Qualitative studies of the organization and management during the time of transformation process and socio-economic changes. Adequate theoretical description

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Organizations can be analyzed from different points of view and applying different criteria. The most frequently used methodology is the quantitative methodology with its emphasis on the standardization of data collection techniques and the process of data collection. Qualitative methods are most often considered as the opposite of quantitative methods, since the former are treated as less standardized and objective, although treating them as opposite to the latter is not always justified empistemologically (Konecki 1993).

In the present paper we present a qualitative approach to research, although we deal also with quantitative research, that is research based on a standardized questionnaire addressed to a relatively numerous group of respondents (representative sample) and developed using appropriate statistical measures.

We would like to advance below some arguments in favour of the qualitative approach in studies of social changes, and especially changes in organizations and management of the economy. The basis for this evaluation is the fact that researchers frequently analyze transformation processes in enterprises using the method of case study. It allows us to make a relatively comprehensive description of a single organization during the transformation process. The materials used in such description have quantitative character (surveys) as well as a qualitative (free interviews with decision-makers). The number of examined cases depend on the goal of studies, time and available resources. The case gives an insight into the process, and those were new and unique problems for them.

In the systematic transformation process we are dealing with changes at all levels of the social structuralization occurring simultaneously. Interrelationship

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are new and emergent, while configurations of variables are quite differentiated for each studied organization (aggregation). It is also for this reason that the reality having a character of an emergent process.

We could try now to list certain general criteria by means of which it will be possible to determine general properties of various research approaches to qualitative analyses of organizations. These properties will show us also possible logical (and maybe empirical) goals of different qualitative research approaches. This categorization will be referred especially to the change and transformation (restructuring) of the organization.

The first, and one of the most important, criterion in the description of methodologies used in studies of an organizational change will be the **criterion of standardization degree** of research instruments. Of course, the standardization of instruments is bigger in quantitative studies than in qualitative ones, although its degree depends on the goal of the studies. If the aim of the studies is to diagnose an earlier localized problem then research instruments will obviously require a bigger standardization. On the other hand, if we want to discover new problems or consequences of the organizational transformation we shall avoid standardization to leave some room for the „context of discovery". A change in the organization usually produces unpredictable consequences or resistance, and particularly when it is a change of qualitative nature (privatization, change of organizations structure or culture). In the case of such phenomena the researchers are often required to make, first of all, a „discovery" and a description. A methodology with smaller of standardization is certainly more useful here. Such methodology is the methodology of grounded theory, in which it is believed that standardization might distort an adequate description of emergent new models of organizational activities (see: Strauss 1987, Konecki 1989). That is why we think that such methodology has an adequate character, because built models of new organizational activities refer to *concrete* activities in a given organization.

The phenomena discovered may be examined next by means of two types of studies: **monographic studies (a comprehensive monographic study - 'case study' and a problem monograph) or surveys** (containing a relatively large number of open questions). **The monographic study** consists in choosing definite enterprises for analysis according to earlier defined criteria, which can confirm certain expectations with regard to the development of certain phenomena connected with an organizational change. The study describes exactly (adequately) in this case the whole context of organizational changes and activities of the management. A metaphor could be used here saying that the enterprise is described and diagnosed in precisely the same way as a candidate for a space flight, whose conditions of activity have undergone or will undergo a complete change. **The problem monograph**, on the other hand consists in choosing an enterprise according to some criterion being an exemplification of

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an earlier defined theoretical problem. An example of it can be the choice of an enterprise having problems with adaptation of new employees if the researcher wishes to analyze socialization processes within industrial enterprises (Konecki 1992), or a newly-privatized enterprise if the goal of studies are social consequences produced by privatization. The enterprise is described here with regard to some problem, while the precision of its description depends on requirement posed by the verification of hypotheses connected with the description of a given problem. Meanwhile various surveys containing a large number of open questions also describe enterprises with regard to certain hypotheses made earlier, but a low degree of standardization still leaves a certain margin for the „context of discovery" of concrete phenomena (activities). Such an approach allows us to avoid building models containing variables, which delimit precisely the frames of analyses and, consequently, make such studies less concrete, that is not referring to concrete activities (as it happens, for instance, in the case of studies of organizational culture in „Hofstede's style", where a rigid set of variables is accepted in advance for frequently incomparable cultural contexts; Hofstede 1980, Mikua/Nasierowski 1995).

While conducting a full monographic study or a problem monograph our attention can be focused on questions about facts or on questions about the cognitive-cultural perspective (opinions, convictions, values, attitudes expressed in interactions). Thus, our attention is focused on the so-called „more objective" dimension of organizational change (changes in organizational structures, ownership structure, profits of the enterprise before and after its transformation) or on „less objective" dimension(changes in organizational culture, new definition of organizational reality, foundations laid for new methods of management, opinions on progress made in privatization process, new model of interactions within the organization, etc.). Such facts as economic and structural data will be of a greater interest for specialists in the field of organization and management, while opinions, values and convictions will arouse a greater interest among sociologists studying organizations. It should be noted, however, that both facts and opinions are interesting for both types of researchers. The adequacy of facts descriptions is not greater than the adequacy of descriptions of the „cognitive-cultural perspective", as it also objectivizes itself in activities, interaction models, language and, thus, in facts, whose factuality from the empirical point of view it is difficult to question.

While analyzing facts or the cognitive-cultural perspective there are usually chosen informers, who may be considered experts on a given organization, because they knew it already before organizational changes. The informer may be obviously questioned in a more standardized manner using a research instrument designed earlier when we are mainly interested in information concerning facts, or the informer may be given a possibility of providing a

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„free“ response when we are interested in their cognitive-cultural perspective. In the latter situation, the informer may be asked, for example, „how did the changes begin?“, and they can be expected or encouraged to present the organizations story or a narration describing the history of the enterprise and change taking place in it. The researchers intervention in the way in which the story is structuralized is negligible here. The processing of data, in turn, assumes the character of structuralized of concepts generated earlier from a concrete content of described organizational phenomena contained in the stories (Konecki / Kulpinska 1995).

The studies of transformation process can differ also with regard to the adopted approach to the main **actors of organizational changes**. These actors may be treated „**as subjects or as objects**“. With the subjective approach (and this is our approach), it is assumed that organizational actors (directors, trade union and employee council activists) have possibilities to operate in a relatively independent manner. Their cognitive perspectives and possessed competences can change the organization’s image. Moreover, their actions have concrete dimension exemplifying itself in their effect, i.e. in organizational change. The objective approach, on the other hand, emphasizes first of all, the impact exerted by structures, market and institutional constraints on activities of the main organizational actors. It is the impact of market rules and external structural conditions which has a decisive influence on an organizational change, while organizational actors may only „behave themselves“ (not act) according to the force with which certain „objective“ variables operate. External constraints prove to be more concrete here than actions of actors, which are only their derivative. The actor is an object of influence exerted by these variables, and the actors definitions of situations cannot change the determination direction of structural variables.

Summing up it can be said that the qualitative studies of transformations taking place in the organization can be characterized by means of the following criteria:

- extent of which research techniques are standardized,
- types of studies (comprehensive monograph and problem monograph or surveys),
- concentration on facts or on cognitive-cultural perspective,
- the organizational actor is treated as a subject or an object.

At one end of the continuum there will be qualitative studies, which standardize research techniques to an insignificant extent, as such studies have a monographic character and are concentrated on the cognitive-cultural perspective, while the organizational actor is treated subjectively, with their actions having a concrete and directly observable character. The description of these actions is adequate, that is to say the conceptual constructs and advanced hypotheses have their direct reference to the organizational reality observable *in*

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vivo or to conceptual constructs of the first degree made by organizational actors themselves (this is our approach). At the other extreme we have an opposite situation, where the actors actions are observed primarily from the viewpoint of variables constraints by assumption as it is the case with studies in „Hofstede's style" (see Mikua/Nasierowski 1995). It seems to us that the systemic transformation, which is occurring not in an abstract space of the market but in concrete enterprises may be analyzed most adequately by means of studies focused on an adequate theoretical description. The adequacy is here a characteristic of these studies, which are focused on directly observable actions and phenomena occurring in enterprises being restructured and on their translation into the theoretical language. An adequate description means an empirical approach, in which the point of departure are actual transformations taking place in the reality and not their models. The studies aimed at an adequate description allow us to build theoretical frames remaining in a close relationship with the reality, as hypotheses are built here on the basis of observations and not only and exclusively on the basis of logical consequences of accepted assumptions.

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