

Researching Enterprise Bargaining: A qualitative approach

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This paper outlines methodological considerations informing a study on the process of enterprise bargaining. The study adopted a facilitative research approach. In particular, it was based on an interpretivist paradigm. Details of the approach taken in data gathering and data analysis are outlined.

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Introduction

Major educational restructuring has been occurring in many countries throughout the world. A significant aspect of this restructuring has been an acknowledgement of the primacy of teaching in the educational process. In Australia, one emphasis on teaching as a major component of educational restructuring has emerged mainly through the industrial arena. Legislation has been enacted throughout the country supporting the principle of agreements negotiated at the workplace either in conjunction with or completely replacing the existing legally binding agreements establishing work conditions for employees within an industrial sector. Education systems and schools are now in a position to reexamine the nature of teachers' work and the defining of this work is no longer restricted by the all-embracing terms of a collective agreement. Rather, the nature of the work to be undertaken in a particular educational system or in a particular school can now be determined by the specific needs of the system or the school.

In Western Australia, schooling operates in two basic sectors, namely, the government sector and the non-government sector. The study which is the focus of this paper aimed to develop theory about how, in an attempt to reach an agreement for its teaching staff, the process of enterprise bargaining was dealt with in one school, and concentrated on the non-government sector.

The outcome of the research was a set of theoretical propositions about how an independent school dealt with the process of enterprise bargaining. The first proposition asserts that the process of enterprise bargaining at the School was dealt with according to a sequence of clearly identifiable stages. The second proposition contends that the process which led to the

enterprise bargaining agreement was dealt with by all parties maintaining trust in each other throughout. The maintenance of this trust was facilitated by, and reinforced by, the maintenance of a communication network. This network allowed parties to be able to communicate with each other at all times even if through a third party and allowed trust to be rebuilt when it broke down. The third proposition contends that the process which led to the enterprise bargaining agreement was dealt with by the Headmaster creatively employing his leadership qualities in a manner which maintained the involvement of all parties throughout.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The picture of the process of enterprise bargaining that emerged from the literature and from anecdotal evidence prompted the adoption of a research approach that could provide sufficient scope for understanding it in all its complexity. In particular, there was a need for a research approach that took into consideration the fact that there was no unitary definition of enterprise bargaining, and therefore no shared meaning (Morgan, 1994; Drabschek, 1995). In the Western Australian independent sector of education, the situation determined that the onus was on the individual school to construct its own meaning of the enterprise bargaining process for the particular time and for its particular context. This meaning is ultimately created by the personnel within the school, but especially by those people who participate directly in the bargaining process. Indeed, it is the personal frameworks of beliefs and values that are brought to bear on the situation that are so imperative to an understanding of how it may be defined.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction emphasises the nature of interaction, implying that human beings are constantly acting in relation to each other. Blumer (1969:2) has identified three basic premises of symbolic interaction. First, 'human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them'. Secondly, 'the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'. Thirdly, 'these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'. Hence, it is through this process of interaction that individuals construct meaning.

A fundamental principle of symbolic interaction, therefore, is that meaning arises from social interaction. According to this premise, interaction is a creative process in which meanings are assembled as

determined by the individual's interpretation of his or her own intended actions and the actions of others. The actor in a given situation thereby assigns meaning to the acts of others so as to enable himself/herself to engage in appropriate action. This meaning is defined by the attribution of intention to other actors and the interpretations of the implications of such attributed intentions. The assessment of a situation from this perspective is influenced by personal experience in what are perceived to be similar circumstances and specific goals. Hence, ultimate understanding will differ between individuals. Nevertheless, whatever the difference in meaning and significance assigned to the 'same' situation, the impact of subjective interpretations should not be underestimated. In relation to this observation the oft quoted words of Thomas and Thomas (1928:572) are pertinent, namely, 'if men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'.

The Value of Symbolic Interaction for a Study of Enterprise Bargaining

Symbolic interaction has two major implications for research activity (Chenitz and Swanson, 1986:6). To begin with, the research enterprise must be fundamentally concerned with unearthing participants' construction of meaning; the main endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience. In addition, the enquiry must be grounded in the empirical world under study. Woods (1992), defines the 'empirical social world' as:

The minute to minute, day to day, social life of individuals as they interact together, as they develop understandings and meanings, as they engage in joint action and respond to each other as they adapt to situations, and as they encounter and move to resolve problems that arise through their circumstances. (p.348)

This definition can be applied to a study of the process of enterprise bargaining because it is a phenomenon that represents a 'lived experience in a real situation' (Woods, 1992). Furthermore, enterprise bargaining is a complex activity and at the time of the research little was known about it with any certainty.

Taking cognizance of the main elements of symbolic interaction which have been discussed so far, it is possible to identify aspects of the enterprise bargaining process which lend themselves to exploration from this perspective. First, individuals may approach enterprise bargaining with widely differing views about what may eventuate and the roles others will play within the situation as it unfolds. It is important to discover what these initial views are because they are likely to influence how the interaction is subjectively interpreted and understood from the beginning.

Secondly, one can focus on discovering the perceptions that participants have of the motives which each of them have in their involvement in the process. As Mangham (1979:65) has stipulated, there are times when preliminary definitions of a situation do coincide, in which case original plans can be pursued with the cooperation of the other party or individuals. However, a more frequent occurrence is the emergence of a setting in which individuals are unable to perform their ideal role, or comply exactly with the role that they have been designated by others. In an enterprise bargaining context, it should be possible to locate the issues that evolve which are problematic for the participants and which require that they accommodate the interpreted reality in the interest of allowing the negotiation to proceed. It should also be possible to divulge the strategies and techniques employed by the participants in this process. For, as Mangham states, 'at the very heart of human behaviour is struggle and resolution, negotiation, process and flux' (Mangham, 1979:65).

The literature at the time of the study revealed scant information about the enterprise bargaining process at the school level and hence there was an extremely limited knowledge base on which to build the research agenda. For these pragmatic reasons alone, it would have been difficult to begin a study of enterprise bargaining with a preconceived theory and then attempt to verify it through an empirical study. More importantly, a research program which is committed to symbolic interaction should endeavour to be as open as possible to alternative constructions of reality and to many different explanations of observed phenomena, none of which can be eliminated prior to the study. It is therefore logical and epistemologically sound for the research enterprise to develop a theory which is grounded in the reality of the situation under question and 'fits' the data that have been generated.

The Research Focus

Researchers adopting a symbolic interaction perspective are fundamentally concerned with how individuals 'handle', 'manage', 'deal with', or 'cope with' particular phenomena within a given situation and over a given period of time. Accordingly, the major focus of the study was on discovering how, in an attempt to reach an enterprise agreement for its teaching staff, the process of enterprise bargaining undertaken has been dealt with in a Western Australian independent school.

As this research approach must accommodate multiple interpretations of the observed phenomenon, none of which could be eliminated prior to the study, it was impossible from the outset to know what the sum total of sub-research questions would be as the study unfolded. However, an initial set of guiding questions was proposed which placed the focus on revealing

how the actors who participated directly in the exercise of enterprise bargaining at one school viewed their circumstances, how they interacted, and how these processes changed. These questions were formulated as follows:

1. What were the individual meanings attached to enterprise bargaining by the employer's and employees' representatives on the negotiating committee prior to the negotiation process taking place?
2. How did the initial meanings attached to enterprise bargaining influence the early process of negotiation? What were the action/interaction strategies engaged in by the participants?
3. What meanings were held by the employer's and employees' representatives on the enterprise bargaining committee subsequent to the conduct of the negotiation process?

It will be noted that these guiding questions emerged from Blumer's three basic premises of symbolic interaction (1969:2). Guiding question number one is defined by the proposition that 'human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them'. Guiding question number two is based on the proposition that 'the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'. Guiding question number three is in keeping with the proposition that 'meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'.

A clearer understanding of the term 'meaning' may be gained by considering it as consisting of the notions of aims and intentions, significance, reasons and strategies (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985:234). On this basis, it seems pertinent to examine what an individual aims to do in the process of enterprise bargaining, what one considers to be significant about the process, the reasons given for pursuing the process, and the strategies employed as a part of it. However, it was not envisaged that the researcher should set out to answer these questions specifically; rather the questions were thought to provide the most productive means of generating data in order to develop a theory.

The Unit of Analysis

The study was located in Western Australia. To focus on a particular State was justified since the enterprise bargaining that had occurred in schools had been encompassed by State jurisdiction. The constraints of time, finance and accessibility meant that the study was further limited to the Perth metropolitan area. Moreover, it was restricted to the non-government schools' sector because previously most progress in enterprise bargaining had been achieved in the Western Australian education system by

independent schools (Western Australian Industrial Commission, 1995). An examination of the enterprise bargaining agreements which had been formulated by schools within the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia and registered with the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission in 1995, revealed a great deal of uniformity. In terms of the respective agreements' structure and content, they had all been based on the framework which was originally recommended by the Memorandum of Agreement signed between the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and the Independent Schools Salaried Officers' Association of Western Australia (ISSOA) in May 1994.

The enterprise agreements that had been registered were of two types. The first type referred to the collective enterprise agreement concluded by the Western Australian Catholic Schools' sector. The second type referred to the single enterprise agreement which other AISWA schools had elected to pursue. All the single enterprise agreements adopted by the non-Catholic, AISWA schools and registered with the Western Australian Industrial Commission were operational for the duration of one year, except for one which was to apply for the longer term of two years and two months. The selection of the school which was the subject of this longer agreement as a case for the study was therefore made on the basis of the difference that existed in the School's enterprise agreement which distinguished it from those of other schools. This sampling strategy concurs with the Goetz and Le Compte's (1984) notion of criterion-based sampling. According to this notion, the necessary criterion is first established for a unit to be included in the investigation and then a sample is found that matches the criterion. The school in question was, therefore, selected because of its uniqueness, or in the words of Goetz and Le Compte (1984:82), on the grounds of 'unique or rare attributes in a population'.

The decision to focus on a single school finds further justification in the potential of such a case to allow the researcher to get as close to the subjects of interest as possible and enable the uncovering of the subjective understandings of the phenomenon which are of most importance.

Data Collection

Attention must now be given to the data collection techniques utilised. In this connection, it was deemed appropriate that qualitative research methods of data collection be employed because of their concern for the empirical social world and their commitment to fieldwork. Participant observation is a major method of data gathering within the qualitative repertoire which enables the experiences of those inside the group to be penetrated. Assuming that entree could have been gained to a setting where sensitive information was being discussed, it would have been appropriate

for the researcher to observe enterprise bargaining meetings in order to record behaviour as it is occurring. A first hand account of the negotiations would provide a useful supplement to other forms of data in the interpretation of what is happening. However, in view of the fact that the school which was selected for the research had already concluded an enterprise agreement, the study had to be retrospective in nature. This feature of the research design automatically denied the appropriateness of participant observation in the collection of data and determined that there should be a reliance on the two other main qualitative techniques for obtaining data, namely, the interview and document analysis. Each of these data gathering approaches is now described, along with a consideration of the provision which was made to enhance validity and reliability.

The Interview Process

As the research project sought to contribute to the cultivation of insight and understanding of the enterprise bargaining process at the school level, the decision as to who should be interviewed was made according to the potential of individuals to illuminate what happened on the basis of their direct involvement, as identified by previous observations. In other words, informants were chosen because of their ability to provide rich descriptions of the experiences they encountered during enterprise bargaining at the School. It was possible to place the informants who were selected into three categories based on the positions that they held during the negotiation process. First, there was the employer, comprising three members of the School Council or the Governing Body. These particular members of Council were assigned to assist with the study because of their prominence in the activities of the Governing Body related to the School's enterprise bargaining which resulted from occupying a key office. Secondly, there was the employer's bargaining committee, namely the Headmaster, the Deputy Headmaster, and the Bursar. Thirdly, there was the employees' bargaining committee which included the Union representative on the staff of the school, two elected staff negotiators, and the Secretary of the Union who did not participate directly but was constantly aware of developments and provided advice to the employees.

Initial contact was made with each informant by telephone in order to obtain at least a provisional agreement to participate in the research project. This was confirmed shortly afterwards by a letter outlining the main purpose of the study and explaining the proposed format and function of the interview that would be undertaken. Consideration was also given to the necessity for interviews to be held more than once, enabling particular topics to be pursued further. Enclosed with the letter was a code of conduct for the responsible practice of research which had been devised

in collaboration with the Headmaster of the School. According to this protocol, three main procedures were stipulated. It was made clear that the principles of anonymity and confidentiality were to be observed at all times. Interview transcripts and research findings could be scrutinised by participants for accuracy, relevance and fairness, and the Headmaster would be consulted on the final results of the study prior to the submission of the dissertation. A declaration of the informant's support for the code of conduct was signed before the interview commenced. Initial interviews eventually took place over a three month period at locations chosen by the informants.

Merriam (1988:73) has identified three major variants of the interview: the highly structured, the semi-structured, and the unstructured. In its highly structured form, the interview questions as well as their order are predetermined, and it tends to be used when a large sample needs to be surveyed. At the opposite end of the interview 'continuum' is the unstructured format which is based on the assumption that informants can define the world in unique ways. It is therefore exploratory in its objectives and does not rely on a pre-prepared set of questions. A semi-structured approach, on the other hand, is also predicated on the epistemological assumption that there are multiple realities, but employs loosely defined questions for guidance during the conducting of the interview. Using this classification, it was decided that the style of interview which most accurately fitted the study was a semi-structured one.

The primary function of the interview within the research agenda was to reveal the informants' perceptions of their own roles and those of others in the process of enterprise bargaining, their perceptions of the enterprise bargaining environment, and their perceptions of the experiences encountered. It was therefore necessary to provide the opportunity for a discourse between interviewer and interviewee which 'moves beyond surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:80). In order to elicit this depth of response from the informant, two important elements of interview technique were adopted. First, each interview was sufficiently long for rapport to be established between the two parties, usually between one-and-a-half to two hours. Secondly, because of the need for interviews to allow informants the freedom to recall and expound on events from their perspective, there was no reliance on a standardised list of questions. Instead, initial questions were more loosely based on the guiding questions already noted, and subsequent questions were asked which were pertinent to the study as the opportunities arose. The nature of the response provided the direction that the interview should take next. In this way it could be claimed that questions were used as an *aide memoire* (Burgess, 1984:108) which served three main purposes:

the formulation of the *aide memoire* assisted with the preparation of the interview (McHugh, 1994:59); the *aide memoire* also helped to ensure that similar issues were covered in all of the interviews; and, whilst providing guidance in the conducting of the interview, the *aide memoire* still permitted the kind of flexibility required for the interviewer to respond to the emerging 'world view' of the informant as well as new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1988:74). Hence, the type of interview adopted in the study conformed to the notion that an interview may be construed as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:79).

Throughout all of the interviews, cognizance was taken of Woods' (1992:372), enumeration of the skills which are necessary to ensure that the interview is as productive as possible. These include active listening, which demonstrates that the interviewer is hearing, reacting, and occasionally constructing interpretations; focusing, or keeping the interview on the subject; explicating where material is incomplete or ambiguous; and checking for accuracy by pressing points, rephrasing and summarising. In this way, the researcher became a partner with the informant, with both of them working together to 'get the story straight' (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991:270). The decision to employ semi-structured interviews was therefore determined by the need to probe as deeply as possible into the individual's subjective experiences of the phenomenon in question. The use of semi-structured interviews also facilitates access to events which cannot be observed directly because of the retrospective nature of the study (Burns, 1994:280).

The interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the respondents and notes were also taken during the conversations in order to capture the things that the tape recorder was unable to record and which are necessary to further enhance the sense which the researcher makes of the interviewee's perspective (Maykut and Morehouse, 1993:99). The recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher on the grounds that the verbatim transcription of interviews provides the best data base for analysis (Merriam, 1988:82), and that involvement in the actual process of transcribing would bring the researcher closer to the data. Transcribing the interviews verbatim was also considered important to enable the use of quotations in the descriptive and analytical sections of the study for, as Ruddock (1993:19) has indicated, 'some statements carry a remarkably rich density of meaning in a few words'. The use of quotes also made it necessary to develop a system of codes in an attempt to maintain the anonymity of those people who were interviewed. To this end, each interviewee was assigned a code relating to whether the person was a negotiator for the employer, a member of the School Council, a staff negotiator, or a union official.

A copy of the transcript was sent to each respondent with an invitation to make any amendments considered necessary to enhance the representation of individuals' positions. At the end of this procedure the transcripts were ready for analysis.

Document Analysis

The second major technique employed for data collection was document analysis. Goetz and Le Compte (1984:153) have used the term 'artifact' to describe the assortment of written and symbolic records which have been kept by the participants in a social group. Such artifacts, as Merriam (1988:109) has indicated, have both limitations and advantages. In view of the fact that they are generated independently of the research, artifacts can be fragmentary and may not fit the conceptual framework. However, their independence from the research agenda can also be considered an advantage because they are thereby non-reactive. As such, they are a product of a given context and are grounded in the 'real world'. This characteristic makes it likely that an analysis of a diversity of artifacts will help to develop insights relevant to the research problem.

The artifacts used in the study were exclusively printed material of various sorts. In this connection, Borg and Gall (1989:813) have made a useful distinction between 'intentional documents' and 'unpremeditated documents'. According to this classification, intentional documents are those which serve primarily as a record of what happened, whereas unpremeditated documents are intended to serve an immediate purpose without any thought given to their future use in the recording of an event. For the function of investigating the process of enterprise bargaining at the School, it was possible to obtain in the first category of documents, *inter alia*, the agendas and minutes of enterprise bargaining meetings and whole staff meetings, draft enterprise agreements, and the Headmaster's monthly reports to the School Council. Located in the second category were documents such as personal memos, the Headmaster's letters and memoranda to staff, and communiques from the Headmaster to the employers' organisation, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. Collectively, the documents not only provided a detailed account of the sequence of events that occurred during the process of enterprise bargaining at the School, but also 'indicated people's sensations, experiences, and knowledge which connote opinions, values and feelings' (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993:216).

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity deals with the question of how the findings of a study capture reality (Merriam, 1988:166). Reality, according to a symbolic

interactionist understanding, is not an objective phenomenon but is, on the contrary, defined by individuals within any given situation. It is therefore incumbent upon the researcher to demonstrate that what is presented in the final report is an honest portrayal of how the informants perceive their roles and experiences within the enterprise bargaining process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have provided a useful framework for describing the aspects of the research agenda which serve to promote this goal. To begin with, there is more than one method of data collection. In this study the combination of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and the close analysis of relevant documents required that the investigation of enterprise bargaining at the school level was approached from different points of view and was more likely to eventuate in a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. This technique of 'triangulation' is particularly appropriate for a case study which is seeking to respond to the multiplicity of perspectives present in a highly complex social situation (Cohen and Manion, 1989:277), and is therefore an especially desirable approach to adopt in an investigation of the process of enterprise bargaining.

Another practice which promotes the internal validity of the study is 'member checking'. This is the procedure of taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible (Merriam, 1988:169). If a recognisable reality has been produced in the view of the research participants, the trustworthiness of the work is enhanced. To this end, key informants in the study were consulted about the concepts as they emerged from the analysis of the data so that their validity could be corroborated. Further validation of theoretical findings was sought by means of peer examination.

Reliability refers to the capacity for the study's findings to be replicated. In other words, if the study were to be repeated, would the same results be generated? Reliability is based on the assumption that there is a single objective reality which can be observed, known and measured. It is, however, a problematic concept when applied to a study which is founded on the premise that reality is, in contrast, a function of personal interaction and perception. Research on enterprise bargaining, which inevitably involves different interpretations of reality and is, by its very nature, highly contextual, leads to the formulation of studies of this type. Accordingly, for the study in question it was deemed appropriate to adopt Lincoln and Guba's (1985:316) notion of 'dependability' rather than the traditional positivist term of reliability.

To adopt the notion of dependability demands that the objective reader should concur with the research findings, taking into consideration the data collected. The main technique used to enable the dependability of results is the 'audit trail'. This allows the researcher to take the outsider through

the work from the beginning to the end so that the process by which conclusions have been drawn is made apparent. People are thereby able to judge the dependability or trustworthiness of the outcomes (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:146). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:319), an audit trail 'cannot be conducted without a residue of records stemming from the inquiry'. Therefore, in keeping with audit requirements, the following information was collected from the study in question: raw data, such as interview tapes, transcripts and written field notes; data reduction and analysis products, such as write ups of field notes, unitised information on report cards, and theoretical memos; and data reconstruction and synthesis products, such as integrative diagrams connecting categories. It will be noticed that the audit trail categories are those originally identified by Halpern and also adopted by Lincoln and Guba (1985:319).

Finally, the matter of external validity needs to be given consideration. External validity has been defined as the degree to which a researcher's observations can be accurately compared to other groups (Kincheloe, 1991:135). Given that the aim of the study was to understand how the process of enterprise bargaining was dealt with according to the subjective meanings constructed within a particular situation, the production of generalisable knowledge is not appropriate. Indeed, it could be argued that all exercises in enterprise bargaining for agreements are unique to their respective settings, making it impossible to transfer findings from one situation to another. Therefore, because circumstantial uniqueness is a major characteristic of an enterprise bargaining study, the traditional notion of external validity is rendered meaningless.

Another way of viewing external validity is by means of reader or user generalisability. According to this proposition, it is up to the reader to decide the extent to which the study's findings relate to his or her own situation. In this sense, the researcher is attempting to facilitate the reader's own analysis rather than deliver generalisable statements (Burns, 1994). In order to enhance the possibility of this kind of generalisability, it is imperative that the study provides a rich, thick description of the phenomenon in question. Readers' judgements about the appropriateness of transferability of findings to other contexts are thereby based on sufficient information. To this end, one section of the study presented the 'thick description' which served to contextualise the theoretical propositions of the research.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory is a 'general methodology for developing theory and is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed' (Strauss and Corbin, 1994:273). It is perhaps the most precise of the qualitative, inductive

methods for developing theory from data.

The lack of research into the processes of enterprise bargaining (Fells, 1995), especially at the school level, meant that there were many categories and properties of the phenomenon yet to be identified. Grounded theory methods of data analysis are particularly suited to this task. They offer a systematic approach to collecting, organising, and analysing data from the empirical world in question. They also constitute an approach to theory development based on the study of human conduct and the contexts and forces which impinge on human conduct (Chenitz and Swanson, 1986:14).

The constant comparative method of data analysis, which is fundamental to grounded theory modes of analysis, was used in the study (Strauss, 1987). Analysis progressed through the stages of open and axial coding (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Also, in keeping with grounded theory modes of analysis, data collection and analysis were undertaken simultaneously (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In this way, the study's substantive theory was generated. The process was further facilitated through 'theoretical sampling' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), building categories, writing memos, and drawing diagrams (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Some examples of the process will now be considered in terms of the two main types of coding that were conducted.

Open Coding

The first stage of the analytical process was to gather all the documentary data together and organise it chronologically. Data were simultaneously read thoroughly and appropriate notes, comments, observations and queries were made. This exercise amounted to open coding or the 'unrestricted coding of the data' (Strauss, 1987:28), with the aim of producing concepts which fitted the data. The rudimentary system of concepts developed according to this procedure served to inform the interviewing process by enabling a degree of theoretical sampling. Likewise, the first interviews and accompanying field notes were provisionally analysed before progressing to the next interviews.

The analysis of an interview began with its transcription. Theoretical memos were used to document rudimentary thoughts as they occurred. These memos enabled the recording of hypotheses which were compared, verified, modified, or changed as new data became available (Corbin, 1986:108). The memos were typed into the computer. Each memo was identified by interview number, code name and date.

The following theoretical memo, written after the fifth interview, is an example of what was undertaken:

5th January 1996

Theoretical Memo

End of the enterprise bargaining process

Interview 5 dated 5.1.96

The respondent was euphoric when agreement was reached, although he recognised that it is based on consensus and not everybody will be happy. This seems to indicate a degree of pragmatism about the outcome. He also claims to have learned from the process that assumptions cannot be made. The process was also a helpful intelligence of the way people perceived they were being treated within the School. The whole process of enterprise bargaining has been regarded as a learning experience.

After the transcribing process, the interview was re-read several times to identify major concepts contained in the transcript. The data were coded by writing into the margins of the hard copy of each interview. Incidents and facts were marked with the use of a highlighter and rewritten in the form of a concept. This process is demonstrated by the following example of open coding from the fourth transcribed interview:

I didn't expect adversarial behaviour

confidence, trust

I thought we would have an open discussion without undue difficulty

collaboration

I believe that if you communicate often enough and clearly enough, then things that are a problem can be clearly identified and then resolved

communication network

Where it all goes wrong is not enough effort goes into that consultative process

ownership of staff

To that end the Headmaster appears to me to have done a good job in driving the process to make sure there was consultation, that people knew what was going on, that there were records kept and that sort of thing

faith in HM's leadership

This involved a huge amount of extra time over and above just following an award

commitment to process

Cross-interview analysis was then undertaken to locate those concepts relating to phenomena which occurred regularly within the interviews and to make comparisons with those concepts that had already emerged from the other documents. In this way, the concepts underpinning most of the data began to be developed.

Thirty-four substantive concepts were identified. They were recorded on separate index cards and elaborated according to situational factors. In this regard, Strauss and Corbin's model (1990) or 'coding paradigm' for developing concepts—causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening

conditions, action/interactional strategies used to deal with the phenomenon, and consequences—served as a useful point of reference. The coding of the substantive concepts was refined by referring back to the data and making comparisons between them.

Axial Coding

The next stage in the process of data analysis was to condense the concepts into categories. Strauss and Corbin (1990:96) have called this process axial coding because its main purpose is to put the data which has been fractured by open coding, back together again in new ways by making connections between a category and its sub-categories. This was accomplished by comparing the information recorded on the index cards to ascertain which substantive concepts fitted together. For this purpose, cognizance was again taken of Strauss and Corbin's (1990:97) 'coding paradigm'. According to this approach, theoretical memos are used to conceptualise how the open codes relate to each other in the data. To give an example from the present study, the category 'Headmaster's leadership' was identified and described in terms of the context within which leadership was exercised, the conditions that gave rise to the leadership, the strategies by which leadership was implemented, and the consequence of those strategies. This is demonstrated by the following theoretical memo.

Theoretical Memo

Headmaster's leadership

Causal conditions

New educational context

Properties of new educational context

Explicit negotiation

Different configurations of decision making

Micro-political implications

Action/interaction strategies for

Headmaster's leadership

Reassurance, communication, information
sharing responsiveness, pragmatism

Consequences for school community

Commitment and involvement of parties
in enterprise bargaining process

Phenomenon

Headmaster's leadership

Specific dimensions of Headmaster's leadership

Opportunism, initiation, research,
learning, standard bearing

The in-depth analysis that was undertaken of the category named 'Headmaster's leadership' enabled some of its properties and dimensions to be identified. Various conditions, strategies and consequences associated with such leadership were also identified.

The process of axial coding was supplemented by employing three further techniques. First, integrative diagrams were used as visual representations of analytic thinking. They were helpful in trying out and demonstrating conceptual linkages (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:198). A second technique was the use of the literature in order to locate categories and discover what had already been said about them (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:50). Reference to the literature at this point helped to develop 'theoretical sensitivity' or 'the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:42). The final adjunct to axial coding was the employment of 'member checking'. In other words, emergent categories were taken back to key respondents and they were asked if the interpretations made were plausible.

The third type of coding used by grounded theorists, namely, selective coding, was not utilised. This type of coding is necessary in a 'pure' grounded theory study. Here, the concern is with 'discovering' a core social-psychological problem and a corresponding social-psychological process. However, in the case of the study referred to in this paper, the concern was with answering the central research question: how, in an attempt to reach an enterprise agreement for its teaching staff, the process of enterprise bargaining has been dealt with in a Western Australian independent school? The employment of open and axial coding was sufficient for the development of three propositions relating to this central question.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that if enterprise bargaining is to be understood as a process in the most holistic sense, a research design is required which, in Peshkin's words (1993:28), 'gets to the bottom of things, dwells on complexity, and brings us very close to the phenomena we seek to illuminate'.

In accordance with Peshkin's objectives (1993:28), the study of the process of enterprise bargaining reported in this paper determined that a qualitative research orientation be adopted because of its underlying assumption that there are multiple realities emerging from personal interaction and perception. It also determined that the research should be undertaken from the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction because of its concern with the 'ways in which individual actors make sense of, analyse, or interpret any given situation' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989:33). It was this meta-theoretical position that decided the nature of the data gathering methods that were employed in the research as well as the modes of data analysis. Indeed, as Lancy (1993:7-8) contends, it is the assumptions about how truth is derived that determine the purpose of the

enquiry, the role of the researcher, what constitutes evidence, and how the quality of a given study is evaluated.

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