PAULA MCDONALD, KEITH TOWNSEND AND JENNIFER WATERHOUSE

Wrong Way, Go Back! Negotiating Access in Industry-Based Research

Published in K. Townsend and J. Burgess. *Method in the Madness: Research stories you won't read in a text book*, Chandos Publishing.

Introduction

Literature which addresses methodological issues in organisational research is extensive and multi-disciplinary, encompassing debates about methodological choices, data collection techniques, epistemological approaches and statistical procedures. However, little scholarship has addressed an important aspect of organisational research that precedes decisions about data collection and analysis - access to the organisations themselves, including the people, processes and documents within them. This chapter addresses organisational access through the experiences of three research fellows in the course of their research with their respective industry partners. In doing so, it reveals many of the challenges and changing opportunities associated with the access to organisations which are rarely explicitly addressed, but often assumed, in traditional methods texts and journal publications. Although the level of access granted varied somewhat across the projects at different points in time and according to different organisational contexts, we shared a number of core and consistent experiences in attempting to collect data and implement strategies.

The Context

Our responsibilities in our research fellow roles included liaising with Human Resource and Executive Committee members of our respective organisations, collecting a range of qualitative and quantitative data, developing and implementing strategies to address identified problems, analysing and publishing our research findings and presenting the findings back to the organisation. We also participated in a range of other typical academic activities during our fellowships, including representation on University and industry committees, service to journals and conferences, post-graduate supervision and the delivery of seminars at conferences and public forums.

Five organisations were involved in the three projects employing us as research fellows. Pseudonyms are used in order to preserve their anonymity. Project A involved two organisations: CAPITAL, which is a public organisation responsible for capital works, and COMMUNITY which is a public organisation responsible for community services. The industry partner for Project B was a peak body in the construction industry, though the research was primarily conducted with two of their organisational members, CONSTRUCT and ASSEMBLE, both private construction companies. Project C involved one organisation, BUILD which is a public organisation responsible for the planning, design, construction and project management of infrastructure. The five organisations differed somewhat in size,

public/private orientation and core business focus. However, four organisations were responsible for major infrastructure development, employed large numbers of engineers, builders and construction workers as well as office-based, administrative and project managerial staff, and were male-dominated. The head office of each of these organisations was located in the same capital city in Australia, but each organisation had offices and sites located across the State (CAPITAL and BUILD) or across Australia (CONSTRUCT, ASSEMBLE). The remaining organisation, COMMUNITY was located in a regional centre and employed predominantly women. Projects A and B investigated work-life balance issues (CAPITAL, COMMUNITY, CONSTRUCT, ASSEMBLE) and Project C involved managing organisational change (BUILD).

In all three projects the collaborating organisations made significant cash and in-kind contributions to the research projects. Research protocols were signed off by senior staff in each of the participating organisations. This was designed to ensure participation by key personnel and provide ongoing organisational commitment to the research project. As will be seen, despite these financial and written undertakings, ongoing access was a major problem for the researchers.

Access as a Methodological Concern

For the purpose of this chapter we define 'access' not as a single episode but as a process of continually building relationships at multiple points and with multiple actors throughout the course of a study (Waldford, 2001). This idea of access being an 'incremental continuum' (Waldford, 2001: 34) is relevant for the cases discussed in this chapter which received indicative, senior-level access before the projects commenced, via the commitment of funding and being a formal signatory to the contract between the organisation and our university. However, ongoing access to the organisations was a concern throughout many of the phases of the projects and necessitated multiple agreements with various organisational stakeholders. We also distinguish access from 'resistance' which refers to a participant's reluctance to discuss, open up or be forthcoming (such as during an interview), after access has already been granted (Adler & Adler, 2003).

Significant pressures from industry sectors or society more broadly can affect researcher access to organizations. Troman (1996), referring to studies he conducted in the education sector in Britain, suggests that access to organizations is becoming more difficult due to macro-level changes beyond the organizations themselves. Specifically, he argued that educational policy and reform has resulted in an increasing number of researchers in schools, an intensification of teachers' work and greater financial constraints on principals, and that these changes have presented researchers with increasing difficulty in accessing schools to research. Pini and Haslam McKenzie (2007) also concluded that macro-level issues were important in the acquisition of knowledge through a discussion of their experiences in gaining access to local governments in undertaking work on natural resource management. They argued that a range of system-level changes, including increasing financial pressure and an expansion of roles within the sector, rendered access problematic for researchers. At the societal level, Adler & Adler (2003) suggest that an increasing surveillance culture and fear of legal action also influences access to organizations. For example, they describe how their access to a Hawaiian resort hotel where they were conducting ethnographic research, was systematically diminished following two lawsuits that were brought by employees against the resort.

These studies provide important insights of the range of difficulties faced by researchers when attempting to acquire knowledge via organisational research. Clearly however, a greater understanding is required of the range of factors affecting access to organisations and what researchers can do to facilitate entry. Indeed, without access, any further knowledge acquisition in organizational settings would cease.

Internal / External Pressures

In Project A in COMMUNITY, access proceeded without difficulty for the first 12 months of the research timeline. A survey on work-life balance (WLB) was administered, interviews were conducted and the results of different phases were reported back to the organisation. Various human resource strategies or interventions were planned on the basis of these 'baseline' findings. Approximately half-way through the second year of the project as the 'intervention strategies' were getting underway, a cyclone in the local area required a significant re-focusing of the organisational priorities and the project was delayed indefinitely. Repeated attempts were made to re-establish the goals of the research through contact with key representatives in the organisation. However, the significant loss of momentum that resulted from the natural disaster and the consequent focus on the provision of essential services, meant that access to the organisation in the later stages of the research was thwarted.

Managers at CONSTRUCT and ASSEMBLE were all very supportive of the idea to address WLB within their organisations and workplaces. The project was built on the premise that employees at all levels of organisations should be entitled to opportunities to be fully engaged in their work, whilst not having to compromise too greatly their non-work interests. However, support for an idea coupled with financial commitment to the research project did not translate readily into access for the researchers or a commitment to initiate the proposed interventions. For example, having begun the larger research project in early 2005, the CONSTRUCT case was timetabled to begin in August 2006. The Time 1 data was collected on time in September 2005 before the research project stalled. Managers and designated employees were simply too busy getting through the day to day to assist the research team; hence, by August 2007 the project had not progressed to any substantial degree. Certainly, no more data had been collected, nor had any intervention began despite regular contact between the primary researcher and staff on the case study site. Commonly, the researcher was told *'we are just so busy, we don't have time to fit this WLB stuff in at the moment'*. This response was ironic given that the project was developed on a body of research that suggests by taking a greater focus on WLB employees could work more efficiently.

At ASSEMBLE the story of delays and inaction was similar. In fact, with some regret from the manager involved, ASSEMBLE in essence withdrew from the research project. Commissioned to develop a major piece of infrastructure, the ASSEMBLE site became somewhat of a political football for a short period of time close to an election. After operating for almost 12 months with employees working (based on our Time 1 data) an average of more than 50 hours a week and up to 80 hours a week, the project was ahead of schedule (six months ahead of schedule in some areas). The researcher was told that :

> 'we know that WLB is a problem here – well, nobody actually has a WLB but we are six months ahead of schedule and our leadership team decided that we wanted to stay that way … So we're not going to do it (the intervention) we're just going to keep going as we are'.

Within the context of very tight labour markets and high activity within the construction sector decisions were made within many potential case studies (and actual cases like ASSEMBLE) that WLB was not as important an issue as maintaining the status quo. For many people it seems, the term 'work life balance' has become somewhat of a cliché.

The aim of Project C within BUILD (public sector) was to capture staff perceptions of organisational change through the collection of qualitative data at six monthly intervals from various sites across their jurisdiction. Ideally data was to be collected from the same sites and, as closely as possible, from the same participants, at each time frame so as to gain the best comparative data possible over the seven years of the study. Access for Project C in BUILD progressed closely to research plans for the first three years of the study except for one data collection period that was delayed three months due to the financial reporting period.

During years four and five BUILD commenced a major new change initiative that sought to address a doubling of its works program at a time of critical shortages in key skill areas. There was significant ministerial pressure on BUILD to deliver the infrastructure program and it was stated that failure to deliver the program was not an option. In response to both ministerial pressure and the increased works program BUILD undertook a major restructure and sought to align policy and practice across all its divisions. Some areas of the organisation were significantly affected and researcher access to these areas was blocked as it was considered that the research would be an added burden to the most affected areas and would not be welcome.

The pressures associated with operational requirements and achieving project timelines were surprisingly similar across the public and private sector organisations in our research. The emergence of 'new' public management principles are likely to have dissolved some traditional differences in emphasis on financial performance and budgetary concerns. Indeed, both CAPITAL and BUILD have changed substantially over the past 15 years, being subject to external pressures and internal changes to become more efficient and highly competitive within the broader infrastructure environment in Australia. Illustrating views about ministerial (political level) expectations is the following quote from a senior manager at CAPITAL:

> "It's very important that high profile projects are done on time. When the Minister has made a promise that a facility is going to be open at such and such a date, it would be an embarrassment to him if it is not done on time".

These changes occurring in Australia mirror a range of global labour market trends, such as growing labour insecurity, increased employer dominance in the workplace, the curtailment of third party influence and government pursuit of labour flexibility.

Despite these operational and industry pressures, access in CAPITAL appeared to be more related to perceptions of risk and research fatigue (described below), while in BUILD, the combination of industry pressures and massive change were most problematic along with concerns associated with the publishing of research findings at a politically sensitive time.

Differential Support

Variations in level of support from key personnel were integrally linked to organisational access in each project. Ethnographic and case study research typically begins with an individual, known as a gatekeeper, who is a member of or has insider status with a cultural group and who is the initial contact for the researcher and leads them to other participants

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In research, staff turnover amongst gatekeepers was a common problem in the level of support afforded to us. For example, the key human resource contact in CAPITAL changed three times during the course of the project. All changes resulted from internal transfer to another position. Following each change, the new contact was briefed by the researchers involved as to the principal objectives of the project and plans for the next stage. While this strategy helped keep the project 'alive', a tangible loss of motivation and a sense that the project was an unwanted task that had been 'inherited', was very apparent with each change of personnel. This resulted in uneven levels of access during the life of the project, especially for variable periods of time following the induction of new organisational contacts. Similarly, in COMMUNITY, the position of Director General changed approximately half way through the project, leaving a hiatus in very senior-level support which was especially critical in this organisation which was small and geographically removed from the location of the researchers.

Turnover at ASSEMBLE meant that within the first six months of the build there were three project managers involved as frontline gatekeepers. All of these managers were in principle, very supportive of the research. However in practice, each manager was focussed greatly on their new role as project manager and simply not able, or not willing to place a high priority on the research agenda. The change of the primary contact or gatekeeper at CONSTRUCT halted the progress of the project for approximately four months. The initial HR/IR manager took maternity leave and during the period leading up to her departure the research agenda was a low priority. The transition to a new manager was also a lengthy process.

Another central feature of differential support that affected organisational access was the question of who in the organizational hierarchy had ownership of the project. Highest-level support was indicated via financial contributions and sign-off of formal documentation in each enterprise. However, the implementation of the research was usually delegated to lower levels of management who were not necessarily involved in the inception of the research and/or did not share the same goals as the researchers. Hence, ownership was delivered to a person's desk and often seen as 'just another task' to be completed.

The issue of ownership was important in allowing access for data collection purposes, but even more critically, for getting approval for research strategies or interventions. In project A, a significant component of the research plan was to implement a number of schemes designed to improve the work-life culture of CAPITAL. These strategies included 'demonstration trials', whereby employees could (with the approval of their direct line manager) trial the use of a flexible work policy, which would then be evaluated following a designated time. Another strategy was to trial recruitment advertisements for part-time positions in skill shortage areas. Both of these interventions were supported provisionally and in principal by the human resource contacts in CAPITAL, and in the original research design by the Director General. However, when the time came for implementation, approval was blocked by the Corporate Governance Board. The members of this Board had had no contact with the researchers and presumably felt little personal connection with the project or ownership of its goals. A third intervention was an education strategy to be undertaken during a leadership residential. This was eventually approved as a special session during a one-day training module.

From the outset Project C had the highest level of executive support from within the organisation. The research project had initially been commissioned by the Director General who had assigned a senior manager to its coordination as well as an administrative support person from the Director General's office who attended regular weekly meetings and organised site visits. The legitimacy given to the research through such high level and formal support resulted in excellent access during the first three years where data was collected from

12 sites each at Time 1, Time 2, Time 3 and Time 4. Strong relationships developed between the university researchers and their BUILD colleagues fostered through activities such as shared office facilities, travelling together, joint conference attendance and joint publications.

However, in the fourth year there was staff turnover in all key project positions within BUILD, that is, the Director General, the management coordinator of the research and the administrative staff member who had been assigned as a day-to-day contact all left BUILD. Both the new Director General and the management coordinator came from outside BUILD. Consequently, the social capital and trust that had been developed through the earlier relationships was lost. New relationships needed to be established with individuals who were not familiar with the project, its aims or the rationale for the processes underpinning it. A new day to day contact for the project was never again formally or permanently assigned. Negativity was expressed by the new management coordinator in relation to the data collection method as it was considered ineffective, overly invasive and time consuming. In fact, the blocking of access to areas most affected by organisational change came from the new management coordinator with the researchers being effectively banned from any communication or access to those areas. This meant that not even individual site access could be negotiated. The effect on the research was that the continuity of data collection from the same sites at each time frame was lost and indeed access to these critical sites was never regained. The whole data collection process and focus of the research was re-negotiated resulting in the research taking a different course to that initially established.

High levels of support for the research came from the upper management within the ASSEMBLE and CONSTRUCT organisations; however, this did not always translate to site level support the way it did initially in BUILD. The difference between the three cases appears to be that in BUILD a staff member from the Director General's office was assigned to broker access across the organisation which effectively opened doors that may otherwise have been firmly shut. By contrast, within ASSEMBLE and CONSTRUCT site access was substantially problematic to the point that 'in principle' access was negotiated at seven different worksites. Actual data was collected from five of these worksites, two managers withdrew support prior to data collection (in one case on the day that surveys were to be distributed). Within the five worksites where data was collected, only one worksite allowed the complete methodological design with Time 1 testing, an intervention and follow up measures to determine success. Still, within this single success story, what was designed to be a four to six month research project took in excess of 18 months. Simply stated, practitioners within the worksites placed a low priority on the processes of the research project largely because it was not *the day to day*. One HR manager, while apologising for the number and length of time delays stated:

> 'I can't seem to get people moving on this – it's all sort of … out there … while people are wrapped up in what's on their desk for today'.

A final point to note on differential support is that all three of these research projects were designed to affect positive workplace change at various levels. Potential changes included those to organisational policies, organisational culture and the work and non-work lives of employees. This process of introducing change and measuring the outcomes demands high degrees of cooperation on 'The Access Ladder' (Neuman, 2006). However, the high level goals of the planned research project meant long negotiations and a strategic and planning level of the organisation were disjointed from the 'gatekeepers' who were at an operational level and perceived substantial risk to their operational requirements.

Perceptions of Risk

The vetoing of the interventions in CAPITAL by the Corporate Governance Board was attributed to the level of perceived risk associated with the strategies. These risks were explained in general rather than explicit terms. No explicit reasons were provided by the Board directly to the researchers. However, the human resource representatives reported second-hand that recruiting part-time employees was incompatible with the design of jobs in the organisation which were exclusively structured around full-time workloads. As one employee stated during a research interview *"Full-time is given here, the culture is full-time so that's not anything unusual"*. In the case of the demonstration trials, the Board apparently believed that the strategy posed risks to the organisation because allowing such trials would potentially 'open the floodgates' for other employees to request similar arrangements. However, in our work with CAPITAL, no more than a handful of employees across the organisation had requested involvement in the demonstration trials. The denial of approval was also clearly at odds with at least one of the principal objectives of the project which was to facilitate the uptake of flexible policies. The clear disparity between what the organisation had agreed to in project formulation and documentation, and what they were later willing to approve, was also apparent in Project B.

The perception of risk at CONSTRUCT appeared to be an opportunity for this particular site-management team. In the first meeting to negotiate access agreement to the case study site the project manager stated that he didn't want to *'just do what others have tried'*. Rather, he was very interested in being experimental and finding something that was *'truly innovative'* and have their *'name up in lights'*. Alas, the realties and pragmatism of managing conflicting interests in a workplace meant that the *'truly innovative'* was indeed too great a risk – or in practical terms – more trouble than it was worth. When developing the interventions that were central to the initial research plan the management team were confronted with two distinctly different groups of employees. All employees worked long hours, however, more than half of the employees were earning hourly wages with the remainder on salaries. Hence, a reduction in working hours for wage staff would result in lower corresponding earnings. In a complicated workplace, what would have a positive impact on one group of employees would have a direct negative impact on another group of employees. The risk of backlash from either group meant a 'minimalist' intervention was by far an easier alternative than one that was 'truly innovative'.

Risks associated with Project C in BUILD were more of an external, political nature than an internal operational one. The nature of BUILD's business is politically sensitive. An ongoing risk with the research, therefore, was that any report that reflected badly on BUILD could potentially cause political embarrassment. Despite this risk, BUILD was initially very willing to share information and make the research public. This intent was a product of the relationship between the initial management team at BUILD and the researchers involved in the project as well as the relationship between the first Director General and the then Minister. However, with the doubling of the works program, the appointment of a new minister, a change of Director General and staff changes associated with the project, BUILD became more risk averse. Although never explicitly stated, risk to reputation was more than likely a factor in the lack of access granted to the researchers to potentially sensitive areas. Research was therefore redirected to Head Office divisions and the observation of a specific change program. The growing political sensitivity was highlighted through this comment by a focus group respondent in the latter stages of the research:

> "There's the extra dimension of our Minister and Director General wanting to know what is happening so tying up a lot of resources in respect to saying do this for me, say this, and for some reason when that process, that once upon a time could have been quite simple, is a bit more complicated."

Concerns about Research Fatigue

Access to employees of CAPITAL for the purposes of data collection was reasonably unhampered until the final stages of the project. An initial survey was administered with full cooperation from human resource staff to a stratified random sample of half of all employees, some 2000 individuals. A series of 40 interviews with a range of employees, as well as six focus groups with managers, were also conducted without obstacles or challenges. However, a key issue in administering a second, follow up survey in CAPITAL was concerns about 'research fatigue' amongst employees. During the final 12 months of the project, as the researchers tried to identify a suitable date for the survey to go out, concerns were increasingly expressed by human resource staff that this would coincide with a staff opinion survey that had also been planned. It was thought that employees would therefore be unwilling to complete both instruments and that asking them to do so would be overly burdensome. Although attempts were made to compromise on this important phase, such as reducing the number of questions and including them in the staff opinion survey, or changing the timeframe so that several months would elapse between surveys, the final outcome was that the second work-life balance survey was never administered. Similarly, the instigation of employee satisfaction surveys and other research programs conducted within BUILD resulted in concerns that staff were being "over-researched" and would therefore be less likely to participate. This finding concurs with studies done on market research where consumers repeatedly approached regarding their intention to purchase were less likely to purchase than those consumers approached only once (Morwitz, Johnson and Schmittlein, 1993).

Each of the organisations had an active internal research program and BUILD also participates in a number of university-led research programs due to its size, its professional links with universities through its core business of engineering as well as its public prominence. As such, gatekeepers were quite eager to ensure external research could either be incorporated into existing research or at least, minimise overlap. The most common concern with the gatekeepers was to avoid 'research fatigue'. Whilst there is a developing body of work examining the fatigue of the researcher (see for example Mandel, 2003), there appears to be very little published on workplace and employee level 'research fatigue'. We have little doubt that research fatigue is a growing phenomenon within society that affects access to organisations and individual employees and that this will continue to have an impact on academic research in the future. There is of course and irony and indeed a problem attempting to develop a research approach that would investigate a workplace's level of research fatigue!

Blockages and New Opportunities

There are few opportunities to pursue such longitudinal research as the seven years in Project C. It had been the case from the commencement of the research that sub-projects had been undertaken in regard to issues of interest to BUILD as an adjunct to the major focus of the study. These were undertaken at the request of BUILD and within the resources of the project and indicated a willingness by the researchers to investigate, not just their own area of interest but to also work with BUILD on various issues confronting them.

When the continuity of research efforts was frustrated through blocked access the longitudinal value of the research was lost. Negotiations took place in regard to the type of research and access that would now be useful and acceptable to BUILD. Twelve separate submissions were made in response to suggestions by BUILDCORP, however on each of these occasions

the proposal was rejected with no clear indication of how it could be adjusted to meet their needs. On reflection this appears to be mainly an issue of uncertainty by the management coordinator of what would be acceptable to BUILDCORP due to their relatively short association with the organisation. This was therefore an issue of establishing trust as there had been no history established on which to build such a foundation. Not surprisingly, when access to a project was granted it was minor and politically safe. However, over time access was granted to observe the process of a new change initiative and to conduct interviews and focus groups with various participants. While too long a period had elapsed to recapture the longitudinal strength of the initial research, this change program offered an opportunity to research a unique change event that has subsequently resulted in two reports to BUILD and three academic papers. Project C therefore demonstrates how through concerted efforts to meet the needs of partner organisations, industry relationships can be re-established to branch research into different and theoretically interesting direction.

How Access Affected Research Outcomes

Not surprisingly, given the access difficulties described, the research outcomes for each project were somewhat different to those articulated in the original proposals. In Projects A and B for example, a key objective was to improve opportunities for employees to achieve work-life balance. In particular, the projects, by implementing a number of specific strategies, aimed to improve access to existing policies and demonstrate the successful use of flexible work arrangements in positions where alternative working arrangements are rarely utilised (e.g., amongst men and employees with supervisory positions). In reality, although some minor technology transfers occurred in the form of changes to human resource policies (such as the introduction of a phased retirement policy and improved access to information via the organisation's intranet), these objectives were not realised and the status quo held firm. Of concern, it is likely that the lack of visible outcomes for employees in Project A (CAPITAL) contributed to increased cynicism amongst some staff that the organisation merely 'talked up' its commitment to work-life balance, without being willing to implement real change. This cynicism was especially problematic for the employees who had volunteered to be part of the demonstration trials which did not go ahead.

Importantly, our project counterparts in Project A appeared satisfied with the processes and outcomes of the three-year research projects and were not concerned with the divergence between the original research objectives and actual outcomes. This lack of concern was somewhat surprising, but perhaps reflects the lack of shared understandings and goals for the research between the researchers and the key organizational contacts, beyond the initial contractual arrangements. The extended period of time that often elapses between submitting grant applications and the completion of a project (up to five years) is likely to contribute to the diffusion of shared goals as well as other practical problems discussed previously such as staff turnover and changes to organizational priorities.

Other goals of the research projects included to facilitate researcher training, promote the development of theory and scholarship in the area of interest and to communicate the findings of the research to interested parties, both academic and non-academic. Project A, despite its under-achievement in progressing constructive changes to organisational work-life culture, achieved a reasonable publication output (six journal publications submitted or accepted at the time of writing and five conference papers), mainly due to the relative ease of data collection. These publications made an arguably significant contribution to theory in the area of work-life balance and work-life culture. The findings were also consistently reported back to various stakeholders in Project A organisations on at least six occasions.

The academic outcomes of Project B were not insignificant, but the project could not be held a flagship for highly successful university-industry partnerships. At least six journal publications and 15 industry reports and presentations to research partners were derived from project data. As a consequence, the knowledge and understanding of the issues generated through the research project reached a significant number of people directly affected by the research issue under investigation. Furthermore, the project provided an excellent research training and project management experience for the research fellow. However, problems with access meant that we were unable to compare cases adequately. The publications were therefore single case study reports and did not have the capacity for generalisation or demonstration of causal effects. For an early career researcher this was a somewhat frustrating investment of three years, though it highlights the pragmatism required for research within the social sciences. Viewed holistically, the academic and workplace results reached a wide audience and provided an excellent training experience, demonstrated a successful project despite the problematic access issues which arose.

The dynamics and politics of every research project requires the researcher to consider how to balance the outcomes expected by industry and those required by academic journals. At one time in BUILD, the researcher was handed a pile of two hundred questionnaires – thirty questions in length and asked if a report would be *ready for a leadership team meeting next week*. Indeed the timeframes sometimes expected by industry are not conducive to the standard of academic analysis required for academic publication. There are likely to be numerous academics with concerns over presenting industry partners with less than rigorous analysis simply to meet partner timelines.

Recommendations for Facilitating Access

Perhaps, as early career researchers, we expected too much from the organisations involved and were not prepared for the difficulties we encountered. Our subsequent approaches to industry-based research have been more realistic and perhaps more guarded, but a reflection on our common experiences and the lessons we learned as research fellows provides for some potentially useful insights that might be helpful to other researchers.

In preparing for the project, the importance of establishing shared expectations and timelines of the research with key personnel who have legitimate power within the organisation cannot be underestimated. Of course, those with legitimate power and genuine 'buy-in' may not be the same individuals who devised, negotiated or signed off on the project. However, they are likely to be important allies through the course of the project and identifying them earlier rather than later is, in our experience, critical. As Cheek (2003, p. 98) notes, 'taking funding from someone in order to conduct research is not a neutral act, but requires that the researcher discuss with the funder all the expectations and assumptions, spoken and unspoken, that both of them may have about the research'.

The problem arises when these key individuals leave their substantive position, or resign from the organisation entirely. A stalling of momentum is seemingly inevitable during these transition periods, as people become familiar with their new roles and the tasks they inherit from their predecessors. The extent to which the terms and conditions of the research can be renegotiated from that point onwards is dependent to some extent on the motivation and personality of the new contact, but also on the quality of communication with the researchers. Regular contact is imperative at all stages of the research, but particularly so during transitions in key personnel. In most situations, the research project is low down the list of a

multitude of tasks needing to be completed and polite contacts in the form of emails and phone calls is important for keeping the objectives of the research salient. Offers to conduct seminars or information sessions for various groups of staff is one strategy we found useful to maintain or improve the visibility of the project.

Obviously some events are beyond the researcher's control. The natural disaster and subsequent re-prioritising of organisational tasks in Project A is one such example. Increasing pressures from macro-level environments in the construction industry is another. However, Walford (2001) notes that although researchers can do nothing directly to reduce the effects of macro-level changes and pressures, researchers need to take new and changing constraints into account and, much like sales people in a commercial environment, promote their research more effectively to gain access.

C.Wright Mills suggested 50 years ago that the research process should involve significant record keeping (1959). That the researcher would do well to keep "ideas, personal notes, excerpts from books, bibliographical items and outlines of projects" in an effort to develop what he referred to as "intellectual production" (Mills, 1959: 198-199). In an age when accountability for government funding is being increasingly devolved to an individual level this advice is particularly salient. In many ways a prudent social science researcher would begin a project expecting the worst, indeed, planning for the worst, yet all the while hoping and working for the best possible outcome.