Between professional autonomy and public responsibility: accountability and responsiveness in Dutch media and journalism

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Chapter 4
Introducing case studies: design and methods
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4.1 Introduction 
Analysis of the media debate over a 20-year period showed that in the 1990s the debate was mainly dominated by structural issues affecting media organisations. By the turn of the century, however, due to criticisms, particularly voiced by politicians, and a number of critical events, the focus of the debate shifted towards media performance and demands for accountability and responsiveness. The analysis provided an overview of the media’s response, shifting attitudes and new solutions. This prompts the question how media are currently coping with and responding to these demands.

In this next phase I want to find out which instruments of accountability and responsiveness are used among different media organisations. And, perhaps, more importantly, I want to understand the mechanisms that underlie the media’s response and find out to what extent the suggested or self-initiated instruments of accountability and responsiveness are visible and adopted in daily journalistic routines. Merely looking at the introduction of instruments within an organisation does not tell the whole story. Instruments can be introduced, used even, but they may not be internalised. As part of my overall research question - *How are news media and journalists responding to criticism of their performance and to what extent have any measures been adopted?* – I therefore need to find an answer to the question:

*How are responses to criticism translated into the daily practice of media institutions and to what extent are they part of the organisation structure and editorial culture?*

To be able to answer the ‘how’ question it is necessary to take an in-depth look in media organisations. For this, the qualitative methods of case studies are the most appropriate research design, as they focus on the phenomena in their natural setting (Miles & Huiberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989). This chapter aims to elaborate and justify the methods used within this qualitative setting. Often the method section in qualitative research is either vague, short
or implicit (Boeije, 2005; Marshall, 2002; Silverman, 2001). More recently qualitative research has gained popularity with the publication of textbooks and articles that describe the process in detail and delineate systematic step-by-step procedures (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wester & Peters, 2004). Even though qualitative research does not follow a linear process with standardized procedures, this does not stop the researcher from working in a systematic, more cyclic or spiral manner. For the reader to obtain a clear understanding of this systematic process and to enhance the credibility of the research, an elaborate method section is required (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Campbell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stenbacka, 2001). In this chapter I will describe the design of this research, the different types of data collection and the different processes in the data analysis. Additionally, I will address some ethical considerations and the question of how the validity and credibility of this research may be enhanced.

4.2 Design

A case study strategy with three separate cases was chosen, because it provides the possibility of focusing on contemporary situations, taking its complexity into account (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989). Case study research investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In other words, all the variables are taken into account in their natural context. Furthermore, case study research uses multiple sources of evidence and a small number of samples (small N) (George & Bennet, 2005; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989). While the previous research phase provided a longitudinal view, this research phase requires an in-depth understanding of the media in their current daily context, making the case study the most suitable research strategy.

I am aware that one of the main alleged pitfalls of the case study research is the problem of generalization (Bennet & Elman, 2006; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989). However, whereas case studies cannot be used to make general remarks about a larger population, the results can be used to reach conclusions at the theoretical level by comparing the empirical findings with the theoretical concepts. Yin calls this analytical instead of statistical generalization (Yin, 1989). Moreover, by studying three media organisations across different media
sectors I was able to lift the results to a more general level to draw some careful conclusions about the Dutch media’s policy with regard to accountability and responsiveness.

4.2.1 Unit of analysis

Three media organisations were selected based on purposive sampling (Mason; 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This means the cases were carefully selected on their relevance to the research question and where the issue and instruments of accountability and responsiveness is most likely to occur. However, due to the differences in media structure and history it is likely that the accountability policy will differ in different media sector. Therefore, I chose a multiple case study design (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989) and selected media organisations from the newspaper, public and commercial broadcasting sectors in order to detect possible differences and similarities. I did not specifically choose a case from the Internet sector, since the other three organisations all make use of online media channels. In addition, the online media sector is still quite new and therefore has not been as involved in the media performance debate.

There are various considerations for selecting the cases (Gerring, 2007). Firstly, I chose to select the cases that are representative of the different media sectors in the Netherlands. All three organisations have outlets with high circulation, listening or viewing figures, which potentially shows their influence on public opinion. Actually, the chosen organisations are leading in their sector. Secondly, organisations were chosen that are either a frontrunner in the accountability or responsiveness debate or at least involved. Only in this way could I answer the question how media organisations have responded to the performance debate. Lastly, media organisations were chosen that focus on news coverage, because it is their democratic duty of serving the public’s interest that was criticized.

For the newspaper sector the Dutch national daily de Volkskrant was selected. This morning newspaper has had a print version since 1919 and has been online since 1996. Originally it was affiliated to the Catholic labour movement, but since the 1960s it has gradually de-confessionalized to a more progressive stance, focused at a better educated public with a rather left leaning position (Hemels, 1981; Van Gessel, 1986; Van Yree, 1996). For many years the newspaper was part of a large publisher PCM Uitgevers. In the beginning of
2009 it was bought by the Belgian publisher De Persgroep. At the moment the newspaper has a circulation of approximately 230,000 (Het Oplage Instituut, 2009) with 230 editorial staff members. This case study was conducted from April till June 2009.

The news organisation NOS as part of Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO [Nederlandse Publieke Omroep]) was chosen since it is the only daily news organisation within this sector. Founded by citizens’ initiatives public service broadcasting in the Netherlands started in a decentralized system with numerous broadcasting associations representing distinctive religious and ideological profiles (Bardoel, 2008). NPO now consists of eleven public broadcasters, each representing a specific group in society but also competing for the general public. In addition, there are two-task related public broadcasters that have a task assigned by law: NOS is responsible for the overall news coverage and NTR has the task of focusing on culture, minorities, youth, education and research journalism. NOS has three departments: news, sports and event. NOS Nieuws is responsible for the news coverage (www.omroep.nl). In total, the public broadcasters have a market share of 34 percent (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2009). NOS, as one of the task-related public broadcasters, provides news, sports and topical events programmes and its tasks are formulated in the Dutch Media Act. This case focuses on the news department, NOS Nieuws, disregarding the sports and events departments.

At NOS Nieuws approximately 400 editorial staff members are currently responsible for the daily news bulletins. NOS Nieuws currently produces hourly television news bulletins on three different channels, starting at 07:00 am and ending with a final bulletin at midnight (NOS Journaal; Jeugdjournaal, a television news program for children aged between 9 and 12 years old, NOS Headlines, for high school students, which is presented on radio, website and teletext; Journaal op 3, a television news bulletin for 20–30-year-olds; an up-to-date news website; hourly news bulletins on three radio channels and 24-hour updated news on teletext. This case study was carried out between August and October 2009.

As a representative of the commercial broadcasting sector RTL Nieuws was selected. With now approximately 120 employees RTL Nieuws provides national and international news on television, teletext and the Internet. Other commercial news programmes (such as SBS Broadcasting’s Hart van Nederland)
are more focused on national and regional news. RTL Nieuws started in October 1989, originally with late-night television news bulletins but soon it was also producing news bulletins for prime time broadcast at 7:30 pm. Over the years it has expanded its broadcasts. Currently, RTL Nieuws offers breakfast news starting at 7:00 am, daily bulletins at 4:00 pm, 6:00 pm, 7:30 pm and a late night broadcast. In 2001 it introduced the financial television bulletin RTLZ, which airs news every hour during weekdays, and in 2003 the national news bulletin EditieNL, which has one daily broadcast at 6:15 pm during weekdays. RTL Nieuws is part of the commercial media enterprise RTL Nederland that in 2009 had a 24 percent market share in the Dutch broadcasting market (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2009). It is a daughter company of RTL Group, which is active in large number of European countries. Ninety percent of shares of RTL Group are owned by the German company Bertelsmann. The other commercial enterprise active in the Dutch broadcasting market is SBS Broadcasting B.V. which has a market share of 18 percent. This case study was conducted between November 2009 and January 2010.

To successfully conduct a case study, the spatial or temporal boundaries of the case must be identifiable (George & Bennet, 2005; Gerring, 2007). The three cases were thus narrowed down to focus only on the news departments. The following editorial sections were taken into account: national, international, political and economic. In order to obtain an overall view of each organisation I chose to concentrate on these four subunits, but also to collect additional data from other departments. For example, at de Volkskrant I concentrated on the selected news units by joining their meetings, observing the daily processes, having informal talks and interviewing the unit heads and journalists. In addition, I spoke to the unit heads of several weekly sections (e.g. the science and opinion units), but did not speak with journalists or join meetings. Moreover, when accountability or responsive measures were located elsewhere, these units were also taken into account. For example, at de Volkskrant the readers’ letters are dealt with in the opinion editorial unit. This approach helped me to get an overall picture of the whole organisation and at the same time focus on specific units to obtain a more thorough view of the issue. In the following section, I will elaborate on my data collection.
4.3 Data collection

Before actually starting to collect the data an important decision needed to be made: in which phase of my research was I to enter the field? After careful consideration, I chose to start fieldwork in the last phase of my research. After two years of working on the previous research phases I was well acquainted with the theoretical concepts, the historical development and the shifts in the theoretical and policy debate. This knowledge was needed in order to set up a solid qualitative research design (Yin, 1989). Moreover, with this prior knowledge I was well prepared to approach the media organisations, explain my research and convince the editors-in-chief of the importance of their collaboration.

One of the strengths of case studies is that it offers the possibility to use many different sources of evidence (Yin, 1989). The case study itself is thus more a strategy that consists of several different methods (Gerring, 2007). I used different types of data within each case to collect the necessary information including documents, observations and interviews.

4.3.1 External documents

Before approaching the editor-in-chief of each media organisation, I gained as much knowledge of the organisation as possible by reading the annual reports over the past 20 years (see also Chapter 2), as well as prior research and publications on the organisation, and weblogs and commentaries from the editors-in-chief in the public and/or media professional debate. This was necessary to get a good understanding of the media organisation, its history and culture, and to get an initial idea of their view on the accountability issue.

4.3.2 Observation and internal documents

I started the actual fieldwork by being present almost full-time in the newsrooms, observing and collecting internal documentation. This allowed me to better understand the context in which I wanted to answer my research question and to get acquainted with the organisational structure and culture. More importantly, the main goal of the observation period was to detect the formal and informal accountability and responsiveness instruments within each organisation and to understand how they are experienced and evaluated in daily practice. Finally, the observations helped me to gain enough information to be able to set up a topic list for the interviews.
Within each case I was assigned a contact person who guided me through the organisation, introduced me to the employees and helped me to access relevant documents. According to Creswell & Miller (2000) the use of a so-called gatekeeper can enhance the credibility of the research (more on credibility issues in section 4.6). At de Volkskrant the ombudsman was my contact person and at NOS Nieuws and RTL Nieuws deputy editors-in-chief guided me through the organisation. This was a very useful way to get to know the organisational structure and the people and to slowly get acquainted with the culture. Since those in different positions in the organisation may have a different perception, I had to be careful to obtain my information not only through these contacts. I used so-called ‘snowball sampling’ to get acquainted with other people and obtain information from different sources (Warren, 2001).

During the observation period I joined daily and weekly plenary meetings, joined the meetings of separate editorial units and observed the daily production practices. Besides the observations I also acquired various types of internal documents. At NOS Nieuws and de Volkskrant I had access to the organisation’s intranet, which provided relevant information such as the minutes of the plenary meetings, the organisation structure, internal changes etc. Moreover, my contacts helped me to get hold of documents that were relevant for my research, such as internal policy documents and memoranda on specific journalistic projects. This period also included informal talks with the staff members to get to know the different people and also for them to get to know me. What struck me was that everyone was very open and enthusiastic about my research topic and was eager to talk and assist me in conducting my research. Whereas some qualitative researchers say media organisations are often reluctant to give researchers long-term access (Paterson & Domingo, 2008; Ten Have, 2004), I experienced the contrary and received full cooperation from the three editors-in-chief and their editorial staff. This open attitude facilitated one of the objectives of the observation period: to create a trust relationship with the members of the organisation. Only when people know who you are and are comfortable with your presence will they easily open up to you when interviewed.

During the observation period the role of the researcher can be quite complicated, because as an observer you have the role of both an insider and
an outsider (Boeije, 2005). Walsh (2000) rightly states that that affects how the respondents perceive and approach the researcher. Four different roles can be distinguished in a continuum: complete observer, observer—participant, participant—observer and complete participant (Gold, 1958 in Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). A complete participant carries out the study secretly and participates while others in the field are not aware of the research. A complete observer is someone who only observes but avoids contact and does not participate in the field. The observer—participant focuses on observing, while only participating in the most necessary cases. The participant—observer participates in order to build trust relations with people in the field. I shifted between being an observer—participant and a participant—observer. The latter role was important in order to create some type of trust relationship with the respondents, but it runs the risk of over-identifying with the subject and becoming too much involved in the situation. To avoid this, I kept my distance and never actively joined in during the meetings or gave opinions on issues. When, for example, during a meeting one of the editors asked me whether he should put a certain item in the news bulletin, I explained that I was merely at the meeting to observe and not to participate. However, acting only in the role of observer would not have allowed me to fully understand the implicit processes and culture within the organisations.

All the information was recorded in written field notes during the actual observation. This is paramount in observing (Lofland, 1971; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). As Lofland notes, “Field notes are the most important determinant of later bringing off a qualitative analysis” (1971: 102). The observation notes were chronological facts of the observations and literal citations of people (Lofland, 1971). I also made notes of ideas that came up during the observation that were either related to the theoretical concepts or methodological considerations.

This observation period started quite broadly with reading internal documents, observing the daily journalistic processes, joining meetings and talking with people. That led to new information, allowing me to shift my focus to more specific moments of observation and interesting new data (Lofland, 1971; Silverman, 2001).
4.3.3 Interviews

After spending several weeks at the newsroom I felt sufficiently well informed about the organisation structure and culture to hold interviews. Within the social sciences the interview is the most commonly used method to understand people’s opinion and experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Ten Have, 2004). Often, interviewing is seen as an easy method and similar to having a conversation with someone, but it is a conversation with a purpose that should lead to the desired and required information (Einars, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2004; Lofland, 1971).

The first interviews were held with the contact people who had introduced me to the organisation. They served as experts in the field (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) and therefore helped me to obtain the necessary factual information, verified facts from my observation period and gave their view on how the organisation was coping with the accountability and responsiveness issue. Since I had daily contact with these people the interviews were quite informal and served as a pilot to test my topic list. Moreover, the experts helped me to approach other people in the organisation I wanted to speak to, facilitating the snowball sampling process (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

The number of people I interviewed varied between the case studies, depending on the total number of employees of the organisation (see Appendix 1 for a list of the interviewees). The interviewees represented both management and professionals in the news organisation. At de Volkskrant 33 interviews were conducted. At management level I spoke with the three deputy editors-in-chief and the then editor-in-chief. At the professional level I spoke with the heads and journalists of several news editorial units. In addition, I spoke to the publisher director. At NOS Nieuws a total of 42 interviews were held. At management level I spoke with the three deputy editors-in-chief and the editor-in-chief. At the professional level I first spoke with heads of the editorial units and program editors and then with coordinators, desk editors, reporters and presenters. In addition, I interviewed the ombudsman, the communication manager and the managing director of NOS. Finally, I spoke with the chair of the Board of Governors and a policy manager of the Netherlands Public Service Broadcasting NPO. At RTL Nieuws I carried out 23 interviews. First, interviews were conducted with program editors, unit
heads, the news deputy editor-in-chief and the editor-in-chief. Then, at the professional level I interviewed presenters, editors and reporters from various news units. Lastly, I spoke with the chief executive officer of RTL Nederland.

The interviews had a semi-structured character, which means that I did not prepare a fixed questionnaire but merely a list of topics that would guide me through the interview. To break the ice, the first topics were related to the interviewee’s function within the organisation. These first questions were intended to obtain factual information and to help the respondent to become at ease with me and the subject (Emans, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2004; Hijmans & Wester, 2006). For example, when interviewing the journalists or editors I first asked them to briefly explain their tasks and the purposes of the different meetings. Afterwards, more complicated issues were discussed relating more to the interviewee’s opinion and experiences. In total, the following topics were addressed: their function within the organisation and their responsibilities, internal evaluation moments, criticism and feedback from colleagues, external criticism, their definition of accountability, their views on instruments of accountability and responsiveness and on the changing relationship with the public. While the order of questions was carefully planned, at times I did vary this since I wanted the interviews to have more of a conversational character with a natural flow. In this way the respondents would feel at ease and might generate other information that came to mind. Each interview took on average 1 hour.

Besides preparing the questions or topics to be discussed other issues should be taken into consideration to successfully complete an interview. Firstly, it is very unlikely that interviews can be repeated since one cannot expect respondents to be willing to make an additional appointment. Therefore, I not only carefully prepared the topics/questions but I also thought of probes to get a deeper understanding of the interviewee’s answer and to check if I understood the answers correctly (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Lofland, 1971; Patton, 1990). Secondly, the role of the interviewer is very important. There are many discussions about whether the interviewer should take a neutral and distant approach or show more involvement to enhance trust (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2004). As I had already met most of the respondents during my observation period they were already acquainted with me and my research subject and a certain level of trust had already...
been built up. I primarily took a neutral and distant approach, stimulating the respondents to give their opinion and thoughts. For example, before asking what they thought about the accountability policy and the use of specific instruments, I started by asking how they would define this concept, without giving them examples or reminding them of the current debate. At the same time, in order to understand respondents’ deeper thoughts on specific issues it is important that the researcher shows empathy (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Hijmans & Wester, 2006). Therefore I made clear to the interviewees that I was conducting independent academic research and not working for the management. This made the professionals feel at ease and sometimes they even used the opportunity to air their concerns about the organisation. A final aspect that should be taken into consideration is the use of journalistic jargon (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Patton, 1990). My observation period helped me not only to understand the organisation and its culture but also to learn the jargon used by journalists. In the interviews I often referred to specific issues that were discussed in the meetings or used specific jargon to make the abstract theoretical terms more concrete and applicable to the respondent’s situation.

4.4 Data analysis

The grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data (see also Chapter 2). The basic idea is that the complexity of a large amount of data is reduced into categories and concepts, after which patterns are identified and a framework or theory is constructed (Bryman, 2001; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to the grounded theory approach four different phases of analysing qualitative data can be distinguished (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because this process of analysis is quite complex and does not follow standard guidelines, I will explain how I analysed my material using concrete examples from my analysis. Even though this process may appear to take place in a linear step-by-step manner, the process is often not a smooth one. Rather, it is a continuous spiral process of remodelling and synthesising (Marshall, 2002). In qualitative research the analysis does not simply follow the data-gathering stage, but alternates by a constant reflection on the results in relation to the research question (Lofland, 1971; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
I started with the analysis of the documents and field notes, after which the interviews were analysed. The first two analyses were also needed to set up a topic list for the interviews. All the interviews were transcribed by two students. Even though I made notes during the interviews I felt that the full transcripts were necessary to really capture everything that the respondents said without making any prior assumptions or interpretations. As the documents, field notes and transcripts were analysed in a similar way, I will limit myself here to a step-by-step illustration of the interview analysis. Due to the substantial amount of data this analysis was more comprehensive than the first two. I read each interview transcript completely on paper to get an overall overview of the information in its context. Afterwards, I started with open coding on paper (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Different sections of the interview were labelled with a code that summarized what was said in the text. For example, when respondents gave their definition of accountability the paragraph was labelled with ‘definition of accountability’. Once the whole interview was coded on paper, I again coded the interview using the qualitative software program MAXQDA. In this way I obliged myself to code twice and possibly change or add codes. This enhances the reliability of the research. Subsequently, other interviews were coded the same way. I did not follow the pure inductive approach of analysing the data without any prior conception and did take into account my theoretical concepts trust, responsibility, accountability and responsiveness. These concepts started off as sensitizing concepts meaning that the concepts do not have a fixed or definite meaning but function as a guide and provide a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical situations (Blumer, 1954). After coding five interviews I took a so-called ‘time-out’ (Marshall, 2002) to compare the interviews and rearrange the codes, adding, eliminating and bundling them. For example, in the open coding phase I coded all the paragraphs where the interviewee gave his or her definition of the concept of accountability ‘definition of accountability’. In the specification phase I realized this code was too broad and I added sub-codes, such as transparency, responsibility, professionalism and responding to public criticism. In the axial phase I rearranged the codes, possibly combined, split or integrate them (Boeije, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also the codes were put into dimensions. For example, distinctions could be made between a positive versus negative association with accountability, suggested or self-initiated. Whereas
in the open coding phase I stayed close to the data, in the following phase I lifted the codes to a more interpretative and theoretical level.

This systematic analysis helped me to avoid the pitfall of anecdotalism (Bryman, 1988; Mehan, 1979 in Silverman, 2001) where results are reported based on a few exemplary quotes or specific examples of an apparent phenomenon. By conducting a systematic and thorough analysis, I verified whether issues were specific, unique examples or shared by many respondents.

One of the basic ideas of grounded theory is the constant comparison method (Boeije, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990). The analysis comprised a continuous process of comparing the data to discover patterns and underlying concepts within the material. The comparison took place at different levels. First, I compared codes within a specific interview and afterwards among the interviews with those with similar functions (e.g. analysis of all the interviews with the editors in one organisation). Subsequently, the comparison took place across functions. All these steps are part of the analysis within one case. After I had completely finished each case, I started with the next, taking the same steps in both data collection and analysis. I finished with cross-case analysis, comparing across cases (Yin, 1989; Peters, 2006). This last step was done with specific caution since the cases differ in historical background, structure and context. This was also the reason I did not choose to conduct a cross-case analysis at an earlier point in the analysis (Gerring, 2007).

The analysis was an intense process in which I had to deal with an immense amount of data. More than 800 pages of interview transcripts were coded per case, not including the documents and field notes. The qualitative software program MAXQDA helped me in arranging and systematizing the data. Moreover, the use of memos within this qualitative software program allows for continuous reflection on the process of analysis (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wester & Peters, 2006). However, I did not use the software program for the documents and field notes because these materials were not available digitally, which is necessary in order to use the program. Moreover, these materials were not as extensive which made it easier to do the coding and further analysis by hand.
4.5 Ethical considerations

Throughout my whole research process I took account of several ethical considerations and I have already mentioned some implicitly. First is the issue of informed consent (see also Chapter 2), which means that the researcher provides the respondents with the relevant information for them to make a decision whether or not to participate (Silverman, 2001). During the first meetings with the editors-in-chief I gave a full explanation of my research and the objectives of the case study. When I started the fieldwork the employees were informed of my presence through an e-mail and on my first day I was introduced at the plenary meeting. Each interview started with an explanation of my research. In all, I chose overt observation. However, a concern about overt observation is the validity and reliability of the observations since people might act differently when they know that they are being observed (Patton, 1990). By prolonging my stay in the field, I was able to deal with this problem. In this research, covert observation would not have been possible since it is not the usual practice for outsiders to spend long periods in the newsroom. Not explaining my purpose would have raised questions and resistance to participate.

Another issue is anonymity, which means that the respondents cannot be traced back (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I agreed with the editors-in-chief that all the interviewees would stay anonymous to the reader except for people who hold a specific position such as the editor-in-chief and the ombudsman. To keep it fully confidential, all the respondents are addressed in masculine form. Finally, agreements had to be reached on data access and the purpose of the data. All the interviewees received the manuscript of this dissertation and several provided feedback. The editors-in-chief and the deputy editors-in-chief were also informed where the results would be presented or published.

4.6 Quality of the research

I have given an extensive and detailed description of the methods used to answer my final research question. This elaborate description provides an insight into how I conducted the research and therefore enhances the quality of it (Stenbacka, 2001). My aim is to be transparent and accountable to my fellow researchers, the research participants and the media profession. But this detailed method section alone does not validate the results of my research. In
quantitative research the terms reliability and validity are used when addressing the quality of the research.

Reliability refers to what extent different coders (or the same coder on different occasions) allocate the same codes to the same category (Hammersley, 1992). The reliability of my research was addressed in several ways. First, I coded the interviews twice, on paper and digitally, obliging me to rethink my initial codes. Second, a student, who had also done most of the transcripts, recoded a random sample of the interview codes. Even though the inter-reliability cannot be measured in quantitative terms, the second coding helped me to reflect on my own coding process. Third, all the interviews were recorded and the field notes were written in great detail. Lastly, the elaborate memos helped me to reflect systematically on the process (Hijmans & Wester, 2006).

Validity refers to what extent the research findings correspond with the social phenomena to which it refers (Hammersley, 1992). Both validity and reliability are statistical concepts that many qualitative scholars believe are not suitable or applicable to qualitative research because this research is carried out in a natural setting and almost impossible to replicate (Stenbacka, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, social facts are problematic to measure (Golafshani, 2003). I agree with a number of contemporary scholars (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Silverman, 2001) that in order to produce high-quality research some kind of quality check or measures are needed. Qualitative scholars have proposed alternative concepts such as adequacy, neutrality, credibility and plausibility (Creswell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Wolcott, 1994). To this end, common procedures have been identified for establishing validity in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2001).

Creswell and Miller (2000) offer nine different procedures to assess validity, using different viewpoints including that of the researcher, the participant and the reader. From the researcher perspective they propose triangulation, disconfirming evidence and researcher reflexivity. Triangulation means that the researcher either uses different types of methods, sources or theories to corroborate the evidence (Denzin, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). I used documents, observation notes and interviews to understand the issue from different perspectives. This was not only a method to support my
evidence but also a way to see to what extent the data differ (Seale, 1999: 474). For example, by comparing the documents with the interviews and observations I was able to see differences between formal policy and actual practice. Disconfirming evidence means that during the analysis one first builds initial codes and then starts looking through the data to find either more evidence or disconfirmation for these codes. This was done in the open and axial coding phase as described in the data analysis section.

Finally, researcher reflexivity requires researchers to reveal their bias, assumptions and beliefs that may shape the research. I did not explicate this on paper but prior to entering the field I did discuss some issues with my supervisors. This made me more alert and obliged me to prepare myself well before starting in the field. Moreover, I organised moments of reflection. For example, during the fieldwork I took time away from the newsroom to rearrange my field notes and reflect on the collected material in order to take following steps. During the coding phase I also built in reflexive moments because often I was so preoccupied with the coding process that I risked losing track of the overall findings. I found that my maternity leave of four months helped me to take a step back and therefore I was able to better reflect on my results.

From the participant’s perspective Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest member checking or in Silverman’s (2001) words ‘member validation’. My results were given to all the interviewees for them to verify the facts and to give their opinion on my interpretation. Prolonged engagement in the field is another procedure from the participant perspective. This procedure was especially important for me during the first case study since it took time to explore how to conduct the observations. Besides this first case, during each case study the observation period took longer than I had planned beforehand. In the field I realized that it takes time to understand the complex organisational processes and the organisational culture. As Patton says, “In the second stage of the fieldwork the observer begins to really see what is going on instead of just looking around” (1990: 260). Moreover, policies of accountability often have more of an informal character and are therefore not easy to identify. But perhaps most importantly, this prolonged time in the field helped me to build a trust relationship with the respondents. For the first few days people were very curious about what I was doing and writing down and during the meetings people would make explicit remarks about accountability issues
because I was present. After a while people got used to my presence and seemed to forget I was observing.

From the reader’s perspective, Creswell and Miller (2000) mention the audit. Throughout the research, my supervisors were closely involved and we organised numerous meetings to reflect on the results. Moreover, preliminary results were presented at academic conferences where I received feedback that I incorporated into the final chapters. My results were reviewed numerous times by fellow colleagues doing research in the field of journalism. Moreover, the two students who transcribed all the interviews also provided feedback on the results. A detailed description of the research process and methods used helps the reader trace the research steps or as Yin says, “helps to maintain a chain of evidence” (1989: 102).

4.7 Case studies: applying theory to practice

This chapter has provided an elaborate description of the methods used for the case study research. In the following three chapters I will present the results of the three cases. Besides providing an overview of which instruments of accountability and responsiveness the organisations have introduced, I will elucidate the reasoning behind the instruments. Moreover, I will explore how these instruments are received among the editorial staff. The introduction of these instruments does not mean that they are invariantly adopted and result in the aimed effect. The success of innovation depends on many factors including the organisational innovation climate and how that matches the employees’ values (Klein & Sorra, 1996), the level of pressure for change, institutional support and cost and benefits considerations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974). Based on organisation innovation literature the introduced instrument of accountability and responsiveness can be placed in different phases of the innovation process. Several stages have been proposed by various organisational researchers (see for an overview Wolfe, 1994 and Bouwman et al., 2002), which boil down to four phases.

After a unit or organisation becomes aware of the existence of the innovation and the innovation’s costs and benefits have been evaluated it is either introduced to the unit or organisation or rejected. Once introduced it is implemented in the organisation. This means the instruments have a place (usually formal) in the organisation with support from management. In the following phase
the instruments are incorporated. This requires the employees to be familiar with the instrument, agree on the implementation of the instrument and use it regularly. There is some kind of commitment of the employees to make use of the instruments (Tornatzky et al., 1983). Finally, the internalisation of the instruments entails everyone to have a consensus on the objectives of the instruments and how to use them without any major logistical and cultural drawbacks. In other words, when an instrument is internalised “it is accepted ... because it is congruent with a worker’s value” (Sussman & Vechio, 1991 in Klein and Sorra, 1996: 1061) and the instrument is part of “routinized behaviour” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974). Wolfe (1994) speaks of ‘infusion’ instead of internalization, when the innovations “are applied to its fullest potential” (1994: 411). In the following chapters, after a descriptive analysis of the used instruments, I will determine whether the instruments of accountability and responsiveness are introduced, implemented, incorporated or internalised in the organisations that I have studied.