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EMERGING THEMES IN THE LIFE STORIES OF EFFECTIVE MANAGERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on emerging themes in effective managers' life stories. The literature review looks at the role of stories in a broader sense in organisations and more specifically the life stories or autobiographical stories and their impact on learning, management, leadership and self development. Regarding methodology, utilising phenomenography, the research aims to uncover conceptions and conclusions that can be drawn from managers' life stories and how they could have a bearing on their success. The result of this phenomenographic study is a structure of categories of description which is interpreted with respect to existing theory on stories and autobiographical writing. This research has implications in the fields of self-development when grounded in the managers' experience of a multifaceted context, reflection, re-conceptualisation and action become means with which to solve problems, clarify ambiguities and develop personal skills and abilities. For persons in management these skills are essential and academic training is not particularly useful in developing a manager's ability to deal with problems. This research also has a bearing on career management, recruitment and selection as well as training and development in that stories act as enablers to describing and reflecting an organisational climate. This allows individuals to make personal decisions about the appropriateness of their "fit" with the organisation and provides a common framework to discuss inconsistency and incompetence.

DECLARATION

I, Cindi Reyneke declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

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Cindi Reyneke

4 September 2006

DEDICATION

To my husband Kingsley

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I wish to express my sincere thanks to:

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of study

Human beings have been communicating with each other through storytelling since the beginning of civilization. What is new today about the art of telling stories is the purposeful use of narrative to achieve a practical outcome with an individual, a community, or an organization. Storytelling is a universal form of communication, which engages people in interactions that are informative, meaningful and inspirational (Christie, 2004). In contrast to traditional forms of corporate communication, storytelling is an enlivening process, which harnesses the energy of people towards constructive change and development in their working lives. Storytelling has over the past twenty years enjoyed a resurgence of interest in society generally (Jensen, 2001) and a newfound interest in organisations, particularly business organisations (Denning, 2004). Well-known economist Deirdre McCloskey (1995) wrote an article in the American Economic Review, showing that 28% of the gross national product in the United States is accounted for by persuasion and Prusak cited in Brown, Denning, Groh, & Prusak (2005) estimates that two-thirds of persuasion can be accounted for by storytelling. In 1999 this would have equated to US$1.8-trillion.

To date, no empirical research has been reported in the field of the autobiographical stories of managers. This research has implications in the fields of self-development (Day Sclater, 2005), career management (McKenna, 1999), training and development, and organisational development (Gold & Holman, 2001).

1.2 Problem statement

The problem this research addresses is to identify, describe and explore any patterns, themes, conceptions and conclusions that can be drawn from managers' life stories that could have a bearing on their success.

Sub problems:

i) What are the conceptions that emerge from managers' life stories?
ii) How are these conceptions experienced and are they interrelated in any way?
iii) Do any of these conceptions or themes have a bearing on their success?

The research is aimed at uncovering patterns, themes and conceptions in the autobiographical stories of ten senior managers. Selecting senior managers by means of the positions they hold would imply, and for this research we assume, management competence and by analysing their life stories one could find similar patterns that could point to management competence. No research has yet been conducted to establish how certain elements in a successful manager's life story promote or contribute to his or her competence. The aim of this research is to explore, if this is the case, what these elements are and how they have influenced these managers' success.

1.3 Delimitations and limitations of the study

1.3.1 Delimitations

- This research is exploratory and uses comparative analysis. The life stories of the selected ten managers will be compared for meaning and relevance and in relation to the framework or guidelines given as categories of description.
- The issues under review are complex and incorporate knowledge and information across different academic disciplines. This research is not restricted to economic viewpoints and socio-economic, social, psychological and anthropological issues are recognised, although not analysed *per se.* This may cause the research to overlook some significant issues that could affect the problem.
- The nature of the topic of this research report evokes a great deal of response. The responses to managers' life stories are therefore based on their personal values and emotions with respect to the issues at hand.

1.3.2 Limitations

With the nature of this research process being qualitative research in the form of case studies (each life story could be regarded as a single case), performed in the interpretive paradigm, certain limitations apply:

- The life stories being examined are single sources of data and, as such, the data or facts contained in these stories have not been verified and will therefore be accepted at face value.
- The data are the authors' own life stores, which raises questions around disclosure. For the purpose of this study it is necessary to take into consideration that the authors might leave facts or events out, that they might lie, forget, embellish and that the comprehensiveness of their stories might be questioned.

- No generalisation can be made, as the purpose of case study research is to add to theory building and to articulate patterns rather than to generalise to a population.

1.4 Significance of the study

To the researchers knowledge no prior research has been done in the field of managers' life stories; this research is a pilot study and therefore groundbreaking. This research is significant for self-development, personal growth, and personal and individual change dynamics, and could have implications in organisational development, career management, recruitment and selection, training and development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of this chapter is to present existing theory and literature that is relevant to the problem. The first topic relates to stories and storytelling in a broad sense, while the second part of the literature review will focus on storytelling in organisations and the third part focusses on autobiographical story and life stories.

2.1 Stories and storytelling

> "Furthermore, we have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path, and where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outwards, we will come to the centre of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world." (Campbell, 1991)

From the earliest times, people have used stories as a means of relating ideals and values that are important to them. Storytelling is a universal form of communication and an innate expression of civilisation which engages people in interactions that are informative, meaningful and inspirational (Christie, 2004).

> "In the first place, in the last place, that is what we people do…. We are a narrative species. We exist by story telling – by relating our situations – and the test of our evolution may lie in getting the story right … so enduring is this storytelling need that it shapes nearly every human endeavour." (Rosenblatt, 2000)

Good stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives that can infuse facts with meaning. Stories include many semiotic clues and can be interpreted in infinite ways; therein lies their richness, as well as their potential dangers. Stories have certainly provided a verbal medium through which generations have become connected over time, thereby acting as a means of keeping history alive. One of the best examples is the Bible, one of the most widely read stories in history.

Nineteenth-century scholars regarded stories as cultural artefacts, surviving linguistic entities pervading by means of symbols. The universality of storytelling was accepted *a priori* (Georges, 1969).

Myths, legends and fables all have a universal character as sources of wisdom, sense making of events and an account of historic events. Bettelheim (1975), a follower of Sigmund Freud and a contributor to psychoanalysis, suggests, for instance, that fairy tales are highly instrumental in the education of children. Following Plato, he believes fairy tales are of pedagogical use in that the literary education of children should begin with the telling of myths because they present models for behaviour, providing meaning and value.

By the age of four we have already constructed a large number of scripts, stereotypes of scenarios that prove surprisingly impervious to change (Gardner, 1993). According to Gardner (1993), children find it easy to identify with stories of basic themes and simplicity such as good versus evil, light against dark, force A versus force B, and can identify strongly with the individuals and causes of these forces. Adults never lose their sensitivity to these basic narratives and it is the leader who can draw or exploit the universal sensitivity to these basic themes that will succeed in convincing his audiences on the merits of his cause.

2.2 Storytelling in organisations

The idea that sense can be made of the richness and complexity of an organisation through stories is a compelling one. Gabriel (2000) contends that good stories are valuable in that they "entertain, inspire, explain, educate and convince". On the other hand, he argued that bad stories can undermine communication and can "challenge the very possibility of 'sensory discourse'" (Gabriel, 2000). In his experience with storytelling, coming from a business environment that scoffs at such notions, Stephen Denning's (2004) early success with an anecdotal tale inspired him. In his article *Telling Tales*, he asks whether stories have a role to play in the business world?

2.2.1 Storytelling, change and transformation

In his book *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-era Organisations*, Stephen Denning (2000) puts together a coalition of colleagues who understand the value of sharing know-how and expertise in transforming the organisation's strategy. Denning coins the term "springboard stories" to characterise his approach. This type of story enables a leap in understanding by the audience, helping them to grasp how an organisation or community or complex systems may change.

Scepticism around the value of storytelling derives mostly from a particular and generally justified mind-set that analysis drives business thinking. The strength of analysis is that it is objective, impersonal and often heartless, but herein lies its weakness: it might excite the mind but it hardly touches the heart.

In anticipation of using visionary stories to ignite people's imagination, Denning (2000) discovered most of the successful stories are surprisingly sketchy about the details of the imagined future. Examples of such imagined futures are Winston Churchill's "We shall fight on the

beaches" speech (Churchill, 1940) and Martin Luther King Jnr's "I have a dream" speech (King, 1963). Over time, Denning realised that specific predictions about the future are likely to be proved wrong and leaders risk losing people's confidence. Stories are designed to prepare people for change and therefore need to evoke an image of the future and provide direction for getting there, without being too precise.

2.2.2 Storytelling and Learning

Denning (2000) shows that even stories told poorly in terms of a classical definition could be effective in the right context. His interaction with Dave Snowdon (Director: IBM Institute of Knowledge Management) indicates that, just as positive stories are more appropriate when motivating people, "negative" stories or stories that illustrate how we learn from mistakes, are more appropriate when sharing knowledge.

Prusak cited in Brown *et al* (2005) finds meaning in storytelling in how organisations work: many standard methods fail to explain how people learn to act in organisations. Where is the knowledge in organisations, how do you know what people know, how do you know how to behave, especially when entering a new organisation? Many of these questions can be understood through stories, talking and persuasion.

Brown (Brown *et al*, 2005) states the following important advantages of storytelling:

- Communicating complexity.
- Learning to work with the world, learning lessons from everyday stories.
- Rapid communication: the social fabric of an organisation is a very effective way of spreading rumours but stories also live in the same social fabric and are equally successful to communicate rapidly through the organisation.

Bell (1992) advocates stories for inspiring, instructing and entertaining. Although research on storytelling, as an educational medium, is limited there are some conclusions (Zemke, 1990):

- A story told aloud, compared with the same story presented as a television programme, resulted in better retention of vocabulary and concepts. The television version showed superior results in recall of specific story actions.
- Stories told with words that were highly evocative of visual imagery stimulated better long-term retention of content than did repetition or rote and drill.
- Students instructed to try to visualise the action and content of a story were better able to remember its key ideas and better able to recite it accurately than were students who were instructed to memorise sentences from the story.
- Humorous stories spurred recall of the content of both live lectures and video dramatisations. Specifically, when a key teaching point was followed by a related joke or humorous anecdote, retention and understanding were enhanced.
- When students were taught principles through storytelling rather than through straight exposition, they were more creative in applying them.
- Adults learned a foreign language more quickly when they were taught through folk stories. The most effective stories were simple and direct, used colourful imagery and natural dialogue, and contained some redundant story elements (p. 48).

2.2.3 Storytelling and leadership

Denning (2000) points out links between storytelling and leadership. Referring to *Leading Minds* by Howard Gardner (1995) and *The Leadership Engine* by Noel Tichy (1997), he illustrates how stories could help leaders define their personality for their followers, boosting others' confidence in the leaders' integrity, providing some idea of how

they might act in a given situation and inculcating positive corporate values and beliefs.

Denning (2000) concludes that, although much work needs to be done on narrative patterns for different organisational settings, the ability to tell the right story at the right time is emerging as an essential leadership skill, one that can help managers cope with, and get results in, the turbulent business world of the twenty-first century.

Prusak cited in Brown *et al* (2005) asks the question: What role do CEO's play? The stories told about IBM's future contain no facts but are a vision of the future. When asked about his most important attribute, former General Electric chief executive Jack Welsh cited in Brown *et al* (2005) said: "What really counts is that I'm Irish and I know how to tell stories".

2.2.4 Storytelling and social construction

For Boyce (1996), studies of organisational stories and storytelling that are built on a foundation of multidisciplinary research shape the understanding of stories and storytelling. Social constructivism, organisational symbolism and critical theory form the basis of this multidisciplinary research.

Berger & Luckmann (1967) described social construction as a blend of a social reality and symbolic interaction. They contended that the reality we collectively experience has, in fact, been constructed by our social interactions. Berger & Luckmann (1967) began with the universal need for meaning and order. They proposed that, as individuals engage in the construction of their personal meaning, collectives engage in the construction of a social reality.

As this reality needs to be communicated and passed on to another generation, difficulty arises. There is a desire to integrate a new generation into the current reality. It is this need for integration that Berger & Luckmann (1967, p.86) believed motivates "legitimation". Legitimation is the process by which people construct explanations and justifications for the fundamental elements of their collective, institutionalised tradition.

McWhinney (1984), building on the work of LeShan (1976), provide additional ways of understanding reality. This perspective on alternative realities provides a more effective way to understand the fundamental differences in how people view reality. The way people define their reality can be described in their position on two dimensions. These two dimensions form the axes of a four-quadrant model. These two axis are "the connectedness of the universe" (McWhinney, 1984, p. 10) and "freedom of will" (p.11).

The model provides a description of four very different realities. These realities are unitary, sensory, mythic and social (p. 11). This work contributes to the literature on the constructed reality, which recognises how deeply people differ in their recognition, experience and construction of reality.

Studies that have explicitly connected social construction, symbolic interaction, organisation(s) and stories are those of Boyce (1995), Brown (1982), Smircich (1983) and Wilkens (1978). These studies intentionally weave a perspective of socially constructed reality with stories and organisation, and specifically examine the relationship between socially constructed reality, shared beliefs and organisational ideology.

Brown's (1982) dissertation looks at the socialising use of stories among 75 employees in four nursing homes. Brown supported delineation of symbolic functions as describing, energy-controlling and system-maintaining and said that stories "give reasons which provide coherence and order to events occurring" (Brown, 1982, p. 48).

Wilkens (1978) found that organisational legend (generating commitment, making sense of organisation and control) enhances behavioural and attitudinal commitment, and organisational control is made easier.

Smircich (1983) describes the stories of an insurance company in light of the organisational history after spending six weeks as an observer within the company. Looking closely at the stories and common beliefs held in the company, she used the organisational history to explore the meaning of the stories and shared interpretations. A significant conclusion of the study is that these meanings may be consciously or unconsciously developed.

The salient aspects of these research studies explicitly linking social construction, stories and organisation are that:

- Stories are useful for socialisation of new members and generating commitment.
- Familiarity with dominant organisational stories can be an indicator of adaptation.
- Stories can be a vehicle for social control.
- Meaning can develop consciously and/or unconsciously.

2.2.5 Storytelling and organisational symbolism

Organisational symbolism involves the construction of meaning in organisations and attaching it to form. Broadly defined by Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce (1980, p. 77) as that which "expresses the underlying character, ideology or value system of an organisation". They proposed that the symbol-bearing aspects of organisational life are stories and myths, ceremonies and ritualised events, company logos, and anecdotes and jokes (p. 77). Organisational symbolism fits in under the overall heading of the literature of organisational culture.

In his essay on organisational symbolism, Pondy (1983) built on the sociological paradigms (functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist) model from Burrell & Morgan (1979) to identify metaphors and research in organisational symbolism, which they aligned with each paradigm. Each paradigm favours particular assumptions, approaches and research questions:

- The functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) emphasises the use of symbol for the maintenance of social order. Metaphors related to this paradigm are the organismic metaphor, the cybernetic metaphor, the culture metaphor and the theatrical metaphor. Therefore, symbolism is useful for organisational order. Examples of research on functionalist paradigms are Goffman (1959), Rappaport (1971), and Wilkens (1978, 1983).
- The interpretive paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) views the construction of meaning through symbolic media. The metaphors related to this paradigm are sense-making, text and language games. Research from this perspective is concerned with understanding and interpreting how this process occurs. Examples of research on the interpretive paradigm are Boje (1995), Boyce (1995), Gabriel (1991), Mahler (1988), Thorpe (1986), Berg (1985), Smircich (1983), Brown (1982), Ricoeur (1971), Schutz (1967) and Mead (1934).

- The radical humanist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) emphasises the pathological use of symbol and draws on the psychic prison metaphor, which focuses on the use of symbols to alienate. Persons are seen as trapped by their own unconscious and conscious social constructs. Work by Sievers (1993, 1994) is an example of research on this paradigm.
- The radical structuralist (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) paradigm emphasises the way symbolic form is used in ideological control in the interests of those in power. The metaphor it draws on is instruments of domination and research from this perspective focuses on ways in which dominant social ideologies are sustained. The work of Giroux (1992, 1993, and 1994) examines the use of popular culture to sustain this ideology.

Research on stories and storytelling has been conducted within each of the paradigms outlined above and the most notable points are: researchers from various disciplines have described organisational stories and the process of storytelling as primary ways in which meaning, individual and collective, is expressed: and the paradigm within which one has worked shapes the design and method of a study and is evident in one's scholarship.

2.2.6 Critical Perspective

A vast amount of literature – spanning sociology, philosophy, social criticism, education and organisational studies – exists that advocates a critical perspective (Giroux, 1992, 1993; Tierney, 1989, 1993; Martin, 1990, 1992; Mills & Trancred, 1992; Smircich, 1992; Calas & Clegg, 1990; Bowles, 1989; Burrell, 1988; Mills, 1988; Freire, 1985; Ferguson, 1984; Gramsci, 1971). What is vital to a critical perspective is identifying and challenging the assumptions that underlie one's work; this involves making a ruthless and courageous examination and deconstruction of assumptions, norms, expectations, limitations, language, results and applications of one's work. This also applies to

storytelling. In one of the most comprehensive and critical review of organisational myth done to date, Bowles (1989) examined the relationship between myth and work in organisations.

His main thesis was that, with the demise of the Church as a central theme in society, many people now seek meaning in their work organisations. One aspect of Bowles' analysis was five dominant management ideologies: structuralism, psychologism, welfarism, legalism and consensualism. He argues that management ideologies serve to bind the individual to the organisation and that organisational stories are used to promote Salaman's (1979) management ideologies of psychologism and welfarism.

The central theme in these ideologies, motivation, becomes the surrogate for meaning (Sievers, 1986). Stories speak to purpose, motivation, sense of team and success. As meaning in the workplace is destroyed, people need increasingly to be externally motivated. Cultural meaning-makers use myth and stories to address the fragmentation and alienation that is created by modern management, but Sievers criticised large-scale cultural prescriptions that are promoted as ways to align employees with a purpose larger than themselves.

Utilising creative images and metaphors, Morgan (2006) shows managers how to view their organizations by demonstrating how to mobilise the insights of different metaphors: to manage and design organisations in new ways; to develop novel understandings of the relationships between organisation and environment; to create learning organisations with the intelligence of a living brain; to explore the intricacies of corporate culture and politics of organizational life; to understand the unconscious dimensions of organisation; to translate the implications of the new science of chaos and complexity into practical management strategies; and to confront and deal with the negative impacts that organisations often have on society and the natural world.

In Ingersoll & Adams (1986) and Adams & Ingersoll (1983), the management metamyth refers to a rational technical orientation towards tasks and relationship but they conclude that it is an insufficient substitute for deeper meaning because it is dehumanising and denies the numinous. Therefore the conditions that Campbell (1976a) described for personal and social integration are not found through the experience of work as instituted through the management metamyth. The "purposive-rational action" found in the work of Ingersoll and Adams (1986) is connected to a focus on increasing efficiency and the pursuit of economic and technological goals, and is contrasted with symbolic or communicative interaction, which Habermas (1970) connected with "emancipation, individuation and the extension of communication free of domination" (Habermas, 1970, p. 93).

Bowles (1989) contended that symbolic communication "is impossible where ideology of technical efficiency prevails" (Bowles, 1989, p. 410). His observations include corporate culture representing the most recent in a series of efforts designed to conceal the attempt of management to manipulate the interests of employees in the service of management. Further, organisational stories are used to develop and sustain corporate culture (Silver, 1987) and the basic tension that exists between the need for control and the need for participation underlies each attempt by management to demonstrate how individual interests can be served by aligning with management. Bowles (1989) advocates a creative mythology based on traditional mythologies and the ascension of work in organisations as a possible locus of meaning. This will allow the individual to re-centre himself on meaning that the individual creates and enacts individually and collectively (Campbell, 1976b).

According to Boyce (1996), Bowles's (1989) critique of organisational myth and meaning draws attention to the ways in which myth and story are utilised to promote and reinforce dominant ideologies, and how intellectual and ethical challenges flow from his work for those working

with organisational stories. Boyce (1996) states that the use of myth and stories is not value-neutral; story researchers, managers and practitioners can use stories and storytelling to describe and sustain current power structures. Or, they can nurture and fuel creativity and liberation to develop new meanings of work and personhood for individuals and groups.

2.3 Auto/biographical storytelling

> "A man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were telling a story." Jean-Paul Sartre (Burner, 2002).

> "If you want to know me then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my life, then I too, must come to know my own story." (McAdams, 1993).

Linguistic approaches in general and storytelling in particular, as methods of inquiry into organisational phenomena are gaining popularity as researchers look for alternative ways to understand meaning and sense-making in organisations (Alversson & Karreman, 2000; Gabriel, 2000; Marshak, Keenoy, Oswik & Grant, 2000).

Stories carry cultural meanings, social meanings and personal meanings. Some might contend that the best stories are born from personal experience. The role of autobiographical narrative has meaning in developing an awareness of the multifaceted nature of the manager's experiences and in presenting context through reflection, re-conceptualisation and action. For example, most theories of experiential learning in management education argue that managers should be encouraged to reflect on their own experience from different perspectives (Kolb, 1984).

Biographies and autobiographies are life stories, involving much more than physical experiences. As stories with antecedent histories, ancestors, events in many passing phases and chapters, common and divergent themes, multiple options, choices and challenges, and memories beyond the grave, biographies supersede anecdotes in their power and reach (Christie, 2004). They are intensely personal and, therefore, typically emotionally laden stories. Such stories are not the exclusive domain of people, and may also include organisations, their products and their services.

2.3.1 Life stories and learning

The Leeds Business School has included personal development modules for a number of years. Gold & Holman (2001) use Kolb's (1984) experiential learning and problem management cycle to evaluate these modules, which have been structured to encourage reflection on particular problems or issues. Diaries, learning logs, group discussions and self-assessment methods aided the process. The original modules were based on academic approaches to education as apposed to experiential approaches.

Academic approaches to education assert that the ideal process of learning is the active acquisition of theoretical knowledge, the acquisition of skills that enable the critique of such knowledge, and the ability to take action based on this knowledge (Barnett, 1990). Heavily criticised pedagogically (Revans, 1971; Willmott, 1997), the academic/technicist approach is often seen by managers and academics as being too theoretical, as having little practical relevance and as not being particularly useful in developing a manager's ability to deal with problems.

The experiential approach now adopted sees education as being more useful and meaningful where learning is grounded in the experiences of the person and involves learning through doing. Thus, according to Gold & Holman (2001) an experiential/practice approach to

management education suggests that learning forms an important element in the sense-making and action-taking processes of management. Grounded in the manager's experience of a multifaceted context, reflection, re-conceptualisation and action become means with which to solve problems, clarify ambiguities and develop personal skills and abilities.

The evaluation of the new modules illuminated the following areas:

- The general reaction of managers to the modules.
- Whether the use of narrative and argument analysis are viable forms of teaching practice in management education.
- How storytelling and the analysis of argument mediate the learning process and forms of action-taking.

On a general level Gold & Holman (2001) conclude that managers' reactions to the module were positive and the use of narrative helped managers to develop rich and complex descriptions of their experiences at work. The storytelling process clearly facilitated reflection, evidenced by the authors' comments on particular acts or events as their stories unfolded. Since the module used storytelling as a means of sense making and critique, this inevitably allowed some managers to relate important aspects of their past to present activities and experiences.

Narrative pedagogy is a technique developed for nursing education in the late 1980s that uses contemporary narratives from students, teachers and the community to treat all health-care issues. Narrative pedagogy emanates out of interpretive phenomenology, utilising conventional phenomenology as well as critical and feminist pedagogies. In a twelve-year study, Dinkelmann (2001) describes narrative pedagogy as it arises out of the common lived experiences of students, teachers and clinicians in nursing education.

Pedagogies are particular approaches to schooling, learning and teaching. Conventional pedagogies are outcomes- and competency-based education, problem-based learning and critical thinking frameworks (Dinkelmann 2001), whereas the alternative interpretive pedagogies to which Dinkelmann (2001) refers are critical, phenomenological and post-modern. The former selects and sequences knowledge to achieve the specified outcome and learning experiences are pre-planned by the teacher. In the latter, multiple epistemologies are presented, exploring ways of knowing and practices of thinking and knowing as central to understanding the nature of the experience. He stresses that although interpretive pedagogies can be contrasted with conventional pedagogy, each exists within and alongside the other, despite their profoundly different commitments to theory, knowledge, knowing, experience, language and political and social discourses. As an approach to learning, narrative pedagogy could also be applied to personal stories or narrative, where learning is more meaningful when grounded in the experiences of the person and involves learning through doing.

2.3.2 Life stories and management competence

In an article based on the use of storytelling in the development of management competence, McKenna (1999) finds that stories have the potential to be personal enablers and they have the capability to add value to individuals, managers and organisations in the following ways:

- To help individuals make personal decisions about the appropriateness of their "fit" with the organisation.
- To raise questions of organisational integrity, ethics and morality.
- To assist managers in "making sense" of their complexity.
- To allow managers and others to challenge "conventional wisdom" constructively.
- To develop the ability to reflect and enable better decisions to be made.

- To create a climate of empowerment.
- To provide a framework to discuss inconsistency and incompetence.

From several years of experience in writing workshops for executives at the Wharton School, Greco (1996) suggests that for more effective writing, one needs to provide time in the process to tap into the well of experience – feeling and thought – that a purely rational process may not achieve. The resulting stories are clearly more engaging, more powerful pieces of communication with emphasis on attention, response and reflection of one's own experience, which could be an influential source of learning in the workplace. Zemke (1990) concluded that stories told with evocative visual imagery stimulated better long-term retention of content.

Greco's (1996) research concludes that stories, in the process that brings them into dialogue with the explanatory powers of rational inquiry, can help people to learn or change in developmental ways. Narrative psychology (Howard, 1989) recognises health and developmental psychology (Kegan, 1982; McAdams, 1993), where maturity and reflection enable the telling of ever more capacitating stories of the self.

2.3.3 Life stories and leadership

Gardner (1993) argues that through narrative and autobiographical narrative, leaders present a dynamic perspective to their followers: not just a headline or snapshot, but a drama that unfolds over time, in which they – leader and follower – are the principal, characters or heroes. Leaders fashion stories, principally stories of identity, and it is important that a good leader be a good storyteller – but it's equally important that the leader embody that story in his own life. For his influential work, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy Leadership* (Gardner 1985), he relied heavily on published biographies but especially valuable were autobiographical accounts.

Gardner (1995) started off with some general ideas about leadership with the notion that stories were important for all leaders and the leaders who wanted to influence wide audiences would find themselves drawn to the enunciation of simple stories. Based on his earlier book, a study of creative individuals, *Creating Minds* (Gardner 1984), he had in mind to monitor such factors as the kind of families leaders came from, the cognitive strengths exhibited by leaders, the crucial role played by other supportive individuals and the length of time it takes to develop and disseminate novel ideas.

During the course of his study, some of these themes receded in importance while others emerged as worthy of more extended consideration. For example, before starting the case studies, he had not thought much about the contribution to effective leadership of travel in one's youth, the capacity to challenge figures in authority, a focus in early life on moral and spiritual issues, or the ways in which public figures apportion their time.

2.3.4 Role of narrative

The appeal of narrative analysis to researchers, according to Daiute & Lightfoot (2004), is its ability to examine people's lives holistically, to examine how social histories not only influence identity and development, but also provide insights into the relations between the self and society, and to allow notions of value to enter the research process. They conceptualise the subject in three ways: the first sees narrative analysis as a root metaphor, the second recognises that narratives are culturally developed ways of organising experience and knowledge, while the third goes further and conceptualises forms of discourse as embodiments of cultural values and personal subjectivities.

Daiute & Lightfoot (2004) take seriously the notion that knowledge of the world is constituted and transformed through the use of language in discourse and narrative. They use methods taken from literary criticism to analyse blocks of text in the search for meaning beyond that bestowed by the immediate context, and to show how text relates to both authors and readers. Since stories are not life itself, the existence of an imaginative element is recognised and illustrated through the analysis of life narratives derived from questionnaires and interviews as well as an examination of memoirs, autobiographies and other personal documents. They also illustrate how historical analysis provides a framework for examining developmental changes in the portrayal of the self in fictional stories produced by contemporary adolescents. Daiute & Lightfoot (2004) point out the danger of losing revealing information when narrative analysis is separated from the context in which it was created. Also, because narratives are interactively constructed, they should not be regarded as windows into the author's mind and are subject to lived experience and therefore, discursive psychology could be useful.

2.3.5 Auto/biography as therapy

In *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*, Hunt (2003) explores the therapeutic dimensions of creative autobiographical writing, drawing on the author's experiences of tutoring and facilitation of writing courses and groups. This was echoed by students' experiences of psychological change, such as a stronger sense of personal identity and increased inner freedom. Kingsley (2003) raises the issue of blurred boundaries between art, education, therapy and research, and mentions the potential risks associated with making psychoanalytically informed interpretations in the absence of the safeguards associated with therapeutic relationships. This text raises questions about ethics of auto/biography, where life ends and art begins, where the boundaries of education and

therapy lie and, most importantly, how as writers and researchers we use the lives and words of others.

2.3.6 Role of psychoanalysis

Day Sclater (2005) writes about the relevance of psychoanalytic ideas to auto/biographical practices, discussing some common ambivalence about psychoanalysis and its applications to understanding life stories. Psychoanalysis offers a set of fundamental truths about human nature, revealing previously hidden dimensions of persons, but its preoccupation with the truth may well stand in the way of creative thinking about the possibilities as well as the limits of life writing (Day Sclater, 2005).

The entire edifice of psychoanalysis (Day Sclater, 2005) is built on the telling and interpretation of life histories. One of the most interesting things about reading and writing auto/biography is discovering the different ways we make sense of the world. When one considers psychoanalysis as a form of life writing, where the theory from its founder Freud (Bettelheim, 1982) has been built on the life stories of ordinary people, it might have been expected that auto/biographers would be keen to embrace the ideas and insights, if not the practices, of psychoanalysis as tools of their trade. But, in contradiction, auto/biographers remain deeply sceptical and certainly paradoxical; cited in Bettelheim (1982) Freud himself was deeply sceptical about the projects of auto/biographers. Phillips (1999) cited in Day Sclater (2005) points out that Freud took active steps to thwart the attempts of his future biographers when he destroyed many of his early papers, manuscripts and letters, and looked forward to his biographers floundering as a result. As his own autobiographical writings were more focused on psychoanalysis, he seemed to have wanted to keep the truth about himself to himself. For Day Sclater (2005) this points to a central enigma of psychoanalysis – our deep ambivalences about knowing and being known. The value of psychoanalysis in self

development is very relevant (Hunt, 2003) but central to the success of the process lies the commitment of the individual to revealing his true self.

These ambivalences are evident in what has been termed the "narrative turn" (Day Sclater, 2005) in contemporary life. We are increasingly surrounded by personal stories – often of an intimate kind – which have become the currency by which to know others and ourselves. Talk about the "Oprahfication" of culture probably masks the seriousness of the transformation in the story'ing of lives and identities. Does "reality TV" provide new opportunities to make visible the complexities of real lives or does it contribute to a culture of superficiality? The only certainty, according to Day Sclater (2005), is that this "narrative turn" is troubling the boundaries between public and private, fact and fantasy. Craib (2000) was explicit about his ambivalence towards the "narrative turn" regarding the apparent intimacy of auto/biography as spurious. For him, selves are always more than stories can express; we habitually sanitise and idealise life stories, leaving out uncomfortable psychic realities and, he concludes we should be wary of the apparent coherence and plausibility of life stories since they are designed as much to conceal as to reveal.

Hollway & Jefferson (2000a; 2000b) follow a phenomenological approach, positing a "defended" subject, one whose emotions and defences colour their experiences and fashion the stories they tell to make sense of the world.

Their scepticism extends the suggestion that selfhood goes beyond the text; what is suggested is that the storied selves we habitually present are but superficial covers for something that is deeper, more complex and much more threatening. Day Sclater (2005) suggests that the issue for auto/biographers can be summarised thus: does psychoanalytic thinking give us unique access to hidden truths about human lives and human nature? Or is psychoanalysis just a useful language for exploring the vicissitudes of stories? Or could it be a novel

language that we can use to invent new stories, or new dimensions to stories?

If psychoanalysis concerns auto/biography, does auto/biography perturb psychoanalysis? Day Sclater (2005) shows that stories can point not to the logic of life but to the ways in which chance and discontinuities conspire to disrupt our struggles for coherence and plausibility. “A life story, well written, enables us to identify the ambivalences that chip away at our attempts at wholeness and authenticity. Psychoanalysis is a tool that helps us to probe between the cracks, and to scratch among the debris, if not of our lives, then of the stories we tell about them” (Day Sclater, 2005). She concludes that psychoanalysis provides a language for exploring the creative and transformative potentials of auto/biography where life writing becomes a “transitional space” in which the possibilities for creative writing and reading are limited only by our willingness to let the imagination run.

2.4 Summary

As a universal form of communication and expression of civilisation, stories are more than just tales. They engage, inform, inspire and carry meaning which impacts lives. From an organisational perspective they assist in change, transformation, learning, leadership, social construction and interpreting organisational symbolism. Stories based on personal experience like life stories and autobiographies are immensely powerful and emotionally laden but are not the exclusive domain of people, and may also include organisations, their products and their services. From a personal perspective, life stories are enablers that encourage reflection and learning. When learning is grounded in personal experience it forms an important element in the sense-making and actiontaking process of management. The process of life writing is grounded in the experience of a multifaceted context and includes reflection, re-conceptualisation and action, which becomes the means of solving problems, clarifying ambiguities and developing personal skills and abilities.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the method of analysis, value of the methodology, sample size and selection, sampling methodology, reliability and validity, limitations of the research, and method of interpretation.

The nature of the proposed qualitative research is ideographic in orientation, utilising second order perspective through the use of phenomenography (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). It is a form of content thematic research that seeks to identify the qualitatively different ways in which individuals experience aspects of their world and as a research approach within higher education, it has been very influential. The widespread acceptance that students' learning is influenced by the wider context has led to a growing recognition that it may be possible to alter teaching and learning in order to improve the quality of learning outcomes (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

3.1.1 Theory-building

The purpose of the research is to identify, explore and describe any patterns and conclusions that can be drawn from managers' life stories that have a bearing on their success rather than to confirm or validate such patterns (which would be the case in quantitative research). In that sense the purpose of this research is to add to theory building, rather than to test existing theory.

3.1.1 Emergent design

The research process will uncover a number of variables with regard to the managers' life stories being studied, which are unknown to the researcher at the start of this research process. This implies the need for a flexible or emergent design. The research will be conducted with an open mind to allow for the emergent nature of this research, and as the variables emerge from the data, interpretations will be made within the context of the case study. Multiple perspectives about the nature of the life stories might also be revealed and will be included, as necessary.

3.1.3 Role of the researcher

Rigid, standardised instruments for data collection will not be used, since data collection will occur through the collection of structured, written life stories of managers. This does however mean that the research process might be influenced by the researcher's personal view. The role of the researcher as an instrument in qualitative research can therefore not be ignored, in that the researcher's ability to interpret the collected data is critical to the understanding of the case study. The principals of contextualisation and interaction between the researcher and the subject hold (Klein & Meyers, 1999).

3.2 Interpretive paradigm

It is important to note that interpretive research is not synonymous with qualitative research, since qualitative research can also be conducted in the functional paradigm (Klein & Myers, 1999). Research can be classified as interpretive if it is assumed that our knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools and other artefacts.

Kaplan & Maxwell (1994) cited in Klein & Meyers (1999) describe interpretive research as not predefining dependent and independent variables, but focusing on the complexity of human sensemaking as the situation emerges.

The proposed research method will adhere to the underlying principles of the interpretive paradigm; the applicability of each to the proposed research process is discussed below:

3.2.1 Contextualisation

Gadamer (1976) states that there is an inevitable difference in understanding between the interpreter and the author of a text that is created by the historical distance between them. The hermeneutic task consists not in covering up the tension between the text and the present, but in consciously bringing it out.

In the analysis of managers' life stories, the principle of contextualisation requires that the subject matter be set in its social and historical context so that the intended audience can see how the current situation emerged.

3.2.2 Ideographic methodology

When choosing a methodology, most social research is concerned with the general case rather than the individual, with the latter studied only to allow for generalisation. Benbasat, Goldstein & Mead (1987) suggest the use of ideographic methodology in case studies because it allows for the understanding of a specific phenomenon in its context, the examination of a single situation. In this case, a specific case or life story will be studied with a view to understanding it better and therefore to add to theory building.

3.3.3 Anti-positivism

The positivist believes that experiment, observation and measurement is the core of research. In the proposed research no formal hypothesis testing, measuring of variables or drawing of inferences from a representative sample of a stated population will be done. Therefore, within the assumption of epistemology, the anti-positivism principle is more applicable to the proposed research (Klein & Myers, 1999 cited in Kaplan & Maxwell 1994).

3.2.4 Voluntarism

Assumptions about human nature fall along a continuum where the one end of the scale states that people's reactions can be pre-determined and the other states that one will never know how people will react (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The proposed research will adopt an intermediate standpoint, but with an inclination towards the school of thought that people's reactions cannot be pre-determined.

3.2.5 Nominalism

Within the ontological debate, nominalism (as opposed to realism) does not assume that the world is made up of hard, tangible, immutable structures and that the world does not exist independently of the observer (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This is specifically relevant to this research, since the role of the researcher in the life stories, observations and interpretations are intertwined with the activities themselves.

3.3 Phenomenography

Phenomenography aims to "describe" qualitative variation, not to "explain" why the variation exists and by identifying common themes, produces a descriptive model of qualitative variation in the way groups of individuals experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive and apprehend a phenomenon (Marton, 1986; Marton & Booth, 1997). The results of phenomenographic research are categories of description, in which different ways of experiencing a phenomenon are logically and hierarchically interrelated to establish a typology.

This approach was originally developed by an educational research group in Sweden in the seventies (Marton, Dahlgren, Svensson, & Saljo, 1977) to describe the qualitatively different ways in which aspects of reality are experienced (Marton, 1981). Overviews of the development and use of this approach are offered by Dall'Alba & Hasselgren (1996), Marton (1981), Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle (1984), Marton & Wenestam (1984), Ramsden (1988), and Marton & Booth (1997). As in other approaches within the interpretive research tradition, the primary focus of phenomenography is on the meaning structure of lived experience – that is, the meaning that an aspect of reality takes on for the people studied (Sandberg, 2000). In the phenomenographic approach, the term conception is used to refer to people's ways of experiencing or making sense of their world. "Ways of experiencing" are categorised into conceptions that emerge from the data analysis as commonality is identified across responses (Rose, Le Heron & Sofat, 2005). Each conception says something unique about the phenomenon of study and stands in logical relationship to other conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997). Therefore, the aim of phenomenography is to take these differing experiences and understandings and characterise them in terms of their:

- Categoriey of description
- Logical relationship to each other
- Hierarchies in relation to given criteria

3.3.1 The Need to 'Bracket'

The central methodological principle is the need to bracket. The categories of description must depend upon an earlier evocation of respondents' very own descriptions of their relevant experiences. It is a paramount requirement for phenomenography to be sensitive to the individuality of conceptions of the world – it must be grounded in the lived experience of its research participants (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). The researcher must begin by bracketing or setting aside prior assumptions about the nature of the thing being studied. This is necessary in phenomenographic research if the aim of describing conceptions of the surrounding world, which are held by the respondents, is to be met.

Bracketing, or the epoch, in Husserl (1973) primarily a method of idealist philosophy, part of a quest for unassailable truths that will form the basis for a reform of understanding – an epistemological enterprise. Largely owing to Merleau-Ponty (1963), Husserl's (1973) notion of bracketing was applied not to a turning away from the world and a concentration on detached consciousness, but to the resolve to set aside theories, research presuppositions and ready made interpretations (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998).
Some presuppositions (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000) that must be bracketed are:

- Importing earlier research findings
- Assuming pre-given theoretical structures or particular interpretations
- Presupposing the investigator's personal knowledge and beliefs
- Assuming, prior to acquaintance with the nature of the experience itself, specific research techniques
- The researcher's concern to uncover the 'cause' of certain forms of respondent experiences

3.3.2 Bracketing Categories of Description

One specific implication of the preceding list of presuppositions which require bracketing has a specific bearing on the work of phenomenography (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000) and, in particular, on this research. Restraint is required in actualising the phenomenographical goal of producing categories of description. The aim of phenomenographic research is to arrive at a structure within which the various respondent conceptualisations of the relevant concept are fitted: a structure of categories of description. However, unless this goal is bracketed during those stages of the research that are concerned to uncover respondent conceptions, it threatens to subvert entry into the actual respondent life world. Although the categories of description was found in, they were not limited to, the framework or guidelines given to students and bracketing this concept allows for alternative categories to emerge.

3.3.3 What is the Phenomenon to be studied

Although we are to set aside presuppositions that would deleteriously affect our hearing of the respondent's experience, the topic for investigation in the research has to be formulated somehow in the researchers mind. The researcher and researched must begin with some kind of shared topic and, therefore, cannot be bracketed but must not subvert the very aim of entering the life world. The topic for this research is given in the research problem: to identify, describe and explore any patterns, themes, conceptions and conclusions that can be drawn from managers' life stories that could have a bearing on their success.

3.3.4 The need for empathy

Bracketing will only be partly successful, as some ways of viewing the world are likely to be more difficult to set aside than other and the achievement of empathy with the experience of the respondent can greatly assist the process (Karlsson, 1993). Empathy requires a detachment from the researcher's life world and opening up to the life world of the students' life stories.

3.4 Modes of doing phenomenography

According to Hasselgren (1996) phenomenography, in the ways it has been practiced at the Gothenburg University in Sweden, has created a long and productive research tradition. A lot of empirical data have been generated and, in some cases, these have been put to practical use (Bowden, 1995).

According to Hasselgren & Beach (1996) phenomenography involves analysing and categorizing the different ways people understand or conceive a certain phenomenon as it manifests itself in different discourses, although most generally in a conversation between the phenomenographer and an interview person. The technical part of this process, applying the procedure of:

compilation of statements -> analysis -> conceptions

is easy to identify. However, the conditions under which the procedure or method is practiced is the central question. In the Gothenburg (Hasselgren & Beach, 1996) mode of phenomenography, five recognisable contexts under which the analysed discourses have been generated and documented can be discerned. Namely:

- Discursive Phenomenography
- Experimental Phenomenography
- Naturalistic Phenomenography
- Hermeneutic Phenomenography
- Phenomenological Phenomenography

3.4.1 Discursive phenomenography

According to Hasselgren & Beach (1996), discursive Phenomenography can be related to the anchorage, origin or residence of the conceptions in a general and context free discourse to be understood non-hermeneutically. In the other phenomenographic modes, how to understand the discourse is strongly predetermined. Discursive phenomenography might be viewed as the least sophisticated way of doing phenomenography, codified as:

conversation -> transcriptions -> compiling of statements -> analysis -> conceptions

3.4.2 Experimental phenomenography

In the beginning of the 1970's qualitative differences in learning outcomes was the most fundamental concept among the Gothenburg phenomenographers (Hasselgren & Beach, 1996) and often appeared in titles of reports and articles. Under rather rigorous manipulated conditions, they asked students to learn from ordinary textbooks or texts of corresponding quality. In subsequent controls, which could be repeated several times at various intervals, the focus was directed toward the way students had understood the main point of the text. Thus, phenomenography started as an experimental enterprise.

3.4.3 Naturalistic phenomenography

The term naturalistic in Naturalistic Phenomenography (Hasselgren & Beach, 1996) alludes to the possibilities for collecting empirical material for phenomenographic analysis from authentic social situations. It is not about producing data in experiments or extracting data from speech events specifically arranged for phenomenographic analysis, but about collecting data about what actually happened in particular situations, without direct involvement from researchers and then analysing that data phenomenographically.

3.4.4 Phenomenological phenomenography

According to Hasselgren & Beach (1996), phenomenographers as a group have more or less actively striven to identify the phenomenological quality of their intellectual labour since the time the term phenomenography was adopted. However, it is more recently in the eighties and nineties that more explicit reference to phenomenological theorizing has been made.

Contrary to most other phenomenographic studies in which people are interviewed about different phenomena "in general", in an abstract way, Neuman (1987) asks for descriptions of what is actually going on in the subjects' mind during the interview.

While Marton (1981) and his co-workers view the analyses and the descriptions of outcome of learning as the phenomenographic enterprise, phenomenological criteria concern questions directed toward experiences of the learning process.

3.4.5 Hermeneutic phenomenography

For the purpose of this study hermeneutic phenomenography will apply and may, perhaps, come closest to the definition of phenomenography by Marton (1981) and Svensson (Martin *et al* (1997).

Phenomenography (Hasselgren & Beach, 1996) is more or less neutral from the point of view of specific research methods. It represents, however, a distinctive perspective in which findings may be re-interpreted in ways that do not accord with their original meaning. The fact that phenomenography is basically not method-oriented, makes it point away from itself , that is, from questions of what it is and how it should be done, to the kind of findings it is about (Johansson, Marton & Svensson, 1985).

Here phenomenographic analysis is geared to interpreting texts or statements not originally made for the purpose of a phenomenographic analysis. It is this quality which fundamentally distinguishes the hermeneutic mode from the other four categories (which are each based on material gathered specifically for phenomenographic analyses) and makes it appropriate for this study. The life stories being analysed in this research were not originally written for the purpose of being studied, they were written as an assignment as part of the evaluation of the Storytelling elective at the University of the Witwatersrand Business School.

Actual phenomenographic studies based upon reinterpretations of results from previously reported non-phenomenographic investigations are not yet available.

3.5 Guidelines for the conduct of Phenomenographic Research

Ashworh & Lucas (2000) propose guidelines that take into account the need to bracket presuppositions and to develop an empathic understanding of the life world of the research participant.

i. Tentatively identify the broad objectives of the research study, the phenomenon under investigation.

ii. Selection of the research participants should avoid presuppositions about the nature of the phenomenon or the nature of conceptions held by particular 'types' of individual while observing common-sense precautions about maintaining 'variety' of experience.

iii. The most appropriate means of obtaining an account should be identified allowing for maximum freedom for the research participant to describe their experience and the opportunity to reflect. For the purpose of this research, the process of writing one's life story reflection is essential and participants enjoyed maximum freedom to express themselves. This means of account eliminates the researcher including his presumptions about the phenomenon that could emerge from questions asked during an interview situation.

v. Since the data for this research project is obtained from written life stories, there is no need to subject the researcher's interview skills to review.

vi. Since the research participants are the authors of their own life stories there is no need for accurate transcription.

vii. During analysis, the researcher should continue to be aware of importation of presuppositions. Analysis should, therefore, be carried out with maximum empathic understanding.

viii. The analysis should avoid premature closure for the sake of producing logically hierarchically related categories of description.

ix. The process of analysis should be described (sufficiently clearly) to allow the reader to evaluate the attempt to achieve bracketing and empathy and trace the process by which findings have emerged.

3.6 Survey Population and Sample

The survey population consists of all MBA students at Wits Business School registered for the Storytelling in Organisations elective as facilitated by Peter Christie between 1995 and 2006. The respondents were mostly part time students, with some full time students, mostly South African but including some international students. The total population consisted of 180 students in classes of twelve to twenty four students each.

In order to fulfil the requirements of the course (Christie, 2004), students were required to complete an individual exam-equivalent assignment. This entailed writing their life stories in no less than three thousand and no more than five thousand words. Although they were given guidelines (Appendix B, C and D), the use of these guidelines was not compulsory. The selection criteria will be students holding senior management positions, as we can reasonably assume management competence in positions of responsibility and leadership. Of the life stories collected during this time, these criteria limited the number of stories and ten life stories were selected for the purpose of this analysis.

3.7 Process

Since this study was conducted in the hermeneutic phenomenographic mode, there was no research questions posed for the students, however, each student was given a framework or guidelines (Appendix B & C) which will be utilised as general categories of description. Listed below, in no order of importance, are the categories of description applied to the texts:

- Ancestry or family background
- Events
- Significant people and relationships
- Phases, stages or chapters of your life
- Recurring or underlying themes
- Challenges
- Future options
- Intentions

The starting point was acquiring a general grasp of each student's life story by reading each text several times. After grasping each student's conception generally, these initial perceptions were documented.

Secondly, the texts was read again and extensive summaries were made within the categories of description with particular focus not on the statements themselves but on the meaning therein.

Thereafter, the analysis shifted from individual students to comparing the categories of description across the students.

Thirdly, the texts were analysed again but this time in terms of the individual conceptions within categories of description. Certain categories of description were less reported due to limited attention from students. Attention was also given to which categories of description and conception were related.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

Validity is concerned with whether the instrument (in this case autobiographical life stories) “measures what it is supposed to measure” (Leedy & Omrod, 2001:31). Since qualitative research in the interpretative paradigm is conducted, there are some obvious validity concerns. These concerns are addressed below in the discussion on the various types of validity. Reliability refers to the accuracy and consistency with which the instrument produces results. (Leedy & Omrod, 2001).

3.8.1 External validity

External validity refers to generalisability, i.e. the implications of this research for other companies in other settings and at other times. No generalisation can be made in this research, as the purpose of case study research is to add to theory-building rather than to generalise to a population.

In the case of phenomenography, external validity is irrelevant. The researcher is debarred from querying the validity of the life world and must adopt no position on the correctness or falsity of the claims that are implicitly made by the research participant (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998). Data gathering should be seen as a process of discovery, concentrating, in the first instance, on each individual as a separate case and, therefore, we cannot even assume that the meaning of the same situation is similar for different people.

3.8.2 Internal validity

Internal validity refers to the extent to which the instrument allows inferences about the causal relationships between data elements (Leedy & Omrod, 2001). Therefore, internal validity is more relevant in studies that try to establish a causal relationship and not as relevant in

most observational or descriptive studies, such as interpretive research (Rowley, 2002).

3.8.3 Reliability

Reliability is defined as the extent to which similar research conducted in future will result in similar outcomes. (Leedy & Omrod, 2001). Given that the research is conducted in the interpretive paradigm, the role and interpretations of the researcher will play a significant part in the final interpretations and even the initial observations. Similar research by another researcher might, therefore, not lead to exactly the same results. Although this might be seen as a drawback, it could also be seen as adding to the richness of the theory-building exercise.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the research results after subjecting the ten life stories to the phenomenographic analysis. The aim in this phenomenographic study was to discover the conceptions held by individual students within their life stories and to determine patterns or variation of conceptions.

4.2 Presentation of results

Since the identified categories of description were only presented to the students as guidelines there was no consistency in structure or emphasis or adherence to the guidelines, within the texts. However, certain categories received much more attention and description than others.

After making extensive summaries of each life story, listing conceptions under categories of description, the analysis shifted to conceptions across categories of description. Under every category of description, a full list of conceptions across students was listed. The conceptions under each category were analysed and main themes or conceptions were identified and represented in Tables 1 to 6. Under each category of description examples are given from respondents life stories. These quotations are in their own words.

4.2.1 Category of Description: Family

The three strongest conceptions that emerged from Family background were that of siblings, parents and values (Table 1).

Siblings

Sibling rivalry was common but in cases of broken or dysfunctional homes with uninvolved or overly strict parents, a special bond developed with a sibling. This bond was either with an elder brother or a younger sibling.

"Cold not because of the cold Johannesburg winter nights but cold because of the lack of love in the house. That is of course until my brother was born. From the first day I saw him; I envied and loved my brother. Envied him because he was so very cute, loved him because he was so sweet and was from the moment he was born until he died tragically at 20, the only really family I had."

"Something else very special happened that first year I went to school. K was born. I was over the moon, at last my very own little sister. I adored her. We fought, like all siblings do, but we were also fiercely protective of each other, something that has not changed to this day."

Parents

The role of parents was not equally important but, in nuclear families, mothers emerged as caregivers and nurturers, giving unselfishly.

"My mother is a very caring person by nature, so perhaps it is no surprise that she became a primary school teacher. Many of my friends learnt to read, write and button their shirts properly under her care. With mom being a teacher and my dad in a well paying job, she invested into our early development and stayed at home with us kids until I started primary school. We had stories and games and I would have to say that we had a model mom.

My heart, on the other hand, was nurtured by my mother. I could not have asked for more. God taught my mother something unique and special about the art of giving selflessly. Sometimes, when I think about it too much, it hurts me that she lives her life being so true to her gift, that she completely neglects herself, even now in her seventieth year."

Fathers, an elder brother or a grandparent were more likely to be role models or mentors and as long as one of these was present it seemed that they provided the necessary inspiration and motivation.

"My father was not the kind of parent who dished out discipline in the form of beatings. Instead he left his mark on my mind. And how indelible it has proven to be."

A parent's indiscretion or harsh judgement had a devastating effect on childhood sense of security and belonging. One student blamed herself for her father's infidelity and suffered years of guilt and abuse from her mother.

"As I realised that my dad had used our swimming lessons to rendezvous with his mistress, I began to feel like a guilty accomplice. This would be a feeling which I would become familiar with over the following years of my life as my father felt neither shame nor guilt in roping his daughters into his lies."

Another student wrote of his father's false accusation about stealing school money (when it was stolen by a class mate) which led to ostracising and meant he had to live with an abusive aunt.

"Well, that day I made up my mind that I was obviously adopted. I could not believe my own dad would beat me up like that, with such a weapon, all for what, 5c? The next thing I remember I was travelling with my grandma to Natal to stay with one of my aunts, my father's sister."

<u>Values</u>

Traditional families with strong values like family traditions respect for elders, and defined gender roles created inner conflict and feelings of oppression, a need to escape but also not to disappoint their family.

"My ancient widowed grandmother and her ever-more ancient (and eccentric) elder sister took full responsibility for the enforcement of Eastern philosophies and tried to develop in me the skills necessary to becoming a good Indian wife.
With each year spent at home, my resolve to escape was strengthened."

"*Resistance is futile*" one student wrote, after realising that rebellion only led to more harsh or stricter rules, choosing to bury herself in school work and socialising with friends.

"My sister, cousins and I quickly realised that the quickest escape from the clutches of these ladies was to pretend that you had home-work."

Families from lower social standing or humble backgrounds also tended to be more traditional and placed huge emphasis on education as a means to overcome or improve social standing. This meant that students felt under pressure to achieve because of limited financial support for studies.

"While university was really a privilege, which my family could not afford, (my brother) had committed to sponsor me, as he had seen my potential, and wanted to uplift our family from our state of socio-economic depravation."

"With the pressure on me to perform, I had to work very hard, and hence minimise my socialising. The pressure of long hours of studying aggravated my stuttering and stammering problem, and heightened my introversion."

Table 1: Category of Description – Family

FAMILY		
Siblings	**Parents**	**Values**
Strong bonds formed with a sibling	In nuclear families mothers stand out as caregivers and nurturers	Traditional families with a strong values generate inner conflict and feelings of oppression
	Fathers, elder brothers and grandparents role models or mentors	Families from humble social status place emphasis on education as a means to overcome social standing
.	A parent's actions, indiscretion or harsh judgement had a devastating effect on childhood experience and sense of security.	

4.2.2 Category of Description: Events

Two conceptions emerged from significant events (Table 2) namely death, birth of a child and meeting a life partner.

Death

The death of a sibling, parent or even a very close friend has a devastating effect but provide opportunities for reflection and self analysis.

"*In November 2001, my mum passed away, suddenly. This has had a devastating effect on me, as I am still trying to grapple with that reality."*

"The same year I got married to her, my brother, my beloved brother, died. An omen, I thought or a rebirth I reasoned! Well 14 years and 3 kids later, I accepted the fact that our marriage was indeed an omen. She just never loved me and my brother knew it."

"The one and only time that music appeared to fail me was on the dark day of 05 March 1996. That was the day I said my last farewell to my father. On the day of his death, there was nothing left in my heart. After all my thoughts and feelings had evaporated in my tears, there was just nothing left."

Spouse

The meeting of a life partner or significant other were very significant events and described as memorable and powerful, words like ‘soul mate’, ‘the wind’, and ‘an amazing’ woman are used when describing these people. These events were given detailed description or prominence.

“The girl walking toward the window was the perfect idea of what I had always dreamed of. She appeared so fresh but at the same time mature. Walking with confidence but without arrogance. An aura of simplicity emanated and highlighted the depth of her blue eyes. As if attracted by a superior force, her eyes turned suddenly straight into my eyes, and during this short sparkle of eternity, I felt as if I had been enchanted by the strongest curse. I was mesmerised. Knowing nothing about this young woman on the other side of the window, it took me less than a handful of seconds to have the conviction that she was the one I was going to marry.”

“In 1991, I met my girlfriend, (wife to be) through a friend and ex-colleague from (Company X). She was and still is an amazing woman of talent and beauty.”

Children

The birth of a child was often described as one of the most prominent events, an experience of intense emotion and pride.

“I was already there for the most important event of my life. I delicately placed the baby in my wife’s hands and dried up the tears that flowed out of my eyes. I looked at this offshoot of my life in the arms of my spouse, and then suddenly screamed a cry of victory. Whaou! For this new little being that surfaced to life.”

Table 2: Category of Description – Events

EVENTS		
Death	**Children**	**Spouse**
Death of a sibling, parent or close friend	Birth of a child an intense emotion	Meeting life partner significant event

4.2.3 Category of Description: Phases

When identifying the different phases in their lives, students identify five conceptions: childhood, primary school, high school, university and career (Table 3). Only two students did not include these phases or stages in their stories.

Childhood

Most students had a protected, nurtured, and carefree childhood with descriptions of friends and childhood games. But for students who mentioned their parent's perceived wrongful actions or indiscretions their sense of security was damaged and their childhood not carefree.

"I look back on these times with fondness, as children we had freedom."

"Well, these were the fist seven years of my life, of the school called life, characterised by abuse and neglect, a life made bearable by the presence of the guiding angel called grandmother."

Primary School

Starting school was a milestone for most students and mostly a very positive experience with recollections of academic achievement. One student describes her taking to school as “like a fish takes to water”. For the few students for whom it was a negative experience, the associated emotions of being beaten up by other pupils or rather wanting to be at home with their family left a lasting impression; in one case leading to insecurity and even a speech impediment.

“It was not long before I was off to big school. How excited I was that first morning. I could not wait to learn how to read properly.”

“My first day of my schooling career was a disaster. The idea of being separated from my mother did not go down well with me. I longed for the green, open summer fields, the undivided attention I received at home; the mere thought of school gave me nightmares.”

“I was still fairly introverted and insecure, and developed a speech problem of stuttering and stammering.”

“One afternoon I was approached by two of my so called friends who started accusing me and pushing me around, looking for a fight. I was not equipped to handle this abuse and did not know from whence it was coming, so I couldn’t defend myself. They threw harsh comment my way about not being liked by anyone and having no friends and that I should go live somewhere else. They then apologised and went to shake my hand. As I reached forward I was hit and then jumped on by both of them. Eventually they left me but the damage had been done. It is difficult to put into words, never mind speak about this event. The beating was not of concern to me, but whether I had any friends and should I trust people and their words anymore? This seed of doubt in my mind caused me to watch each encounter carefully for any signs of disappointment and proof that people are not true to their word. This habit has resulted in me becoming more introverted, when meeting a

crowd of new people I will hold and stand back to assess whom in the group I can trust."

For two students a specific teacher was singled out as a mentor / coach that ignited passion and academic excellence.

"Key to my revival was the arrival of a Xhosa teacher, Ms N, at the school I was at. The year was 1976. She stood tall and confident. Beautiful too. Her arrival was pivotal to my rebirth, the emergence of a star. From that day until the time I left that school, her presence proved pivotal in my life. I guess I also did not disappoint her because she got her first first-class pass in standard five."

<u>High School</u>

High school was for four students the time of their first romantic encounter but mostly the place where lifelong friendships started. One student uses the word "buddies" and another describes all their nicknames for each other and their meaning. Academic and sporting achievements acted as a bridge to overcome insecurities and led to different privileges and creating university opportunities.

<u>University</u>

For most students university was an enjoyable experience, one student describes it as the best time of his life. Those who had clear goals and guidance achieved academic excellence, but for others the options created confusion and indecision.

"Consequently I did reasonably well in Matric and could then progress on to university, a direction both my parents were pressing me to go as they both had degrees. What would I do? I could do anything I wanted."

Relationships during this time led to marriage for some or a negative influence on academic results.

"The second year started well, until I met NM, who was to become my wife and my nemesis. When we started dating in May of 1986, I was an "A" student but by the time the year ended, I was happy with a 50% pass."

Career

For all students who travelled as part of their working life, the exposure had a positive impact on their lives and career. Students' work frustration because of bursary obligations, boredom and limited career options contributed to them embarking on an MBA to improve their situation. Mentoring in the students' careers was a key influence in developing clear and structured career paths.

Table 3: Category of Description – Phases

PHASES				
Childhood	**Primary School**	**High School**	**University**	**Career**
Parents actions or indiscretions affected childhood	School a positive experience	Academic and sporting	University enjoyable experience	Traveling positive impact on career
Protected and nurtured	Disliking school	First romantic encounter and lifelong friendships	Academic excellence or confusion	Frustration, boredom and limited career options
Carefree and playful	Teacher as a mentor / coache		Relationships	Mentorship

4.2.4 Category of Description: Significant people or relationships

Three conceptions emerge from significant people or relationships namely: spouses, mentors / coaches and friends (Table 4).

Spouses

Most individuals met their significant other during their university years, travels or first working experience. Students who have strong relationships or marriages write about their first encounter describing it as powerful and meaningful.

"Thankfully (my wife), my Florence Nightingale, agrees and, since my Tanzanian campaigns, accompanies me to the battleground, providing invaluable support, shelter, encouragement and love."

For these six people their partner is a soul mate who changed and improved their lives and values. Meaningful relationships have a positive impact whereas bad choices as a partner or destructive relationships have the opposite effect.

"It is this sharing of common values that binds us ever so strongly, today and makes no task impossible for us to embark on. Together we are powerful, our values humble, our philosophies simple and uncomplicated - mutual respect for others, regardless of seniority, belief that constructive disagreement and debate makes for a healthy relationship, open and honest communication. I believe in many ways, my wife opened up my world for me, laid the platform for me to express myself and the pathway for the ensuing processes in my life."

Mentors / Coaches

It is usually a family member, a father, brother or a grandparent that provide guidance at an early age.

"This house was designed and built by my dad who, as a Chemical Engineer, I held in high regard. He was my hero. I gained a huge respect and admiration for my dad in these early years as he had all the answers to my questions. He could also help me put my toys back together."

"While my parents, each in their unique way, played a key role in motivating me, my brother started playing a significant role in my life as motivator and mentor. He continually emphasised the importance of education."

When these people pass away it is experienced as a devastating loss. Where there was no guidance from parents at an early stage the first mentorship or guidance is usually a teacher who inspires academic interest, sports and life values.

"Mr. H was our rugby coach for the first three years of my rugby life. He had the image of a clean living healthy guy who exercised everyday and loved his job. In this sense he was a very important inspiration to me."

Individuals who had strong guidance from a teacher usually seek and accept mentorship from a superior in their working life. Individuals who had mentorship during school and their working career have very clear goals and career paths and these mentors or coaches often help to shape their future.

"*I was fortunate to have him as both boss and mentor, as my exposure with him formed the foundation of my development for the corporate world."*

"My exposure with my last mentor had been immense, and he had taken over the role of mentor from (previous mentor), but with a different focus."

"*My most fulfilling experience in life was my exposure with past boss and mentor (Mr X). His amazing ability to think spontaneously, coupled with his strategic thinking capability, is an asset he has bestowed upon me for the rest of my life."*

Without this influence, students, on occasion seem overwhelmed by options, indecisiveness and experience lack of fulfilment.

"Unqualified. Unsure of my worth, doing things for which I have no training. Learning whole fields of professional practise by doing it with no mentorship or role model."

"(Me) the student. Diligent, compliant, wide-ranging, argumentative, and faced with a new space and the luxury of instruction and guidance for the first time on my life."

Friends

Students often have close and lasting friendships forged at high school through camaraderie and sporting activities. But situations of being an only child or mistrust of others lead some to be loners or to forge special bonds with one individual.

"Well, I had this special friend, VM, a fellow athlete, who happened to look like me too. I shared everything with this guy, we shared a bed, we shared lockers, and we shared jokes and we shared tricks on people."

Table 4: Category of Description – Significant People / Relationships

SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE /	**RELATIONSHIPS**	
Spouses	**Mentors / Coaches**	**Friends**
Meet significant other during university, travels or first working experience	Family member provides guidance at an early age	Lasting friendships forged at high school
Strong relationships, life changing, improving values	Where no guidance from parents, the first mentor usually a teacher	Social situations or misrust of others led to being loners
Destructive relationships have a negative effect on life.	Strong guidance early in life means seeking mentorship in career	
	Mentorship during school and career led to clear goals and career paths	

4.2.3 Category of Description: Challenges

Not many students chose to identify specific challenges but in some cases, the challenges are highlighted through other experiences. Challenges mostly relate to conceptions of family, discrimination or apartheid and personal issues (Table 5).

For one student the constraints of her traditional family posed a huge challenge. The need to overcome the prejudice of apartheid was recognised by one student and the need to overcome personal insecurities and mistrust instilled during childhood were also mentioned. For one student, coming to terms with being HIV positive was one of the biggest challenges of his life.

Table 5: Categories of Description – Challenges

CHALLENGES		
Family	**Apartheid / Discrimination**	**Personal**
Constraints of traditional family	Prejudice of apartheid	Personal Issues

4.2.6 Category of Description: Intentions

As with challenges, little attention was given to intentions but some mentioned (Table 6) that they'd like to travel more after reflecting on past travel experiences. Other intentions were to improve on personal relationships, especially for one student who wished to spend more time with his children and to try and establish a more balanced life.

"Before this happens though I would love nothing more than to spend one more day drifting around in the boat fishing with my Dad and enjoying the silent pleasure of each others company. The professional German soldier took war as seriously as I have taken my work and in realising that this may be one of the deeper reasons for my being called the "German" the real challenge is to seek better work – life balance moving forward."

"However my dad has aged quickly, my take on it is that he does not have any hobbies outside of gardening with mom. This has woken me up to the fact that I need to maintain doing my hobbies and becoming interested in new ones so that I have interests outside of my work for when I retire."

On a personal level, especially for those students who experienced some hardships in their life, there is an intention to live life to the fullest and the realisation that one person can make a difference to their lives. Also, the need to be more spiritual was expressed.

Table 6: Categories of Description – Intentions

INTENTIONS		
Travel	**Relationships / Balance**	**Personal**
Travel more	Improve relationships and find balance in life	Live life to its fullest, one person can make a difference, need for more spiritualism

4.2.2 Category of Description: Future options

For most students, future options related to career opportunities as a result of their MBA studies, but one student mentioned a brighter future after his divorce.

"Two years ago, I met this great lady, who breathed a new breath of life into my life, who has given me a second chance in life."

For another student, after coming to terms with his HIV status, the future options are replacing emptiness with purpose.

Table 7: Categories of Description – Future Options

FUTURE OPTIONS		
Career	**Relationships**	**Personal**
After MBA, new career opportunities	After divorce, new lady, new life	Coming to terms with HIV, replacing emptiness with purpose

4.2.8 Category of Description: Themes

Students did not explicitly identify themes in their writing but from the analysis, the following themes were identified: boredom, social pressure, travel, religion, sport, uncertainty, non conformist / adventure, apartheid / discrimination and MBA (Table 8).

Boredom

Most individuals who excelled academically at school, university or in their careers got bored easily with insufficient challenge or stimulus. For some, the boredom was alleviated by a parent or teacher who provided enough stimuli or continuously challenged them to do better.

"My school years were characterised by intermittent periods of learning, boredom and fun. It would start off as learning as I have an incredibly inquisitive mind. Initial periods were spent with vigour and passion until I understood a concept. I have a quick mind and the period following this would be characterised with boredom."

Social Pressure

Alcohol and smoking only featured with men and had a positive influence on confidence or, in some cases, overindulged (Tequila was mentioned by three individuals) which lead to either giving up completely or mild consumption.

"Due to peer pressure and due to my stuttering and stammering, I then joined my friends occasionally on a Friday evening, and on one such evening, frustrated with my inhibitions to 'chat up' girls at the ladies residence, I gave in to taking my first drink."

"Over time this practice had helped to overcome my stuttering and stammering problem, and was an important step in my first job. I had to be careful though not to over-indulge."

" I produced a bottle of tequila. He poured three tots when I apparently stated that lemon and salt was for girls, grabbed the bottle and downed it neat. After that I do not remember much – "don't breath on the fire" and "you're home early". "Yes dad, I have had a bit much to drink (and throw up)." My mother was concerned. My dad was bemused and pumped me full of pills to protect my liver. When I was still throwing up after drinking water three days later it became clear that I had given myself a good dose of alcohol poisoning. I found out that some of the people on my mother's side of the family were alcoholics and did some research into it and concluded that I might be a binge drinker. I decided not to risk it and in November 1985 gave up alcohol for good."

*"What's a guy to do but deal with the circumstances by drinking deeply of whatever is available, in this case the 'real square bottle' of Olmeca Tequila – as enjoyed by Mexicans and other interesting people…*and then later that night ….*The night auditor's eyes look like saucers as he regards me – frightened. An mlungu devil that has walked in from the night. I explained that I have got lost. Sleepwalking. And I need to get to (the lodge). The name of the chalet where I am staying. "I am sorry sir. We do not have the keys to the land rovers at night. You will have to stay in one of the hotel rooms for the night. We can get you home in the morning". I sleep. Today I like tequila again. In small doses. About once a year. If there is nothing else on offer."*

<u>Travel</u>

All students who had travelled described it as an intense and immensely powerful experience that broadened their horizons and opened their mindset. Most travel experiences were very descriptive and detailed.

"*It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life and it stimulated my appetite for more travel. I had always wanted to travel. I will go as far as far as to say that I believe that I was destined to travel, I just always knew that I would travel extensively."*

"I had stories from all over the world. A favourite coffee shop in a little Welsh sea-side town where she got to meet Pierce Brosman, the snobbish Parisian museum where I was invited to watch Karl Lagerfeld show his spring collection. My favourite holidays were always the ones where I did not stay in a hotel but lived like the locals. Buying marinated olives and madelines from the corner shop -come -deli in Madrid, drinking wine with the locals in Lucca….. They were wonderful times, such happy memories…ones that were all the more precious because they almost never happened."

In one case the exposure to travel at an early age made a student opt for a career that would include travel.

"As a result of my father's export orientated career, my childhood was moulded by extensive travelling and family resettlement episodes. So naturally, as a grown-up, I opted for the international opportunities that came across my path. I even made travelling his profession."

Religion

Only one student included religion in his life story. After meeting a girl from a different religion they were forced by their parents to stop seeing each other. This led to disillusionment with his religion and he eventually stopped practicing Hinduism.

Sport

Sports emerged as a theme but only with the males. Although some individuals were not athletically inclined, they still participated eagerly and the sports field was a place were friendships were forged and battles settled. Individuals from traditional families were pressured academically but not encouraged to do sport.

"Most of our "fights" as boys were settled on that soccer field. It's on that field that I sought to win my acceptance by the new community I found myself staying with. I guess what I bought were a few tricks one learnt playing soccer on dirt stadiums which litter the whole of Soweto

and of course speed. Boys all over have their own unique ways of welcoming each other into their fold. Zulu boys are no different. To be accepted into their fold I had to fight my way in."

Uncertainty

Students who excelled academically but did not receive guidance or coaching were uncertain about their future choices and career options.

"Where to from here? I was consumed with questions, which left me feeling desperate, helpless and lost. Is medicine my field?"

In some cases, the exposure to an MBA created more confusion. One student wrote: "*In some ways the MBA did more harm than good*" referring to options now available to him and being unable to find clear direction.

Non conformity

Students who travelled were also non conformists, questioned authority and had a burning desire and spirit for adventure.

"On my first day I got caned for refusing to help dig a new long jump pit and being cheeky to the deputy principle in pointing out that they really should not expect a group of twenty standard sixes to dig a new long jump pit with one spade between them."

"As we are non conformists and like to go against the crowd we decided that since MBA's are renowned to break up marriages, we should get married. I had forgotten about most of these feelings in this exploration of my life. In these last few years and I have become trapped in the rut of my life. By writing this autobiography it has awakened these thoughts and feelings again, resulting in me taking out the photos and mementos of those trips. As she and I do not hark on the past, it has lit a flame under us again and we have begun to "plan" our next trip to Cambodia and Vietnam. Our planning now involves

taking leave from work and booking a plane ticket. The adventure spirit lives on!"

"The imposed values of unconditional respect for adults whatever their merit did not fit with the system of understanding that I had developed. My energy and confidence led me into many troubles in my quest of fighting the unacceptable injustices of the human society."

Discrimination / Apartheid

Incidents involving 'apartheid' or discrimination left a lasting impression on some students when this happened at a young age. One student recalls driving past a "putt putt" course and nagging her father to take her there only to be told eventually that this was not possible because it was reserved for white people only. This event left such a lasting impression that one of her stated intentions is to speak and point out discrimination at all cost.

"But those trips home were not always so happy. You see on our way home, we would cross over the Umgeni river on NMR avenue and directly beneath the bridge was a little putt-putt course. I did not really know what it was, all my little eyes saw were the beautiful bright lights and children playing with their mummies and daddies and brothers and sisters and how I longed to go there. As soon as I jumped onto the back seat I would ask' papa you will take me to play putt-putt now okay?', and papa would avoid answering for as long as he could. They would try to distract me as we approached the course but even then I was a smart one, and invariably the back seats would end up drenched with my tears, how that hurt.One night Papa finally told her 'I cannot take you there because that place is only for white people. And thus the seeds of hatred were sewn in me. As I grew so did the roots of this hatred as I came to realise just what apartheid meant. Whenever my mum gave me lima beans to peel, I would pinch all the ones that were completely white, this in my little mind gave me some strange satisfaction."

Career opportunities were also limited and students often had to opt for choices with less racial prejudice or with more international scope should they choose to leave the country.

"I finished school among the top ten Indian students in the country. I really wanted to study accounting but I was a black female in South Africa in the heart of apartheid. It would not be easy to progress in the corporate world. Medicine would offer me job security and the opportunity to leave the country if I needed to.
As a result of the policies of the then apartheid government, opportunities in industry were fairly limited (job reservation). Hence my brother motivated a career in medicine."

Individuals from disadvantaged groups see huge opportunities as a result of the abolishment of apartheid, and the democracy for them creates a true sense of belonging.

"This marked the birth of a new South Africa. Harsh apartheid laws were repealed. Job opportunities were suddenly being opened up to non-whites. With the result in 1991, I was offered a position in marketing at (Company Y) in Johannesburg."

<u>MBA</u>

For students who experienced limited career options or needed to consider their future career development, an MBA was a logical choice. An MBA was also an option to stave off boredom and reignite passion and was usually initiated by a mentor or a significant person.

"In 1998, strongly supported by (Mentor), I commenced the MBA programme at the Wits Business School."

For some students the MBA was a first exposure to mentorship but those without a mentor experienced even more confusion with ever more future options.

Table 8: Categories of Description – Themes

THEMES				
Boredom	**Social Pressure**	**Travel**	**Religion**	
Easily got bored without enough challenges or stimulation	Alcohol and smoking	Exposure to travel great impact	Disillusionment lead to not practicing Hinduism anymore	
Sport	**Uncertainty**	**Non conformity / Adventure**	**Apartheid / Discrimination**	**MBA**
Sport participants all male	Uncertainty for those without enough coaching or mentorship	Questioning authority, a spirit and need for adventure	Events involving apartheid leave a lasting impression	Option when faced with limited career oppertunities
Individuals from traditional families not encouraged to do sport			Limited career	Option to stave off boredom
			Abolishment of apartheid sees huge opportunities	First exposure to mentorship but for those without mentorship creates even more confusion

4.3 Summary

Ancestry or family background was well described but was not equally important to all students and two students did not mention it at all in their stories. Events were related to other categories of description, particularly Significant People, Phases and Themes. Mentors or coaches seemed to have played a definitive role in influencing decisiveness in most aspects of their lives except in romance. Within phases or stages, particular attention is given to school, the graduate phase and related decision making. Preliminary themes identified are sport, uncertainty or indecisiveness, MBA, religion, travel, adventure, non conformity, boredom, social pressure and the role of apartheid.

5. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

At the onset of this report, we set out to identify, describe and explore any patterns, themes, conceptions and conclusions that can be drawn from managers' life stories, how they were experienced and if they have any bearing on the managers' success.

When we looked at the relevance of psychoanalysis and the writing practice of life stories in self development, Day Sclater (2005) argued that it offered a set of fundamental truths about human nature and revealed previously hidden dimensions of persons. The entire edifice of psychoanalysis is built on the telling and interpretation of life histories and, one of the most interesting things about reading and writing auto/biography, is discovering the different ways we make sense of the world. As a learning - or process of self discovery in the ancient Greek aphorism "Know thyself" (Delphic Oracle, 558 B.C), it is a very valuable tool. One student wrote:

"The writing of this so-called autobiography has been one of the most challenging, probing, interesting, fun-filled, thought-provoking, and rewarding exercises of my MBA degree."

But writing a good story is also a creative process. "A life story, well written, enables us to identify the ambivalences that chip away at our attempts at wholeness and authenticity. Psychoanalysis is a tool that helps us to probe between the cracks, and to scratch among the debris, if not of our lives, then of the stories we tell about them" (Day Sclater, 2005). She concludes that psychoanalysis provides a language for exploring the creative and transformative potentials of auto/biography where life writing becomes a "transitional space" in which the possibilities for creative writing and reading are limited only by our willingness to let the imagination run.

Reading these stories offered more than just a glimpse into the lives of these students: the stories also offered insight, emotion, understanding and an intimate view of the respondents experienced their lives. Each story exists in

its own context but applying the basic categories of descriptions from the assignment guidelines provided a framework for interpretation. Most students used this framework except for one who chose to reveal his experience of life through the presentation and interpretation of three dreams. All except three stories were written in the authors own words. The first exception was a story told by the little family car, written as a journey from childhood to adulthood. The second was written by the family dog revealing ancestry and events as he overheard these tales lying next to his master in front of the fireplace. The third exception also included a dog, a faithful companion who revealed some canine insight on his master's life and habits.

These three stories were not easy to analyse but, from a creative point of view, were the most engaging and offered a journey into the imagination. It concurred with Day Sclater (2005) on the limits of life writing .The preoccupation with the truth in autobiographical life stories may well stand in the way of creative thinking.

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Ancestry or family background

There was no consistency in family backgrounds. However, students that came from humble families or families with strong traditional values shared the following:

- An emphasis on education to as a means to improve social circumstances.
- A means to improve social circumstances and overcome discrimination.

The majority of these students came from previously disadvantaged groups. These students also gave detailed descriptions of their parents and family situation. Their parents were very influential in decision making.

- Parents were mentioned or described in all except one story. In nuclear families, fathers provided guidance and mothers were nurturers.
- In dysfunctional families, siblings seemed more important and special bonds were formed with a sister or brother.
- Students from families who emphasised education felt obliged to perform and achieve more than their parents.
- Students who came from well educated families continued the tradition and followed in their parents footsteps.

5.1.2 Significant people and relationships

The most significant people identified were:

- Spouses
- Mentors or coaches

Spouses and mentors were distinctively more significant than friends. Parents were included with mentors or coaches. Most relationships with spouses were very inspirational and had a significant influence on the respondents' lives. These people provided the following:

- Inspiration
- Care
- Motivation
- A positive impact on live and career

Only one student was divorced. This relationship seemed to have been destructive since an early stage and had a negative impact on life and family. It was not possible to determine if it had a negative impact on career success.

Mentors, coaches or guides were present in all stories and took on different identities at different stages of the respondents' lives. They had an impact on respondents' childhood, primary and high school and career:

- Parents (mostly fathers), a grandparent or an elder brother provided guidance at an early age.
- For some students who did not receive this from a parent or family member, guidance came from a teacher. It would appear that it did not matter if early guidance did not come from within the family as long as some form of guidance presented itself at an early age.
- Individuals who had strong guidance during their formative years also seek out mentorship during their careers. These individuals seemed to be more goal orientated, have clear direction in their lives and seemed to be more successful in their careers.

The role of friends was not as prominent as mentors or spouses but was very important during the formative years. Lifelong friendships seemed to be formed during high school and university. It was not possible to determine if any of these friends influenced career success.

5.1.3 Events

The following main events were identified:

- Meeting a life partner was an important event and some students dedicated a great deal of their stories to this event.

- The birth of a child was a major event and seemed to enrich life experience.
- The death of a parent or a sibling (people of significance) had a devastating impact on those students who experienced the loss.

In two instances, the loss was also associated with a sense of doom. It was not clear if these events had any impact on their current or future success.

5.1.4 Phases, stages or chapters of your life

There was no consistency in childhood experiences but the following stood out during formative years:

- Students from nuclear families seemed more likely to have a carefree and nurtured childhood.
- Lasting emotional scars related to childhood insecurity and dysfunctional home life.
- All students, except for three, enjoyed going to school and most achieved well academically.
- During high school, academic excellence was also related to privileged treatment, university options and, for some, indecision about future opportunities.
- High school was also the time where some students found their sporting niche but students who were pressured to excel academically were not encouraged to do sport. It was not possible from these accounts to draw a clear conclusion regarding sport or sporting achievements and career or future success but it would appear that sport can be associated with disciplined lifestyles and clear objectives.

University saw the start of romance, only two university romances led to marriage and one of those ended in divorce. There was not enough information to draw any conclusions about relationships formed during this stage. The university stage also represented the following:

- This was the best time of their life from a social perspective.
- For those who experienced indecisiveness about university options, this continued and they seemed to have difficulty finding clear direction.
- This indecision also seemed to relate to job dissatisfaction and restlessness.
- This was also the stage all students decided to embark on an MBA, whether inspired by a mentor or just to improve their career options.

5.1.5 Themes

The themes that emerged from the analysis were related to other conceptions in one way or another.

- Boredom was a recurrent theme during childhood, education and working life and was mostly as a result of a lack of challenges or enough academic stimuli.
- Only male students revealed some elements of social pressure and this was mostly during high school or early twenties.
- Alcohol and smoking was seen as a means to be in the 'in crowd' during high school but only a few students continued using alcohol during their adult life. Although the use of alcohol was a strong theme amongst male students it was not possible to draw any conclusions in this regard.

- Travelling emerged as a very strong theme and students who were exposed to travel also appeared to be very independent. As apposed to most students who are driven by a need for

achievement, a sense of adventure is the driving force behind students for whom travelling is part of their destiny.

These individuals would appear to be most suited for careers that include travelling and postings in foreign countries. These students also seemed more likely to be nonconformists and to challenge authority.

- Religion was only mentioned by one student. It is not possible to conclude that it is unimportant since it was not included per se in the guidelines presented to students.
- Sporting themes as mentioned earlier seemed related to clear objectives and self discipline and could have an impact on career success.
- Uncertainty as a theme is related to indecisiveness resulting from too many options and choices without clear future objectives and guidelines.

It would appear that students without mentorship or coaching are more likely to be uncertain about their future and career choices.

- The impact of their MBA, the circumstances leading to, and the options available since embarking on this path was evident in every story. An MBA is seen as a means to advance and change careers, stave off boredom and reignite passion.

For students without mentorship or career coaching, the MBA seems to lead to even more uncertainty and confusion.

- For students from previously disadvantaged groups, the apartheid regime and associated discrimination had profound impact on their lives, options, choices and career development.

This theme might warrant an independent study since democracy in this country was only introduced 12 years ago. The limited career choices as a result of apartheid and the emerging opportunities since the abolishment thereof had a fundamental impact on these students' lives.

5.1.6 Challenges

The last three conceptions or categories were not easy to identify as, in most cases, they were not clearly identified or addressed by students.

The challenges identified were:

- Issues related to circumstance or personal issues.
- The constraints of traditional family values.
- Resentment as a result of apartheid.
- Overcoming childhood insecurities.
- Dealing with being HIV positive.

5.1.7 Future options

Only three individuals included future options in their stories and they related to:

- Career
- Relationships
- Personal issues.

The first student indicated future career options emerging from the exposure to an MBA, the second was looking forward to the option of a new relationship and lastly, the HIV positive student mentioned replacing emptiness with a sense of purpose as a focus for the future.

5.1.8 Intentions

Intentions were related to:

- Travel
- Relationships
- Personal issues

All students who had travelled expressed the intention to travel again. Some students are intent on improving relationships and finding more balance between personal and work life. This could be related to the demands of working life and the additional pressure of completing an MBA. On a personal level, the need for more spiritualism, impacting others lives and living life to its fullest was identified.

Although these conceptions were all expressed as intentions, if acted on they could have an impact on choices for personal and work life.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of storytelling in the development of management competence (McKenna (1999) has the potential to be a personal enabler and that stories add value to individuals and managers and organisations in the following ways:

- The narrative process of life writing can help individuals through contextualisation and making assessments about the appropriateness of career choices and options which were evident from the stories surveyed.
- The reflection required in writing their life story assisted students in "making sense" of the complexity of their lives and work.
- It allowed students to question and challenge "conventional wisdom" constructively.

- The ability to reflect on situations in life and work can enable students to make better decisions.
- These stories create personal empowerment through retrospection, understanding and insight.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of Previous Chapters

Chapter one identified the Context of this study, the Research Rroblem, Delimitations as well as the Relevance of this research project. Chapter two introduced the Literature review in relation to Storytelling in general, Storytelling in organisations and more specifically Autobiographical Storytelling. The Research Design is described in Chapter three focusing on the Interpretive Paradigm, Phenomenography, Modes of Phenomenography, Guidelines for conducting Phenomenographic Research, Survey Population and Sample and lastly Reliability and Validity. The research results are presented in Chapter four and, finally, Chapter five presents the Interpretation of Results focusing on Findings and Conclusions.

6.2 Limitations

As mentioned in Chapter one, the life stories examined are single sources of data and as such the data or facts contained in these stories have not been verified and therefore had to be accepted at face value. This could be overcome by including an interview stage or process as part of the analysis to assist in verification of facts.

The data are the authors' own life stories, which, as mentioned before, raises questions around disclosure. Some students disclosed that they had faced the dilemma of what they were comfortable revealing. As with verification, there is no way to determine if students left facts or events out, lied, forgot, embellished and an interview process could also assist in this manner.

In some cases, the comprehensiveness of the stories is questionable since they did not follow the given guidelines or structure. Although these stories

were inspiring to read from a creative perspective, they did not provide a complete picture of the lived experiences from childhood until their current situation.

6.3 Recommendations

It is recommended that the study include alternative research methodologies like in-depth interviews and content analysis to achieve triangulation which would greatly enhance the verification of findings and make the methodology more rigorous.

As mentioned in Chapter two, the Leeds Business School has included personal development modules for a number of years. Gold & Holman (2001) conclude that managers' reactions to the module were positive and the use of narrative helped managers to develop rich and complex descriptions of their experiences. The storytelling process clearly facilitated reflection, evidenced by the authors' comments on particular acts or events as their stories unfolded. The viability of a similar programme could be investigated for inclusion in future courses at the Wits Business School. Since such a program module would use storytelling as a means of sense making and critique, it would inevitably allow some managers to relate important aspects of their past to present and experiences in relation to effectiveness, management competence, decision making and career development.

It is further recommended that access to qualified career and life coaches at the inception of an MBA could also assist in personal and career development.

Lastly, it is recommended to repeat the study but using 20 stories based on the findings following Glaser and Strauss's (1967) notion of theoretical sampling in terms of theoretical relevance and based on previous phenomenographic studies (Alexandersson, 1994) in which the variation of a

phenomenon reached saturation at around 20 participants, after which no new conceptions emerged and would further increase validity.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Students from previously disadvantaged groups experienced unique circumstances and since democracy is only been in place for twelve years a study on managers from that background could bring to light distinctive findings.

The role of mentorship or guidance was also very prominent in this study and study with particular focus on the role of mentorship in management devilment could be insightful.

As most of the respondent's in this study had siblings there could be an impact leadership, decision making and career development when growing up as an oldest, middle, youngest or only child.

The impact on leadership and career development when growing up in a rural versus urban environment.

The influence of education of parents (one or both) on leadership and future success.

APPENDIX A: List of People Interviewed (informal)

1. Steve Banhegyi

   Steve Banhegyi & Associates: Exploring new territories in change and transformation

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   083 232 6047

   ICQ - 51369478

2. Zelma Opland

   Clinical Psychologist

   MA (Clin) Psych (Wits)

   PR. No. 8626685

3. Peter Christie

   BA (Hons) MA

   Not The Bored-Room

   Storytelling in Organisations

APPENDIX B: Biographical Storytelling – Some Guidelines

During the workshop, a process of outlining your life story was undertaken. This process is referred to as biographical storytelling, or the stories of our lives, and has the following main components:

- Your *ancestry*, including aspects such as where your ancestors came from, what they did with their lives, noteworthy contributions they made to the community and the like. Also addressed here may be the question of how it was that you came into your ancestor's lives when you did. What were the circumstances in your parents and grandparent's lives, where in the family order did you come, what was happening in the broader society at the time, and so forth?

- Significant *events*, *people* and *relationships* in your life. These events and people may have been close to home, such as the birth of a younger sibling or the separation of parents, or they may be a little further away, such as men walking on the moon, or the release of a significant political prisoner. Regarding relationships, these would include significant relationships you have with other people, but may also include any significant relationship you may have with places, types of work or whatever. Obviously the pattern of events, people and relationships are unique to a particular life story.

- The different *phases or chapters* in your life, where one period is characteristically and qualitatively different from what came before and what came after. These phases are not the development phases which all people traverse throughout the course of their lives such as childhood, adolescence and so on – they are rather the very idiosyncratic periods into which your life can be divided. It is useful to give each of these chapters a title, as in the chapters of a book. Some people have many chapters, others just a few.

- The *underlying and recurring themes* in your life story. That is, irrespective of the particular phases or chapters of your story, what are the themes that characterise your life? These themes may not be ever-present, but they do seem to recur to the extent that you would identify them as characteristic of your life. Such themes may include poor health, good luck, conflict, difficulties with relationships, sport and the like. Every person's life story will have a unique set of themes, some stories having many recurring themes, and others just a few.

- All of the above aspects of biographical storytelling refer to what has happened in a person's past life. In relation to the present aspect of your life, it is important to consider the *challenges* you now need to overcome in your life. These challenges may involve confronting the themes in your life story, some of which may be positive and functional, but others are likely to be negative and dysfunctional.

- Regarding the future of a person's life, biographical storytelling would involve identifying the *various future options* a person has in relation to confronting their particular challenges. Perhaps some things may be best left alone, but there will be others for which new directions are sought. A consideration of the options available is a healthy exercise for those wishing to master the future rather than be moulded by it.

- Finally, for a full life story it is important for you to consider your *intentions* regarding the best options for your future. Where does your will, that deepest part of you, really reside? What has stopped you from realising good intentions before in your life? What has kept you stuck? What can get you "unstuck?" What sacrifices do you need to make to realise your future? What sacrifices will others in your life need to make?

Tips for writing your life story

- Don't write in a mechanistic manner, whereby you address the above elements of your life in a piece-by-piece fashion. Rather try and integrate the various aspects of your life. For instance, through the relating of a few personal anecdotes, recurrent themes may be identified.

- Strive to be as comprehensive as possible. This does not mean attempting to do the impossible task of recording your entire life. What is meant by comprehensive is that you look holistically at both the good and bad parts of your life, and address both in a fair and honest manner.

- Incorporate as many real anecdotes as possible in your life story. What happened, who was involved, where and when did it happen, what were the consequences?

- Never under-value your life, or the value of your life story, to the reader. If you were not interested, why would they be? Don't apologise for having led a boring life, only apologise if you have written a boring life story.

- Share your emotional life with the reader. Let them know when you were excited, sad, depressed and so forth.

- Try where appropriate, to include humorous and self-deprecating aspects of your life, which will enliven you to the reader, as well as develop empathy from the reader for your story.

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APPENDIX C: Biographical Storytelling

The *events*, *phases* and *themes* of your biography were all about the *past*. Now we focus on the *present*, and address the following issues:

* **Unfinished business**

  - looking at my biography to-date, what is still unresolved?

    . .....

  - what major questions do I have about my life and my work?

    . .....

  - what old themes still need to be worked with?

    . .....

* **My network of relationships**

  - who are the people who have a significant impact on my life?

    . .....

  - which relationships are going well?

    . .....

  - where are there conflicts?

    . .....

* **Challenges facing me at this stage of my life**

  - what challenges do I need to confront?

    . .....

  - what new themes are emerging in my life?

APPENDIX D: Storytelling in Organisation – Biographical Storytelling

The *events*, *phases* and *themes* of your biography were all about the *past*, and the *unfinished business*, *network of relationships* and *challenges* are all about the present situation. Now we focus on the *future*, and the need to address the following issues:

* what choices / options / possibilities are open to me, as far as my future life direction is concerned?

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* what possible work and career choices do I have available to me?

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* what actions do I need to take as a matter of priority?

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