CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aim of the study

In the South African call centre industry full-size communication centres are growing in number, with their tasks relating to the making or taking of calls. Call centres have refined procedures, supervision and technology in place aimed at optimising the work tasks. The current research is a case study in a South African call centre environment. The research has three main aims based on the following three research questions:

1) What images/metaphors do individuals use to describe performance management?
2) Do employees at different levels in the organisation use different images/metaphors?
3) How do the images/metaphors relate to the eight constructs used in the current research in defining performance management, i.e. control; alignment with organisational strategies; the achievement of overall goals and objectives; rewards; training; development; appraisal and motivation?

The case study approach was used in this research which involved face-to-face interviews; the interview schedule used was composed of several questions aimed at uncovering answers to the research questions.

3.2. Nature of the research

A case study approach was used as in case studies the research direction is that of unpacking a case so as to understand it's uniqueness and idiosyncrasy in all of its complexity (Welman and Kruger, 2001). This was deemed appropriate in order to investigate the dynamics involved in people's perceptions of performance management within a call centre environment.

The case study approach enabled the study of agents and supervisors from two call centres in the Johannesburg area as well as representatives from HR/management with the aim being not only to describe people's perception but also to identify any trends or consistencies.

Having set the foundation of the approach used the procedures followed in carrying out the current research in order to achieve the aims of this research will now be discussed.

3.3. Pilot interviews

A pilot study was conducted with four individuals from the fields of law and recruitment. The selection of participants was a combination of convenience sampling as well as meeting the requirements of the prerequisite for the sample, which was exposure to performance management, thus all four individuals had personally experienced performance management in their work environment. The complete sample was made up of two females in recruitment and one male and one female in law. Questions asked pertained to perceptions of performance management and images related to performance management were elicited through questioning and probing.

The pilot interviews were aimed at establishing if the interview questions were appropriate and concise. The pilot interviews further hoped to establish whether the words and phrases used had clarity and were not ambiguous. The final aim was to ensure that questions were understandable and applied to the concept of performance management.

The results obtained from the pilot interviews conducted ultimately informed the final interview schedule as the questions were refined based on the feedback received. The interview schedule served as a template for the interviews to address several aspects and the questions selected were chosen specifically to determine people's perceptions of performance management, how they would

define it, how they understand it in their organisation, the experiences they have had with it, the feelings performance management evokes and what image comes to mind when they think of performance management. Open-ended questions were used so as to gain respondents personal views without limiting, influencing or informing their responses. The rationale behind the questions selected was that the questions were believed to be at an accessible literacy level for the sample group and also within their context, thus terms, words, phrases and concepts they would have encountered previously.

The methodology for the study conducted will now be discussed. This chapter will detail the procedure, sample, research questions and method of analysis for the current research.

3.4. Research design

This research is exploratory and qualitative in nature as it aims to discover South African employees' perceptions of performance management through the use of metaphors. It is also qualitative in nature being comprised of interviews with 28 individuals from two different call centres. Voluntary participation was requested by inviting agents, supervisors and managers to take part. Participants were informed that confidentiality is ensured but that anonymity could not be as face-to–face interviews were conducted.

The use of interviews is considered to play an important role with the majority of social research types (Breakwell, 1995). The research interview may be conceptualised according to two metaphors, the first being the interviewer as a miner, the second being the interviewer as a traveler. As a miner the interviewer unearths the valuable buried metal considered to be knowledge, knowledge in a subjects' interior that is waiting to be uncovered.   The interviewer digs for data or meaning from subjects' experiences without using leading questions, rather he/she strips away the conscious and dig for unconscious deeper layers. (Kvale, 1996)

The traveller on the other hand views the interview as a journey that will result in a tale to be told upon return. The traveller explores many domains and may look for specific sites or topics by employing a method. A method according to the Greek original definition is considered to be "a route that leads to the goal" (Kvale, 1996: 4). Through conversations with subjects, the interviewer qualitatively reports on the information gathered. The overall process may result in new insights and understanding for both the interviewer as a traveler and others (Kvale, 1996).

For the present research, in-depth open-ended interviews were conducted that were semi-structured in nature. The interview metaphor employed in the current research was that of the interviewer as the miner. This allowed for the exploration of various ideas, images and overall perceptions of performance management in a loose manner, allowing for appropriate deviation and tailoring for each participant. Where it was deemed appropriate and necessary to further explore an idea probes were used. The aim of the interviews and questions employed was to determine the images held of performance management and employees' interpretations of performance management. This was achieved by gaining in-depth understanding into images used and perceptions held, as well as the meaning performance management has for each employee. All interviews conducted were recorded to allow for transcription and analysis at a later stage. All the face-to-face interviews forming the data were conducted on the organisation's site.

3.5. Procedure

In order to conduct ethical research, the following procedures were followed in carrying out the current study: permission to conduct the research was first obtained from the University Ethics Committee. Each of the participating organisations was informed of the research aims and procedures. Permission

was obtained from each organisation to conduct research in its call centre. Human Resource practitioners from both organisations were approached in order to gain access to participants, invitations were sent via e-mail or verbally about the interviews on performance management and employees were thus asked if they were willing to participate. From those respondents that accepted to participate, an interview roster was created indicating the times for each individual's interview.

In order to ensure informed consent, after being informed about the nature and purpose of the study, all participants completed a form consenting to participate in the study, as well as to being recorded during the interview. All participants in the study were informed that their participation was purely voluntary, and also that no individual would be advantaged or disadvantaged for participating or choosing not to participate in the study. Participants were informed that if at anytime they felt uncomfortable with the questions or did not want to answer a particular question they were not obligated to. Participants were also informed that although anonymity could not be ensured as face-to-face interviews were being conducted, confidentiality could be offered. In addition, they were told that analyses and reporting would be on a group basis and not an individual basis.

Participants completed a questionnaire to gather demographic information before the commencement of interviews. The demographic information included: the age, gender, race and home-language of the participant, tenure in the specific organisation as well as in the particular job, and educational level.

3.6. Sampling method

Two methods of sampling were utilised for the current research. The first relates to managers whereby sampling included all relevant managers who were involved in the design and overseeing of the performance management system, thus purposive sampling was used. These individuals were specifically targeted

and requested to take part in the research. The second method used for the call centre agents and supervisors was however of a more random nature whereby employees were randomly invited to participate in the research. The organisations involved were informed of the number of people required at each of the different levels and the day on which interviews would take place, based on that information the organisation sent out e-mail invitations as well as verbal invitations to employees who would be available, from those that accepted the invitations a sample was formed. This sample, after having gained their consent, underwent face-to-face interviews based on the research questions.

3.7. Sample

The total sample of participants from the two call centre case study sites consisted of 27 employees from three different levels of the organisation:

- Management: 1 HR manager and 2 call centre managers in charge of overall performance management
- Supervisors: 6 supervisors who implement the performance management
- Call centre agents: 18 agents who work in the call centre.

This sample of 27 employees is broken down into its different components of biographical information, being age, gender, race, marital status, home language, tenure, contract type, field, first organisation ever employed, number of other organisations where performance management has been experienced previously, and highest level of education. This detailed biographical description of the sample is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Biographical description of the sample

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	CATEGORIES	N	%
Age	20-24	9	33.3
	25-29	4	14.8
	30-34	7	25.9
	35-39	3	11.1
	40-44	3	11.1
	45-49	1	3.7
	Total	**27**	**100**
Gender	Male	7	25.9
	Female	20	74.1
	Total	**27**	**100**
Race	Black	11	40.7
	Coloured	3	11.1
	Indian	6	22.2
	White	7	25.9
	Total	**27**	**100**
Marital status	Single	14	51.9
	Married	12	44.4
	Divorced	1	3.7
	Total	**27**	**100**
Home language	Afrikaans	1	3.7
	English	15	55.6
	Northern Sotho	2	7.4
	Setswana	4	14.8
	Xhosa	1	3.7
	Zulu	4	14.8
	Total	**27**	**100**

Tenure	0-2 years	10	37.0
	3-5 years	10	37.0
	6-8 years	3	11.1
	9-11 years	2	7.4
	12-14 years	1	3.7
	15-17 years	1	3.7
	Total	**27**	**100**
Contract type	Temporary	5	18.5
	Permanent	22	81.5
	Total	**27**	**100**
Field	Inbound	12	44.4
	Outbound	7	25.9
	Both	8	29.6
	Total	**27**	**100**
First organisation ever employed	Yes	5	18.5
	No	22	81.5
	Total	**27**	**100**
Number of other organisations where performance management has been experienced previously	0	9	33.3
	1	8	29.6
	2	6	22.2
	3	3	11.1
	4	1	3.7
	Total	**27**	**100**
Highest level of education	Matric	8	29.6
	National Certificate	3	11.1
	Diploma	7	25.9
	Bachelors Degree	9	33.3
	Total	**27**	**100**

Table 1 above shows the results of the various elements from the biographic segment of the questionnaire. In total, 74% (N=20) of participants were female, with 33% (N=9) of participants being between the ages of 20-24, which formed the majority. The majority of participants were single (51.9%, N=14) and had English (55.6%, N=15) as their home language.

With regards to employment, the majority of participants forming the sample had been in employment in their respective organisations for up to five years, and were employed on a permanent basis. Of the participants, 44.4% (N=12) were employed in a call centre field of an inbound nature.

For 81.5% (N=22) of participants their current employment is not their first employment; however 33.3% (N=9) of participants had not experienced performance management in their previous employment, closely followed by 29.6% (N=8) of participants who had experienced performance management in one other organisation.

Table 2: Participant pseudo names, genders and positions

POSITION	GENDER	PSEUDO NAME
AGENT	**Female**	Asanda Camilla Mahendra Casey Diane Kareshnee Khanyi Mbali Merisha Motsabi Palesa Rebecca Sibongile Tebogo

	Male	David Manesh Sandile Tsepho
SUPERVISOR	**Female**	Adrysha Ashley Kgomotso Mariana
	Male	Aseem Mark
HR/MANAGEMENT	**Female**	Antjie Jade Refilwe

Table 2 above is a break down of the sample group according to the participants' position, their gender and the pseudo name assigned to them in order to maintain their confidentiality.

3.8. Data analysis

The data gathered from the interviews was systematically examined, allowing for the recording of the relative incidence or frequencies of emergent themes (Welman and Kruger, 2001). A Tape-Based Analysis was used for the current research. The recorded interviews were transcribed in order to allow for content analysis to occur, with the relevant emergent themes of performance management being noted. This formed an abridged transcript and summary. This was done for all the interviews in order to determine emergent themes and perceptions of performance management and to determine how they relate to the 8 constructs of performance management discussed previously.

A master list of images and themes was produced, which was subsequently coded and analysed. Coding allows for the development and refinement of data interpretations, thus through coding images and perceptions were expanded on, developed further and discarded where deemed irrelevant (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). Individual analyses were conducted, as well as comparisons made

between the two call centres, individuals at different levels, as well as differences based on demographic information.

3.9. Conclusion

The current chapter presented the methods employed for the current research. Various issues were discussed, specifically: the aim of the study; research design; procedure; sample; sampling method; and data analysis conducted. Following on from this, the next chapter will form an in-depth presentation and discussion of the results obtained from the content analysis and other analyses conducted.