

## Reflection

*If we knew what we were doing it wouldn't be called research would it?*

*Albert Einstein*

Creswell (2013) comments that the researcher who is studying in their own "backyard" (p.151) has the advantage of being able to collect data easily and conveniently and just needs to ensure that they engage in multiple validation strategies to ensure that the account is accurate and provides insight. I have reflected about the fact that I have been researching in my own backyard and wondered has it really been easier to carry out the study and collect data than if I had carried out the research in another organisation or institution.

Perhaps my thoughts arise because it was not possible to proceed with the research as I had originally outlined it in my proposal. The organisation I work for was in the process of implementing an online classroom and my original thoughts were around working with our team of trainers and using an action research approach to come up with some best practice guidelines for trainers making the transition to synchronous online training. This did not come about, as the technology being used for our online classroom could not be installed or used unless the appropriate testing took place. The start of my research coincided with the test / implementation phase of the technology so the natural progression for my research was to change to a case study format and relate the issues and challenges that arose. Yin (2009) seemed to voice my fear when he discussed the need for flexibility in the area of case study research. For me, my research proposal with its action research approach seemed like a safe option. I was dealing with a small group of people who I knew well and I felt I had a plan, which although it may not

have stretched to the four cycles I hoped for, would at least stretch to two or three. The case study on the other hand would take me into unknown territory; I didn't know what was going to happen. That seems to suggest that I thought I had a good idea of what would happen in the action research cycles, but I think it is more that, to me there was a definite structure and plan. With a case study I had no idea of where it would take me within the timescale available. In thinking about design I decided to go with an exploratory study that consisted of the case which was the organisation, and two embedded cases which were the learners and the training team. This was really my way of covering all bases with the possibility that one out of the three cases would be explored depending on how the implementation went. My reading during the project has covered all of these topics and so has informed my understanding of how the technology can be used and the factors which need to be considered to deliver effective and engaging training as well as elements to be considered during implementation. My thoughts are that what was perceived as a lack of direction has led to a more rounded experience than that which may have been gained through researching my initial topic.

Going back to my original thought of whether or not it has been more difficult to research in my own "backyard", I take Creswell's point relating to data. I have been able to collect data just because I happened to be in the right place, at the right time. In some cases it was in casual conversations after a meeting, when a comment may have been passed which illustrated what the person really thought, in other cases there have been chance conversations over a cup of coffee. These are the nuggets that an external researcher may not have the opportunity to collect either because they may not be present all the time or they have not been in a position to build up a relationship with the participants. On the other hand, I have wondered if I was an external researcher would it have been easier for me to collate data through surveys. We have never

been busier than we are at the moment and although I asked if it was possible to run a survey after we completed a short live broadcast using the technology, I was asked not to as it was not a priority for the employees involved, who were busy sales reps. In that case we took some quick feedback from employees on the day of the broadcast, but I felt it may have been more enlightening if they had a chance to reflect on the experience and provide feedback anonymously. This is where I felt my role within the organisation is primarily an employee, not a researcher and business takes precedence. Perhaps if the organisation had agreed with an external researcher to complete research it may have been possible to agree in advance how data would be collected.

Researching in my own "backyard" has challenged me to rethink and reflect on some of my initial perspectives of the study. Creswell (2013) suggests writing qualitative text is "positioned within a stance" (p.215). The project has offered me the opportunity to take a step back and re-evaluate some of my initial reactions to interviews and observations I have made. In particular when discussing thoughts and meanings with a "peer debriefer" Creswell (2013), (p.251), I have found that in explaining my interpretations I have had to ensure that they are as objective as they can be. I have become deeply involved in the project and I am very enthusiastic about what the technology will help us as an organisation achieve. At times I have found myself challenged to remain objective and take the point being made without trying to influence the person around to my way of thinking. Having worked in the organisation for over 30 years it has been a challenge to view it with a more objective eye, but I have found it an interesting process.

My final thought is around how the research has evolved. That need to be flexible suggested by Yin (2009) just seemed to happen without my knowing. My literature review changed significantly to reflect the main themes around implementation in corporate contexts, if I couldn't collect data one way, I found another way. My realisation is that regardless of

the context there are difficulties or challenges for researchers no matter what their position is. That is what makes life complicated for the researcher but what makes for a richer more valuable insight into the topic for the reader.

## References

Creswell, J. (2013), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*, (3rd ed.), Sage, California.

Yin, R. (2009), *Case Study Research: design and methods*, (4th ed.), Sage, California