The Collective Use of Forms of Language as Cultural Artefacts to Represent Public Understanding in Case-Studies

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Abstract: The need to demonstrate both the value of collective forms of language and the richness that interviewee reviews add to constructed analyses is a focus of debate. Researchers undertaking developmental studies have continually affirmed their commitment to demonstrate to the managers of Developmental Charities (DCs) and associated stakeholder groups not only the value a case-study approach adds to understanding but, more importantly, how better to analyse the perspectives of the different stakeholder groups regarding the management of their organisations. Here we demonstrate a methodology to help achieve this. This paper reflects on a novel case-study approach used to demonstrate the added value of constructed analyses from data provided by key informants in the construction of case studies for Oxfam GB, Water Aid, Christian Aid, Amnesty International and Action Aid. Using a wide-range of key informants to provide different insights with regards to the subject of study is an intrinsic part of the methodology. These act as the principals in adding value to data and reviewing the constructed analysis. The *constructionist* approach used in the development of meanings is a key methodological feature in creating a *cumulative cultural text*. This fits well with the key features inherent in *Representation Theory* that guides the choice of methodology. Four components are discussed in relation to a new proposal for case-study methodologies. These are: *Key Informants, Cumulative Cultural Text, Representation Theory, Constructed Public Understanding.*

Keywords: Case-Study Method, Key Informants, Different Voices, Cumulative Cultural Text, Representation Theory, Interviewee Reviews, and Constructed Public Understanding.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to demonstrate the benefits of using language as a cultural artefact to represent public understanding, and how a richer understanding of contested issues is gained when interviewee reviews add value to analyses in the construction of case studies for Oxfam GB, Water Aid, Action Aid, Amnesty International and Christian Aid. It focuses on the discussion of a proposed case-study method used in research regarding the aforementioned DCs, whose managers have continually affirmed their commitment not only to improve the allocation and use of developmental funds but, more importantly, to improve public confidence and to achieve their objectives in more viable ways. This is not only of interest to the managers of DCs and researchers but also to the recipients of charitable aid and those members of the public, other organisations, and stakeholders who contribute and/or have a vested interest in the charities' operations (Mukasa, 2016).

The decision to propose a different case-study approach for DCs is motivated by the following observations:

1. DCs serve in similar areas to each other and as such provide vital fuel for comparison and cross-referencing, and as examples of different approaches/systems or practices of operational management;
2. an approach is needed which offers a unique analysis of practices for specific DCs;
3. an approach is needed that compares and contrasts similar practices across different charities, which in turn can suggest how these organisations can improve their current working practices.

This paper begins with a review of the relevant literature and a discussion of possible methodologies that were considered for the construction of case studies for DCs. It outlines the key features inherent in the proposed method, and discusses the difference between this method and the best practices of case-study research in the business and management fields. The paper then discusses how the proposed approach constructs case studies and how the underpinning theory connects with the case research. The last sections of the paper demonstrate how meanings are constructed from data gathered and analysed from a wide range of key informants.

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Five case studies have been constructed. These are case studies for Oxfam GB, Water Aid, Amnesty International, Christian Aid and Action Aid. The analyses, conclusions, arguments and recommendations presented here arise from the data compiled in their construction.

2. Literature Review

Languages are artefacts intentionally used for a purpose and the properties which make up a language depend on the collective intentions of the speaker/s (Hilpinen, 1992:1993; Weir, 2005). The use of languages as cultural artefacts is based upon fundamental assumptions and observations. For example, Hall (1997) demonstrates that the shared meanings, understanding and values of groups or societies are carried in their natural languages. Similarly, Du Gay et al (1997) emphasise that people's responses regarding issues affecting them or their understanding of the world are carried in what they say. It is observed however, that sharing meanings in a language does not mean that every individual contributor of a narrative or a story interprets or responds to world events in a similar way. It means contributors to a language understand other's perspectives and accept them as legitimate in order to realise a desired solution or future (Hall, 1997; Du Gay et al, 1997). Ross (2007) and Scholes (1980) explain that when the natural languages of specific groups or communities are used collectively, it is observed that they share the same conceptual maps, they reason or interpret issues or occurrences in roughly the same way, they build up a shared culture together and inhabit the same social world. Yin (2009) emphasises that languages dominate societal studies that aim to achieve a collective interpretation and understanding of a phenomena. Weber and Mitchell (1995) describe the *cumulative cultural text* as a feature arrived at through *accretion* and *aggregation*. Qualitative researchers can rely on this text to represent the shared meaning of differing groups or communities whose natural languages collectively respond to some contested issues (Weber and Mitchell, 1995). In case-study research, languages are an intrinsic part of the methodology. This is demonstrated when the understanding of the dynamics that exist within specific settings is obtained from the experiences and observations people carry in their narratives or stories (Yin, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989; Harris and Sutton, 1986).

The advancement or construction of knowledge from languages is based on three approaches, all of which are explained in Hall's Representation Theory (1997). These approaches are: *naturalistic*, *constructionist* and *interpretive*. The *naturalistic* approach is underpinned by the argument that languages are artefacts intentionally used by speakers to represent meanings (Hall, 1997; Hangen, 1997; Hilpinen, 1993). The *constructionist* approach is based on the idea that meanings responding to contested issues or people's understanding of the world can be constructed from their narratives and stories (Hall, 1997; Ross, 2007; Scholes, 1980). This approach is supported by the earlier work of Bourgeois and Eisenhardt (1988), who state that when constructions from qualitative data prove important to a study, researchers provide firmer empirical grounds for their emerging findings. The *interpretive* approach is based upon the argument that individual readers/writers make their own interpretations of the work or of the meanings written by others in order to advance knowledge or to satisfy their production intentions (Hall, 1997; Du Gay et al, 1997; 2013).

Although the terms `case study` and `qualitative research` are often used interchangeably, case-studies can be based on qualitative data solely in the form of a narrative or story (Eisenhardt, 1989). For example, in their study regarding bankruptcy in Silicon Valley, Sutton and Callanhan (1987) specifically rely on qualitative data. Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) use similar data in their study which focuses on the National Film Board of Canada, and Warburton and Saunders (1996) rely on qualitative data in a study which focuses on the professional culture of teachers. Narratives provide a rich description of evidence attained from anecdote, and such soft data helps researchers to arrive at more complex conclusions (Mintzberg, 1982). Qualitative studies can rely specifically on narrative accounts because researchers unavoidably serve as a researcher tool to undertake investigations without physical measuring instruments or experimental procedures (Yin, 2015).

Whilst narratives and stories offer a rich description of evidence, qualitative researchers should bolster their findings by guarding against false impressions and reconciling their personal views and experiences (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1984). Studies relying only on qualitative data should:

- be conducted in a covert manner (Yin, 1984);
- Discard influencing behaviours and responses of informants (Miles and Huberman, 1984);
- Resist emotional attachment to the subject matter (Eisenhardt, 1989). Researchers relying on qualitative data are reminded to build relationships with informants based on trust, to collect data

from a wide range of sources, and to analyse that data through a series of codified procedures (Yin, 1981:1984; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Glazer and Strauss, 1967).

This paper makes a contribution to the available literature by demonstrating how forms of a language fit well with the key features inherent in Representation Theory, and the notion of a cumulative cultural text to support the proposal for a new approach to case-studies. In essence, Representation Theory and a cumulative cultural text are borrowed from cultural studies in order to underpin the use of languages as cultural artefacts for case studies in the wider fields of business and management.

3. Using Alternative Methodologies

As researchers, we considered other possible methodologies. Three in particular were discussed in detail. The first of these was to enable key informants to provide self-generated written accounts. We rejected this, even though the process of self-consideration would add richness to the data, because this would be too hard for respondents to reproduce. However, to take a more simplified method we did consider the use of questionnaires: a method we also later rejected as being too imprecise in the nature of its responses. Although we initially thought it would be advantageous to use participant observation as this would yield a higher quality data, our analysis later made us conclude that this would be too extended a research programme to manage and achieve with the resources we had at our disposal (Newman and Benz, 1998; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Zahra and Pearce, 1990).

Thus we chose the case-study method as our main approach. Again, there were three main reasons for doing this. Firstly, it provided for the appropriate nature of interaction with the key informants. Secondly, as we would end up with five case studies this method would allow for ease of cross-checking between each. Finally, using a case-study method allowed us to use Representation Theory and the creation of a cumulative cultural text to underpin the method. We felt that this process of formative accretion as part of our method was a significantly novel development.

3.1 Key Features of the Proposed Methodology

We emphasise a two-phased case-study approach which fits well with the notion of creating a cumulative cultural text. The principal of a constructionist approach to Representation Theory guides the choice of methodology.

Table 1: Key Features Inherent in a Two-Phased Case-Study Approach

PHASE I
Case-study compilation.
Comparison of case studies.
Construction of a cumulative cultural text using the principal of a constructionist approach to Representation Theory.
Key informants review constructed analyses.
Final compilation of constructed analyses.
PHASE II
Establishing the relationship between constructed analyses, key moments, and critical incidents in relation to the research questions.
Construction of a cumulative cultural text using selection and accretion

This approach relies on an embedded design that emphasises multiple levels of analysis.

3.2 Proposed Case-Study Method

The best practices of case-study research in the business and management fields are generalised as:

- The use of interdisciplinary approaches that emphasise the relationship between the social and the individual to report the complexity of phenomena or contested issues in their natural form;
- Not necessarily requiring published data to construct or to advance knowledge as they report one instance of an activity based on observation, discussion, and the understanding and experiences of those individuals or parties associated with the subject;
- Allow a narrowing of the focus of any inquiry by directly interacting with the topic and interviewing those involved with it (the advantages of which are cutting down the number of variables to consider, concentrating on specific issues, and allowing validity to be achieved more easily);
- They offer a rich description of the subject based on explained narratives and other data gathered from this narrow focus (Yin, 2003; Lewin and Somekh, 2008; Walker, 1997; Stake, 1978; Spiggle, 1994; Patton, 1987; Kvale, 1996).

The proposed approach is unique. Firstly it takes theories, notions and terminologies from cultural studies methodology to guide the construction of case studies for DCs. Secondly, the approach relies on accretion and aggregation of the `*different voices*` to approve evidence regarding contested issues and on the enrichment of such evidence via feedbacks from interviewee reviews.

The cultural studies terminology `different voices` describes the approach of gathering arguments, opinions, views or stories from a wide range of informants (i.e. managers, charity donors, opinion leaders, etc.), all of whom provide different perspectives regarding how the current working practices of DCs could be improved (Weber and Mitchell, 1995). In essence, every key informant is expected to have a different story to tell regarding the subject. We use the phrase `contested issue` to mean the differing perspectives of each associated stakeholder group regarding the subject.

The factors that provided the motivation for the research discussed in this paper were a concern regarding the increased anxieties of donors surrounding some of the current working practices of DCs. The donors shared the view that the managers of the organisations with which they are involved have a different perspective to other stakeholders regarding how their current working practices can be improved upon. We therefore propose a different case-study approach for DCs, and one that allows the `different voices` of the key informants to bring multiple foci to the subject in question.

3.3 Constructing Case Studies

Our methodological approach to creating case studies has certain novel aspects. It demonstrates the constructed uniqueness of the case study and makes clear its contribution to the value chain of the study. It allows the creation of a cumulative cultural text as a key method of obtaining an analysis in the construction of public meaning, i.e. as a feature that represents public understanding compiled by collective accretion (Weber and Mitchell, 1995; Warburton and Saunders, 1996; Hall, 1997). In essence, the perspectives taken regarding the subject of the study are gathered from 'texts' provided by a wide range of key informants, all of whom provide different insights into how the current working practices of DCs could be improved. The benefit of this is the accretion and aggregation of a 'master text' constructed from these smaller texts provided by the key informants. 'Master texts` present conclusions that represent the understanding of stakeholder groups and the public in respect to the subject at hand (Weber and Mitchell, 1995; Warburton and Saunders, 1996).

In addition, the processes leading to the construction of meanings are underpinned by the notions inherent in Representation Theory. Texts are extracts from language/s and are used as evidence or data. In the process of construction the writer/reader develops meaning from what the key informants say (Hilpinen, 1993; Hangen, 1997; Weir, 2005). This notion of 'text artefacts' being used collectively is the basis for constructing a cumulative cultural text. The reader/s, when constructing meaning, interpret or make sense of what is written based on their own understanding (Hall, 1997; Du Gay et al, 1997:2013; Hilpinen, 1993; Hangen, 1997; Weir, 2005; Ross, 2007; Scholes, 1980).

The method emphasised in this paper adds to the value chain of the study in two ways. Firstly, the constructed meanings perceived to represent `constructed public meaning` are reviewed by key informants to ascertain whether or not their understanding has been `correctly` analysed and represented. Secondly, when the perspectives of all key informants are combined, we are able to effectively construct the cumulative cultural text in which the sum of the whole is greater than that of the individual constituent parts. The use of the term

`key informant` as it applies to interviewees is methodologically significant. The term itself makes explicit that the notions expressed by such respondents are privileged due to their particular roles and placings within their relevant milieux. The key informants are representatives of the stakeholder groups who contribute and/or have a vested interest in the operations of the five DCs. These comprise Executive and Operational Managers of DCs, donors/funders of DCs, beneficiaries of projects undertaken by DCs, organisations that regulate and monitor DCs, Opinion Leaders, academics and support staff. All these groups are themselves stakeholders and provide different insights regarding how the current working practices of DCs could be improved.

3.4 Underpinning Theory

The construction of the proposed case-study method is underpinned by Representation Theory. This theory explains three approaches used to attain meanings from language/s. To reiterate, the approaches are: naturalistic, constructionist, and interpretive. The naturalistic approach describes the natural languages of people as cultural artefacts due to the fact that responses regarding `contested issues` or people's understanding of the world are carried in what they say. The second approach is constructionist, which explains that writers/readers construct meanings from what is said by others. Lastly, the interpretive approach explains that readers meaningfully interpret or make sense of what is written by others (Hall, 1997; Du Gay et al, 1997; 2013; Weir, 2005; Hilpinen, 1992; Ross, 2007; Scholes, 1980).

The naturalistic approach guides the use of `different voices` to gather relevant texts carrying the relevant perspectives of key informants' responses to the research questions. The constructionist approach guides the use of the cumulative cultural text as a springboard to construct meanings from the perspectives of key informants. We emphasise that (i) the summative result of the `different voices` leads to the formation of a cumulative cultural text, (ii) the cumulative cultural text represents collectively gathered languages in the form of texts, which are used as cultural artefacts in the construction of meanings. The constructionist approach is therefore a key methodological feature in the proposed case-study approach for DCs. The interpretive approach guides the evaluation of constructed analyses by interviewees. This is demonstrated when interviewees read analyses and make their own interpretations of what is analysed in order to provide clarification and further meanings to the analyses. Representation Theory therefore, not only fits well with the idea of constructing meanings from the natural language of key informants, but also emphasises that meanings are carried in what key informants say.

When the perspectives of all key informants are gathered in the form of relevant texts, we are able to effectively undertake the first phase of constructing analysis from the key features inherent in the texts (Weber and Mitchel, 1995; Warburton and Saunders, 1996; Mukasa, 2016).

A cumulative cultural text grows out of the aggregation of smaller texts and is therefore a feature which represents constructed understanding compiled by collective accretion (Weber and Mitchel, 1995).

Narrative lines are significant to the study because they carry full details regarding specific perspective/s of key informants. We emphasise narrative accounts in this study as carrying stories, critical incidents and key moments which are relevant in responding to the research questions. In essence, narrative accounts are drawn upon to gather relevant threads and texts.

The overall process of analysing data emphasised in this paper is highly iterative and tightly linked to narrative accounts, a research feature which is commonly associated with new topic areas (Eisenhardt, 1989). This is demonstrated when every perspective added by an individual informant improves the quality of data, as is the case with constructed meanings. Key informant review meanings and add value to them by providing clarification and further meanings. The researcher looks at all the different sets of data and is therefore well placed to be an informed key informant.

This paper relies on semi-structured dialogic interviews as an integral part of our method to gather texts. The objectives of the study are:

- to identify factors/concerns relating to the need for DCs to improve their current working practices;
- to explore a significant problem, i.e. that the managers of the DCs represented in the study described may not have seen the benefits that could be gained by their organisations incorporating wider public perceptions into the strategic planning and formulation of their working practices;

- to address the benefits of why public understanding should be incorporated into the current working practices of DCs, and to put forward a new and robust operating model incorporating the perceptions of all stakeholders who contribute and/or have a vested interest in the operations of DCs by accretion and aggregation which could help them improve operational effectiveness and public confidence;

Semi-structured dialogic interviews were conducted with 54 key informants representing the different stakeholder groups. Based on their personal experiences and understanding, it was expected of key informants to describe or explain practices that cause them concern and that thus may need reviewing.

1. All questions were formed to suit individual informants and were introduced in the form of interview themes for discussion.
2. Prompts were carefully selected and used to seek further information.
3. No specific information explaining examples of the working practices of particular DCs were provided to key informants.

The interview schedule was divided into five sections. The interview themes were:

1. Scale and Number of Projects Undertaken by DCs
2. Current Working Practices of DCs that Might Cause Concern to Stake-holders
3. Approaches Used by DCs to Achieve their Defined Objectives
4. Supervision and Management of Developmental Projects
5. Current Working Practices of DCs that Can be Improved by Better Strategic Decision-making

Table 2: Key Informants Differentiated by Type

Total sample of key informants = 54
Executive Managers representing the five DCs = 10
Donors who contribute to the funding of the five DCs regularly = 10
Informants from organisations involved in the regulation and monitoring of DCs = 9
Informants familiar with the management of DCs, businesses and public organisations = 15
Informants from the five DCs with information relating to the study that has never been published or disclosed to the public before (e.g. minutes of meetings, emails, etc.) = 5
Opinion leaders, celebrities and fundraisers = 5

The study emphasises a balanced representation and selection of key informants able to provide specific data relevant to the subject under study.

4. Construction of Meanings

The perspectives of key informants responding to the research questions, which were formed to suit each individual informant and introduced to them in the form of interview themes for discussion, are presented in this section. Here, we demonstrate how the summative result of the `different voices` forms the cumulative culture text through accretion and aggregation. The key features represented in the cumulative cultural text include explained narratives and stories, and examples of key moments and critical incidents regarding the subject. The main constructions from the `cumulative cultural text` are the 'master texts', which represent the constructed shared meanings and understanding of the stakeholders and the public regarding how DCs can improve their current working practices.

4.1 Scale and Number of Projects Undertaken by DCs

Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 41 stressed the importance of reviewing the scale and number of projects currently undertaken by DCs as a critical factor in enabling them to improve their current working practices. There was also a common belief that if those who manage DCs were to consider specialisation in specific projects or services this would be more likely to improve their effectiveness:

> *"I am concerned with the scale of projects undertaken by DCs without well-established systems to ensure such projects are effectively managed and supervised"* (Informant D19)

This is echoed by 40 other interviewees who share views about two main issues. Firstly, the current working practices of DCs do not demonstrate evidence of well-established and effective management systems because they are not based on *reliable* systems, i.e. operating consistently and in the same manner from one system event to another identical system event at the same time and/or across geographical locations. Secondly, the current management of DCs, which is described by the majority of informants as based on 'conviction' and 'trusting' third parties to manage and supervise the allocation and use of donor funds across continents, makes it difficult to gather empirical evidence of measuring performance. Thus, unrealistic performance evaluation methods are likely to impact validity of evaluation and consequently affect stakeholder satisfaction.

> *"DCs need to specialise in the provision of specific services and to avoid undertaking too many projects at the same time. Imagine a single charity funding projects in over 120 countries which aim to provide people with the basics of life".* (Informant D29)

Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 42 urged that it was important for DCs to narrow their focus. Their argument was dominated by a shared view that a narrow focus would help DCs to cut down the number of variables and challenges they normally face and to achieve operational validity more easily.

> *"I doubt if DCs have explored the benefits of specialising in specific projects. Specialisation will help DCs to be more effective, to demonstrate legitimate evidence of performance and help them to cut overhead costs".* (Informant D43)

The majority of informants echoed that specialisation would help DCs to demonstrate their expertise in defined fields and in the provision of specialised benefit packages.

> *"Because DCs undertake various projects in geographical locations across continents, the management and supervision of developmental funds is primarily vested with third parties - a practice [perceived] to be exposing developmental funds to mismanagement and corruption."* (Informant D37)

Those involved with the direct management of DCs, however, strongly shared the narrative that it might be difficult for some DCs to specialise in the provision of specific services as some causes are directly connected and cannot be represented separately. Thus:

> *"It's illogical to provide education to children dying from starvation and you cannot treat diarrhoea if people are still consuming unsafe or contaminated water. In these two cases, you have to provide food along with education and treat diarrhoea while simultaneously providing safe drinking water if you want to achieve your aim".* (Informant D3)

4.2 Perceived Corruption in DCs

The need for DCs to limit the influence and participation of politicians and governments in the management and supervision of developmental funds was a recurring theme. Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 36 suggested that before developmental funds are transferred to the beneficiary communities, there should be pre-agreements or assurances regarding the level of involvement of politicians and governments within the receiving communities. They argued that perceived corruption and mismanagement of developmental funds mostly happens on the ground in communities where developmental projects are undertaken and that it is mostly a result of the politicians and governments of the receiving communities being allowed to influence the direction of donor funds.

> *"I am disappointed that charitable funds can still be mismanaged and sometimes accessed [by perceived] corrupt officials and governments on the ground".* (Informant D17)

This argument is shared by the majority of informants. It is believed that governments of beneficiary communities influence local leaders and other parties involved in the direct allocation and use of donor funds.

Informants urged that such influence is the major contributor to what is perceived as corruption, embezzlement and the mismanagement of donor funds.

> *"DCs seem to be soft and easily influenced by politicians or governments in developing countries and this is how developmental funds end up being abused."* (Informant D39)

To emphasise how the governments of beneficiary communities are perceived to be associated with corruption and mismanagement of donor funds, informant D18 provides a narrative containing the key features expressed by most of the key informants.

> *"We acknowledge the need for DCs to work with local leaders and governments in the communities where developmental projects are undertaken for purposes of acceptability, mobilisation, sensitisation, peace and stability, but their role must be agreed and communicated to stakeholders before projects are undertaken."* (Informant D18)

The majority of informants are concerned that local leaders and third parties trusted with the allocation and use of developmental funds are influenced by governments of the beneficiary communities.

> *"Corruption is a big problem in DCs but in [most open reports] corruption, mismanagement or abuse of donor funds are [reported as isolated incidents]."* (Informant D28)

The narratives above carry two key issues which are shared by 36 key informants. To reiterate, the issues are: firstly, that the way DCs are currently working with the governments and local leaders in beneficiary communities might be impacting the success of programmes. The concern raised by the majority of informants is that the developmental funds raised to help people in need are accessed by governments and local leaders in beneficiary communities. Government and leaders who are perceived to be associated with corruption, embezzlement or mismanagement of fund; thus, trusting such parties with developmental funds impacts the success of these programmes. Secondly, to ensure that corruption is eradicated the majority of informants suggest that: (i) DCs should have a structured process or work plan that stipulates the role of all parties in the allocation and use of those donor funds accessible to all stakeholders, (ii) in funding developmental projects through governments who influence local leaders, there should be defined pre-agreements regarding the level of involvement those governments and local leaders should have in the management of donor funds, (iii) DCs need to establish a robust system of oversight, which may even be devolved oversight, in order to ensure tight and vigorous supervision of developmental funds.

4.3 Management and Supervision of Developmental Projects

The need for DCs to vigorously supervise the allocation and use of donor funds was a recurring theme emerging from the responses of the interviewees. Most of the interviewees (41 key informants) shared the view that the allocation and use of donor funds is mostly passed-on to third parties in communities where developmental projects are undertaken without close supervision from senior managers or executives of the DCs concerned. Key informants argued that the practice of trusting third parties to manage donor funds without close supervision was contributing to the corruption and mismanagement of developmental funds.

> *"Those managing DCs should instead work directly with the beneficiary communities without the involvement [of perceived] corrupt leaders and governments who are associated with abusing developmental funds."* (Informant D20)

Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 37 urged that DCs would be demonstrating best practices if they worked directly with beneficiary communities.

> *"Lack of vigorous supervision of developmental funds by the executives of DCs is the reason as to why corruption and mismanagement have been reported in these organisations."* (Informant D22)

Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 40 shared the view that projects undertaken by DCs are most of the time underfunded, largely because these organisations might be lacking narrowness in terms of focus.

> *"The biggest challenge faced by DCs is the development of robust management systems that can be relied on to effectively [apportion and] watch over donor funds across continents. The current practice of management based on files and reports provided by third parties is not robust enough and can easily be manipulated".* (Informant D27)

4.4 Approaches DCs Use to Achieve their Objectives

The perception that the strategies used by DCs to reach their goals impact their resource-use practices was one held by 39 of the 54 key informants interviewed. The argument is that the approaches DCs use to achieve the objective of ending world poverty are extremely broad and should really be 'projects in action' with a narrower or more manageable focus. When interviewees were prompted to describe the approach used by the five DCs to end world poverty, they could not differentiate between the aims of DCs and the approaches such organisations use to end poverty.

> *"Oxfam GB builds infrastructures that provide the poorest communities of the world with the basics of life in the form of water, food, health care, education and shelter."* (Informant D2)

Similarly, Informant D4 describes the approach used by Water Aid to end world poverty by saying:

> *"Water Aid provides the poorest communities with safe water, improved hygiene and sanitation so that people are healthy and able to engage in food production and income generating activities."* (Informant D4)

When prompted to describe the approach used by Amnesty International with the aim of ending world poverty, Informant D5 provides the following:

> *"Amnesty International's approach to ending absolute poverty in the poorest communities of the world is by empowering communities with knowledge of their rights to make decisions that positively impact their life."* (Informant D5)

What was evident in the narratives gathered from the majority of informants was that the current approaches DCs are using to end world poverty might either be 'undescribed' or 'underdeveloped' and *not codified*. Seven informants mentioned that they do not recall a time when DCs described their resource-use practices to donors and 13 informants did not think that DCs have ever published any information accessible to the public that specifically explains the approaches they use to end world poverty.

> *"Christian Aid uses religious establishments as a conduit to empower the people in the poorest communities of the world with the skills necessary to eradicate poverty."* (Informant D7)

When prompted to describe the approach used by Action Aid to end world poverty, informant D10 provides the following:

> *"Action Aid is using education to end world poverty. Like Oxfam GB, the organisation also builds infrastructures in some communities which aim to provide people with some basic necessities of life."* (Informant D10)

Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 29 endorsed Amnesty International's approach to ending world poverty and described it as the most appropriate approach. Amnesty International encourages communities to stand for their rights and to actively get involved in the making of decisions that are likely to impact their life positively. Other DCs aim to establish infrastructures which provide communities with the basic necessities of life.

Those involved with the direct management of DCs (i.e. 10 key informants) strongly urged that DCs foster a different organisational ethos and, due to this, their approaches to end world poverty differ along with the manner in which developmental funds are allocated and used. They argued that DCs are impacted by the fundamental values and beliefs that shape the organisations.

4.5 Most Appropriate Siting of Strategic and Operational Control

Of the 54 key informants interviewed, 33 urged that DCs might reduce operational costs by setting up their head offices in the developing countries where projects are based and where operational costs are low. They urged that there would be costs incurred to set up and to build up teams as a short-term investment, but such costs would lead to reduced operational costs and value for money in the long-term.

> *"Developmental charities should consider setting up their head offices in countries where most of their projects are undertaken. Such a move will mean DCs are hands-on and a lot of overhead costs would be reduced due to the cheap cost of living in poor countries."* (Informant D28)

This narrative endorses the view shared by 33 interviewees, who urged that the executives and senior managers of DCs should stop relying on the reports and files provided to them by local leaders and third parties who allocate and use developmental funds on behalf of their organisations. They should instead base themselves in the communities where developmental projects are undertaken to watch over donor funds and have more focussed and vigorous operational control.

> *"My view is DCs should relocate and be on the ground full time. Let them copy businesses and set up operational offices and networks like businesses do when getting into new markets. DCs will be more cost-effective and their funds well managed and supervised if they do so."* (Informant D35)

In the same vein, the view contained in this text is endorsed by informant D26, who goes on to explain the likely benefits to DCs if their executives and senior managers were to relocate their head offices to the developing world where their developmental projects are undertaken.

> *"DCs should setup their head offices in the developing countries where development projects are undertaken. It's a no-brainer that the cost of living is far lower there compared to the West. We are told more than half the population in Africa is surviving below the poverty line, which is less than a dollar a day. Head offices of charities should be where their projects are based."* (Informant D26)

The majority of informants admitted that a lot of funds would be required for DCs to establish their head offices in the communities where developmental projects are undertaken. But they maintained that this spending would be short term and that the benefits of such spending outweigh the risks and would eventually lead to reduced overhead costs and improved resource-use practices.

> *"The management and operational departments of DCs should be based in the poorest communities of the world where over 80% of developmental aid is allocated."* (Informant D17)

Four of the key informants interviewed provided the example of Action Aid (i.e. a DC with its head offices established in Africa) to urge that costs will be incurred by DCs to set up and to build operational teams and structures, but that after a few years the cost of administration would be far lower compared to the current operational costs incurred in western countries, where the standards of living are expensive. They further urged that if DCs relocate to the developing world, they will be putting infrastructures in place that will permanently benefit the region.

On the other hand, several of those involved with the direct management of DCs urged that it was not possible for some DCs to establish their head offices in the poorest communities of the world because: (i) the funding of developmental projects would normally have timelines (i.e. expected start and end dates), and therefore it would be illogical to set up head offices in such communities, (ii) DCs aim to train the local communities to be self-sufficient and to manage their own developmental projects and, due to this, the idea of setting up head offices in such communities would not be logical.

> *"I may agree with the idea of relocating the head offices of DCs to the developing parts of the world but the idea needs to be balanced against the logistics of building teams across geographical boundaries."* (Informant D1)

5. Interviewee Reviews

In this section, we demonstrate how constructed analyses are referred to key informants for reviewing in order to ascertain whether their perspectives are rightly represented or not. This review enriches constructed analyses in two areas, which are (i) providing clarification and further meanings to what interviewees mean in their interview responses and, (ii) contributing to recommendations. After this review, the next stage is the final compilation of constructed analyses, which is followed by establishing the relationship between constructed analyses, key moments and critical incidents in relation to the research questions.

When constructed analyses were presented to interviewees and asked whether or not their perspectives responding to the research questions are rightly represented, their responses are analysed as presented in the next figure.

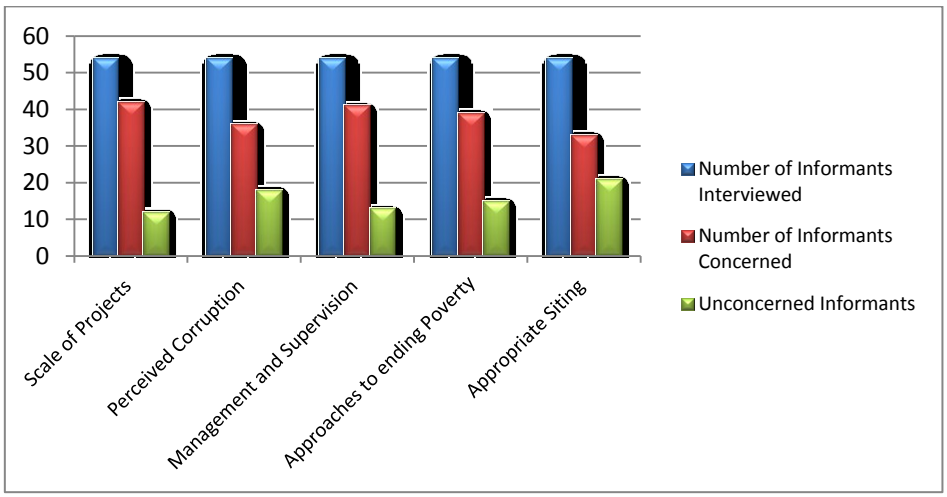

Figure 1: Responses of Key Informants to Constructed Analyses

The shared feedbacks from interviewee reviews which provide clarification and further meaning are;

The current working practices of DCs can achieve operational reliability and validity more easily if their focus is narrowed. Those managing DCs advise that a narrow focus would lead to cutting down on the number of variables and challenges normally faced. A trusting approach does not allow for empirical evidence relating to the effectiveness of the process of achieving outcomes. A change in this approach allows evidence relating to the effectiveness of the process of achieving outcomes and strictly defines operational perimeters.
The management of DCs should be based on *codified* systems that grow out of structured processes, defined work plans and stipulated roles. Codified systems would clearly stipulate the level of involvement for governments and local leaders in the management of donor funds and emphasise a robust system of oversight to ensure tight and vigorous supervision of funds. The codified systems of oversight should include evaluating plans against reality, including financial plans and scheduling.
The locus of control should be locally sited in operational contexts. The strategic siting of DCs should be in the communities where developmental projects are undertaken. The benefit of this is that executives and senior managers of DCs would be practically involved in watching over donor funds and have more focus and hands-on operational control. Management approaches and supervisory practices need to be based on codified systems.

This feedback is compared to constructed analyses, key moments and critical incidents in order to establish the existing relationship to the research questions. The results gathered from these comparisons are used to effectively construct the cumulative cultural text.

5.1 A Brief Methodological Note

If we had to advise other researchers who might wish to consider this particular research methodology, then this specific approach is most suited for (i) studies aiming to answer explanatory questions which require the research strategy to be directed towards discovery and interpretation of meanings that interviewees connect

to their behaviour or actions and, (ii) studies aiming to address *constructed meanings* analysed by accretion and aggregation (Weber and Mitchell, 1995; Warburton and Saunders, 1996; Mukasa, 2016).

The underpinning principle of this approach is to focus on advancing or constructing knowledge from the natural languages of groups or societies using either a *naturalistic*, *interpretive* or *constructionist* approach (Hangen, 1997; Hall, 1997; Du Gay et al, 2013; Hilpinen, 1993). Our case-study method focuses on the use of languages *collectively* to construct and to advance knowledge.

6. Conclusions

The value of the novel approach to case studies discussed in this paper is demonstrated when meanings are developed and constructed from the natural languages of different stakeholder groups associated with DCs and, referring the constructed analyses to interviewees to provide clarification and further contribution to what they meant. This paper has demonstrated how forms of language are used as cultural artefacts to represent public understanding regarding contested issues and, has set forth grounds as to how the principal of a *constructionist* approach to Representation Theory is applied to construct analyses that represent public understanding. More importantly, the approach to case-studies emphasised in this paper allows `different voices` from key informants to bring multiple foci to the area under study. Thus, the aggregated reconstructions can prove extremely useful in arriving at recommendations.

The approach has enabled us to arrive at conclusions that the current working practices of DCs can be improved upon if (i) those who manage DCs consider narrowing their focus in order to achieve operational reliability and validity more easily, (ii) that the management of DCs should be based on codified systems that grow out of structured processes, defined work plans and stipulated roles and, (iii) the locus of control should be locally sited in operational contexts.

The suggestions for future research arrived at here result from the cumulative culture text constructed from the five thematic areas explored with key informants. This study suggests that those managing DCs should consider the following:

1. Limiting the scale of projects undertaken by DCs. The many projects undertaken by DCs is a concern to stakeholders, who argue that undertaking very large projects hastily and without securing their funding is a cause for project failure or projects taking many years to achieve their defined objectives.
2. Vigorous management and supervision of development funds. Management based on files, reports or records should be replaced with legitimate evidence of performance. Most stakeholders argue that legitimate evidence of performance will help those managing DCs to replace resource-use practices perceived as expensive or unethical and to achieve cost-cutting on overheads.
3. Reviewing the role of politicians, governments and local leaders in the management of developmental funds. The role of these specific stakeholder groups should be stipulated and effectively communicated to all stakeholders before projects are undertaken.
4. DCs representing similar causes and operating in similar regions should avoid competition or operating independently.
5. Representation of all stakeholder groups at all levels of decision-making, including the encouragement of the working practices of DCs to be based on codified work plans and stipulated roles.

Whilst the interviewees' views may be based upon individual experiences and reasoning, the methodological approach demonstrated in this paper helps us to gain an informed perspective. Namely, that some current working practices of DCs are causing concerns to stakeholders and thus need to be improved upon. Given the small-scale nature of this research, there may be issues in making generalisations. However, the issues raised by our selection of key informants are clearly important to DCs as organisations, to the recipients of charitable organisations and indeed to all stakeholders who contribute and/or have a vested interest in the operation of DCs.

All stakeholder groups should have the opportunity to debate and to contribute ideas regarding how the current working practices of their organisations could be further improved. Our case-study approach using constructed artefacts to construct a *cumulative cultural text* has proved extremely useful.

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