kurtz CF, Snowden DJ. 2003. The new dynamics of strategy: sense-making in a complex and complicated world. *IBM Systems Journal* 42(3): 462–484.
- Marshall C, Rossman GB. 1995. *Designing Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications: London.
- Mason J. 2002. *Qualitative Researching*. Sage Publications: London.
- Mintzberg H, Ahlstrand B, Lampel J. 1998. *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management*. FinancialTimes/Prentice Hall: London.
- Pascale R, Millemann M, Gioja L. 2000. *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*. Textre Publishing: London.
- Patton MQ. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Sage Publications: London.
- Rao S, Perry C. 2003. Convergent interviewing to build a theory in under-researched areas: principles and an example investigation of internet usage in inter-firm relationships. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 6(4): 236–247.
- Reige AM, Nair G. 2004. The diversity of convergent interviewing applications for early researchers and postgraduate students. *The Marketing Review* 4: 73–85.
- Rocco TS. 2003. Shaping the future: writing up the method on qualitative studies. *Human Resource Development* 14(3): 343–349.
- Silverman D. 2000. *Doing Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications: London.

- Silverman D. 2001. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. Sage Publications: London.
- Stacey RD. 1996. *Complexity and Creativity in Organisations*. Berrett-Koehler Publications: San Francisco.
- Turner BA. 1983. The use of grounded theory for the qualitative analysis of organisational behaviour. *Journal of Management Studies* 20(3): 333-348.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.