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**A METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCH**

**THE NATIONAL FREIGHT  
CORPORATION 1962-1982  
(WORK IN PROGRESS)**

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## **Note**

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## **Abstract**

Structuring of a research project using a Phenomenological approach is examined as an interpretive methodology for a Business History case study. The research case is the privatisation and Management Employee buyout (MEBO) of the National Freight Corporation (NFC) and the formative period to that MEBO of 1962-1982. Overlaps into other qualitative and quantitative approaches are examined and a narrowly focussed research question and terms of reference are constructed from a simple initial and broad deductive hypothesis. The advantages and disadvantages of specific methodological aims and objectives are considered, and the tentative results of a prosopographical element of a triadic multi-methodological research structure are discussed. Modifications are made to existing research models that were designed for analytic application, and the augmentation of an analytic base upon which to ground the project thesis is continued.

## **Keywords**

Efficiency, methodology, phenomenological, prosopographical, culture

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## **Introduction**

### **Methodological Aim**

The aim of the NFC research is to re-examine the privatisation of the Company using, new evidence from unused sources. A research decision was made to examine the possibility of approaching the NFC transformation by examining the “third level” (Schein 1992) of the NFC, and look at values and behaviour below the obvious symbols and espoused values and political and executive levels of the nationalised organisation, the traditional “strategy and structure” relational model which often only allows a “black box” approach to the examination and analysis of an organisation.

This “third level” would encompass for examination and analysis the whole of the organisational institution, its activities as they affected and were understood by its community at that time, and the actions and behaviour resulting from them, and would offer an imaginative and new approach to analysis and classification of a Business historical model. The “third level” has meaning in this research project as a “deep” exploratory and phenomenological process, which uses the perceptions and memories of the executives, middle managers and the operational supervisors and operatives of the NFC as part of a triangulation process involving primary data, secondary data and hypothetical comparisons and verification (figure 1).

Previous research work published on the NFC has been limited to positivist examinations of quantitative data rooted in financial performance of the traditional profitability outcomes type, an economo-centric approach. Initial examination of Company records by the researcher during the period of its nationalization revealed that the generalised stereotype of a failing public sector operation was open to serious question, and that the richness of the company’s “third level” had never been examined for use as a tool to compare and assess the validity of the truisms on record.

A simple deductive hypothesis, that reflected the dominant theme apparent in initial examination of the literature, that public ownership = inefficiency and private ownership = efficiency indicated that a triadic research model was required which would enable an examination of the NFC:

- a) As a commercial construct,
- b) As part of the historical context surrounding that construct, and
- c) By inclusion of the NFC people, who were considered to be an essential, but hitherto unresearched element.

The deductive hypothesis used as an entry tool for the research formulation then began to falter as a credible basis for verification because of the specificity of its approach, and influenced a further inductive approach. The reason for this broadening of the hypothetical reasoning was that it became apparent from initial research and examination of the complexities and scope of the NFC operations, via the archives and initial interviews, that there was much more to the structure, strategy and performance of the NFC than was indicated in the literature, and that valuable data was available from a relatively unused source, the Company's people, which might reveal hitherto undiscovered variables influencing the performance and successful transition of this Company from the public to the private sector.

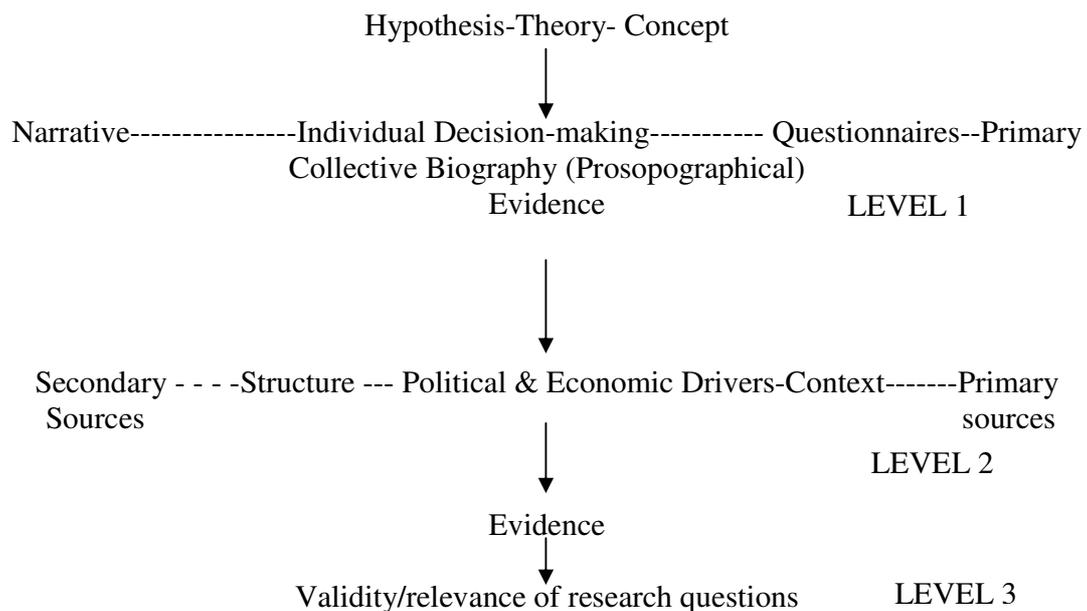
The research strategy also had to encompass an initial multi-methodological approach that would then identify the optimum method of research, collection and evaluation of data that would be successful for a part-time candidate with limited time constraints from the demands of employment and career development. The multi-methodological approach initially exposed the researcher and the research to some difficult justificatory questions regarding the positivist/phenomenological paradigms of the research. The

examination of a multi-methodological approach involving phenomenological and deductive/inductive epistemological positions resulted from that, and in the decision by the researcher to pursue a combined Survey and Case study strategy <sup>1</sup>whose objectives arising from the research questions are discussed below.

### Methodological General Objectives

The general objectives were to use historical narrative and accumulated historical evidence within the triangular framework described (figure 1):

**Fig 1. Methodological analytical framework**



<sup>1</sup> A disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach that may be argued as a variant of Mode1/ 2 research

## **The Methodological Strategy**

The strategy for the general objective was to devise a methodology that would gather the data that would enable the following research question and terms of reference to be tested for relevance and then answered initially within the conceptual framework of strategy and structure, the value chain, and capability theory.<sup>2</sup>

### *Research Question.*

Can a definitive Business typology be identified from the NFC case study that shows whether a public sector business operation becomes more “efficient”(efficiency in the NFC case being based upon increased profitability and productivity) when privatised and owned by its management and employees?

### *Term of reference 1.*

Whether a fundamental structural ethos existed historically in the NFC organisation that was led to a distinctive organisational culture whose beliefs, values, and knowledge constituted a shared basis for successful operations. A phenomenon that would make the late 1980s privatisation preparations and the subsequent MEBO a success

### *Term of reference 2.*

If the NFC case study could be used to demonstrate that the epistemic paradigm of Business History, a paradigm that frequently privileges the economo-centric empirical methodology of quantitative analysis for business historical cases, also requires an actor-relative phenomenological and qualitative approach (To answer the “*so what*” question, i.e. the value of researching this particular historical model, by examination of the role of people, culture and values in the historical development and successful MEBO of a nationalised business operation).

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<sup>2</sup> Exemplified by Chandler (1962), Porter (1985), Pettigrew (2002).

*Term of reference 3.*

The role that specific cultural value factors may have played within the NFC and its subsidiary companies during the period under research (1962 – 1982) that could have been directly influential to organisational management integrity, employee involvement and commitment, and the combined commitment of management and workforce to mutual aims and objectives

*Term of reference 4.*

That the changes to strategy, structure, organisation and operational processes necessary for the successful privatisation and MEBO, were in place within the NFC as a result of longitudinal development from an historically based foundation from decisions and organisational design implemented in the past.

*Term of reference 5.*

Ascertain how the NFC management was able to shift a political policy that did not consider their company suitable for privatisation, and was then able to challenge contemporary business conceptions of organisational form and continuity by transformation of the ownership and effective control of a large nationalised multifunctional operation into a pioneer logistics business.

Examination of the raw preliminary data (Interview/Questionnaires 2001) resulting from the research preparatory phase, and which was based around research questions 1-6, began to open the research process “onion” (Saunders et al 2000), and to determine research approaches, strategy, and data collection methods and time horizons. The nature of the research question and associated terms of reference, and the intended triadic framework pointed firmly to a multi-methodological and multi-level approach.

## **Methodological Specific Objectives and Justification for the Methodology**

The research question and terms of reference 1-5 above indicated that a holistic approach would be required drawing upon qualitative and quantitative methods (Easterby-Smith et al 1991) within a framework of:

- Archive research.
- Literature research
- Interviews and questionnaires
- Written Correspondence
- Telephone communication
- E-mail communication

The epistemological positioning of the main methods within this framework is a position of cross-validation. The cross-validation encompasses an iterative cycle, from theory to observation, between understanding of the NFC organisation and its processes in the period 1962-1982 – (from the archive records), checked against quantification of the results of the questionnaire surveys, and verified again against results from the semi-structured interviews. The epistemological assumption underpinning the methodology is of positive realism, that is, a combined qualitative and quantitative methodology to maximise the potential for obtaining rich data.

### **Data Sources: Quantitative and Qualitative Desk research**

Primary archival data at the Public Records Office London, and in the National Freight Co. and National Freight Consortium, (now Exel plc), company archives Bedford.

Primary archival material (private unpublished papers), at The Modern Record Centre, University of Warwick.

Secondary sources relating to the Management Employee Buyout (MEBO). The literature search revealed the gap and limited extent of the research knowledge regarding the UK nationalised logistics industry. Published sources were directed

at Industrial relations in one NFC Company, a restricted organisational analysis of one NFC Company, and the financing of the MEBO.

Primary prosopographical (Collective biography) evidence. Questionnaires distributed to NFC pensioners at all levels, and from across the range of operational companies and administrative headquarters, who were actively involved in the company during the research period, followed up by interview, and access to private papers.

Interviews with senior managerial and political actors directly involved with the NFC during the period 1962 to privatisation in 1982. Some participants also granted access to private papers

Secondary sources (archival/audio/visual) examining the British experience of privatisation and subsequent corporate governance from 1982, for comparative purposes.

However any decision was tempered by uncertainty regarding the likely response rate from what was considered one of the paramount elements of the triadic model, the core target for qualitative primary data, the National Freight Corporation (NFC) pensioner cohort.

### **Justification for the Prosopographical Methodology**

Without the comparative qualitative data from the participants of the buyout, any historical evaluation resting upon the primary and secondary written sources would be a retrospective quantitative analytical exercise lacking richness and depth (Stone 1971:Jeremy 1990) that would enable the research questions to be answered but which would not demonstrate development of the phenomenological methodology and concept. The sample would also have to be large enough to provide data that was credible and testable against the variables to be examined. The NFC pensioners' cohort was considered to be a crucial resource, and the key to an in-depth evaluation as part of the

attempt to seek answer to the research questions, and to add the originality and richness of the research data. The remainder of this paper concentrates upon the prosopographical methodology, techniques and tentative indications.

### **Pilot Sampling- Field Research**

Contact was made with the National Freight Consortium (NFC) Secretariat at Bracknell to ascertain whether a pilot sampling of unstructured interviews with NFC pensioners could be made. The current NFC is the holding Company for a multi-national grouping of logistics companies and also administers the National Freight Corporation (NFC) pension system and a pensioner's administration organisation and house magazine.

Initial negotiations were tortuous, slow, and problematic and frustrating as a succession of "doorkeepers" in the NFC Head office passed the research proposal around the organisation. A major global M&A (merger and acquisition) was also taking place throughout 1998/1999 between Exel and Ocean plc, which diverted executive attention from what was a none-priority request. Eventually the Exel Foundation magazine "Changing Gear" made contact and the Editor accepted an initial article, which outlined the research project and asked for ex-NFC retirees to make contact (Exel 2001).

The Exel Foundation administers the pensioner organisation of the National Freight Corporation from a head office in Bedford, which also retains the company records and access to Company archives. The pensioner cohort administered is currently 18,000 strong, representing the diversity of the previous NFC structures, including moribund British Rail business units, a travel company, liquidated transport business units and Associated British Ports. Sampling of the entire NFC pensioner population was not feasible because of time and cost and accessibility constraints (Saunders 2000 ch 6).

## **The pilot sampling**

The initial aim of the pilot sampling was to test the practicability of access to the company and its records and pensioners, and the strategy and objectives of the research project data collection methodology(s). The company would not allow access to the pensioner database directly, because of Data protection statutory requirements, and the magazine article was experimental in its design to check the viability of the whole project of data collection. The response was intended to indicate, from its size and range, a decision regarding the best approach to data collection methods. The response was also intended to indicate whether the proposed field research was indeed viable.

The sampling was restricted to a none-probability method technique (Saunders 2000) because of the restrictions on access to the pensioner population. Self-selection of the sample had to be acceptable because of these restrictions. The methodology fitted the requirement for the exploratory research needed in that it was low cost, would obtain a range of qualitative data, and as it was self-selection would draw in people with a potentially rich amount of qualitative raw data based upon definitive views of the NFC.

The outcome of the pilot request culminated in replies from 230 NFC pensioners who indicated their willingness to take part in the survey. The sample ranged over a representative range of the NFC and included all grades up to and including the Chair of the Board during the research period 1962-1982. The responses were in the form of telephone calls, e-mails, hard copy letters and faxes which confirmed acquiescence to taking part and gave initial contact details from which to build a contact data base using a simple Excel spreadsheet.

The pilot sample response frame was a simple contact summary (Silverman 2000):

- Name
- Gender
- Position in the NFC
- NFC operational Company
- Age
- Reason for interest in the NFC MEBO.

### **Pilot sample qualitative responses**

The presence of a distinct cultural phenomenon in the NFC companies became apparent in the pilot survey. The short responses (fig 4) contained a reoccurring anecdotal theme that indicated a potentially rich qualitative source that had not been researched. Responses centred around the themes e.g. *“this buyout was never properly reported”*, *“this Company has never had the credit for what it did”*, *“the privatisation was a set-up”*, *“the public were conned”*, *“this was one of the best nationalised operators in the UK”* etc. The indications were that behind the subjective and emotionalist appearance of the responses were essentially useful and empirical data<sup>3</sup> (Silverman 2001:287-289), which would contribute to, or deny the significance of the role of cultural factors, and charismatic individuals, to company performance (Jeremy 1990:53)

### **Modification of the Methodological Framework**

As the momentum of the pilot responses increased, it became apparent to the researcher that people as a analytical factor were pivotal to the whole tentative dynamics model theorised by the researcher from the current NFC research. The tentative model (fig 2) was designed by the author and derived from the exploratory research and literature review. The model summarises and explains the principal variables over time that were seen to be instrumental in the strategy, structure and operational responses of the NFC in its competitive business environment. These variables were focused around a strongly

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<sup>3</sup> Huntington (2000: xxv) summarises the use of cultural evidence as particularly problematic for economic research with “most economists uncomfortable dealing with culture, particularly since it presents definitional problems, is difficult to quantify, and operates in a highly complex context with psychological, institutional, political, geographic and other factors).

indicative central element of company culture and all of these variables were noted as principal factors that should be included in the data gathering.

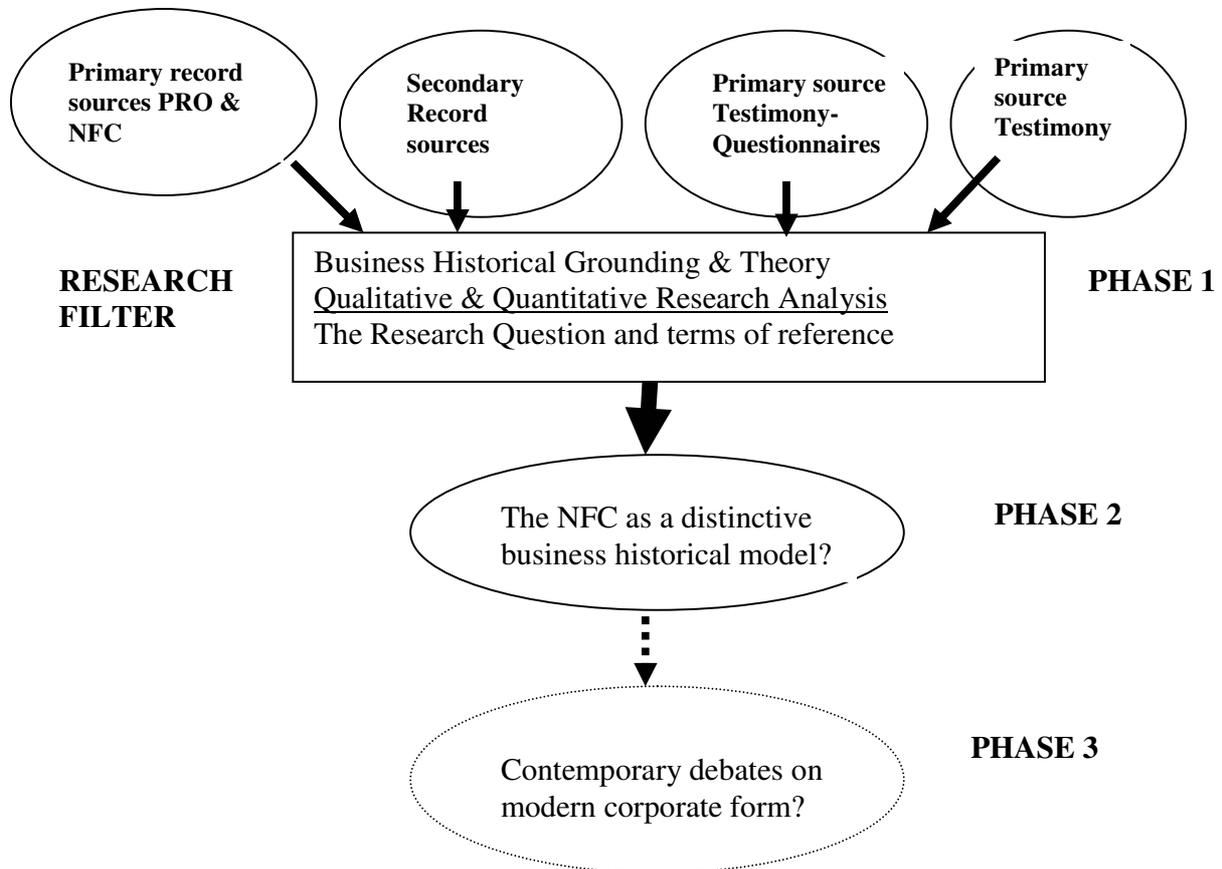
**Fig 2. Transformational dynamics - NFC.**



It became apparent that the measurable variables in the model should be re-examined with a due weighting for a complex cultural and value mix that may have had significant influence in the organic structure and performance of the Company well before the MEBO, and which was relevant to the research questions. This involved a diversion, a temporary realignment, of research focus away from the NFC archival (written, visual) records to the primary “human testimony” in written and verbal form.

The methodological analytical framework phased strategy for this study, designed by the researcher (fig 3), was modified to incorporate this significant element:

**Fig 3. Modified Methodological framework for the NFC**



### **Sampling Technique**

The response rate from the pilot was high enough to give confidence that the research questions could be answered with a methodology of suitably rigorous analysis and the required necessitate vigorous design. The self-selection process had as anticipated elicited responses resulting from the strong feelings held by the respondents for or against the NFC MEBO. Initial contacts with the responders, although time consuming and costly (reverse charges and mail etc), confirmed that there was sufficient qualitative data available for a questionnaire and interview operation to be viable.

A significant variable that became apparent was that the sample population was of advanced age and natural attrition was taking its toll during the pilot survey. This variable of mortality forced a change in methodological timetable, with the need to obtain the data from the respondents as quickly as possible. It was decided that the technique for the collection of the major percentage of data would have to be by self-administered questionnaire, distributed by e-mail and post, followed up by selective interviews, which would insert partial interviewer control for validation of responses. Structured interviews were planned for some key actors in senior management and politics, and for respondents where the questionnaire data indicated a follow-up would be beneficial to the research. There were offers of private papers, which were accepted and they began to arrive and were subsequently matched with questionnaires as supplementary material for further analysis.

### **NFC Questionnaire Design**

The design of questionnaires is discussed widely in the research methodology literature (Saunders et al 2000, Silverman 2000, deVaus 1996, Dillman 1978 et al). The primary reason for the questionnaire technique was for accessibility to participants dispersed over a geographical area that included Cornwall and London in the South to Harrogate and Scotland in the North and Wales and the East coast. The initial none-probability sampling technique had resulted in a range of responders who may not have been included on a sampling frame methodology from probability sampling (Saunders 2000) and who, crucially, were keenly interested in the project. It also became apparent that the qualitative data from this primary human resource would result in a major contribution to the research questions and to the methodological objectives being met. A questionnaire then had to be designed and distributed with some urgency.

The investigative questions in the questionnaire were constructed from the framework of the research question which hypothesised the successful NFC MEBO as the result of a combination of cultural and value factors and influences, direct and indirect, within the Company and its people rather than prescriptive econometric managerial methods and

techniques (. The design also had to cater for the physical constraints of time, cost, researcher availability, and is adaptable for computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Types of variable of distinctive interest for this research project were:

- Attitudes – affiliation to the Company and their work
- Beliefs - political and religious
- Behaviour – depot and company activity indicative of workplace culture
- Characteristics (attributes)-personal qualities from structured questions around motivation

of the respondents (Dillman 1978 in Saunders et al 2000), which may have contributed to the distinctive NFC culture (Paige 2001) that made the MEBO successful.

The questionnaire design then had to incorporate questions that opened out the Company as an entity viewed by the respondent, and which also had to indicate perceptions of the specific technical organisational operations which were of professional interest to the researcher, and offered explanatory data to test the theories in research questions 1-6. The design also had to cover descriptive purposes (Saunders et al 2000) in describing the NFC population and possible cultural characteristics that were considered integral to understanding of the company.

The respondents, many known by name from the pilot survey and personal contacts, were proactive in their participation. This gave a reasonable degree of confidence that the responses would be from the particular respondents and that the response would be theirs, and not overly mediated or distorted or contaminated by an intermediary handling process.

## **NFC Questionnaire - final form**

A set of 50 questions was originally designed, based upon a questionnaire format that had been originally developed as part of year 1 requirements of the MMU Doctoral<sup>4</sup> methodology programme. The prototype was modified and the number of questions reduced when it was realized from pilot respondent feedback that the length of the questionnaire would be a deterrent to completion and a high return rate for the completed document. The final version was structured in design, of 31 questions (Appendix 1).

Questions 1 and 2 were designed to gather social phenomena<sup>5</sup> data that would give a profile of each respondent and their gender, age, education religious and activity characteristics, together with the NFC company with which they worked. Question 3 was designed to gauge their attitudes to the NFC pension that they were receiving; negative responses would indicate a negative bias in the survey that could have been “skewing” factor. Questions 4-8 were designed to gather further social perspective micro-data to expand the respondents’ profiles, and with questions 9 and 10 to ascertain if the respondents’ were part of a network of family or close friends. Question 11 required a set of responses that would build up a profile of the NFC operations that could be compared against the quantitative and qualitative archival data. Questions 12 to 19 were designed to obtain data that would indicate motivational factors at work in the NFC staff at all levels. The questions at 1 to 19 gave macro- and micro - level profiles of the respondents, their attitudinal, and motivational and cultural fit within the NFC companies’ context. Questions 20-26 were designed to obtain data specifically relevant to the respondents’ participation in the MEBO and the context of the MEBO. Questions 27 to 29 were designed to obtain unstructured data from each respondent that gave different, interesting and valuable data to cross-compare with the quantitative and qualitative data in the archival records. Question 30 was designed to examine the NFC respondents’ views of the leadership of the MEBO by the Chief Executive and with question 31 gave a comparative model of the NFC post-MEBO. The unstructured questions within the

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<sup>4</sup> The Graduate school of Business Manchester Metropolitan University, Research methodology programme 1999/2000 assignment 2.

<sup>5</sup> See De Vaus (2002) p.17 et seq.

questionnaire were designed to obtain rich qualitative data that enabled a detailed profile of the NFC and its subsidiary company operations to be built up and that also gave the respondents a spontaneous opportunity to contribute data to the research that might not have been forthcoming in a structured survey. This profile then gave a comparator model against which the archival data was examined. The primary objective of the whole questionnaire had been to obtain a detailed and rich response that would enable the research questions to be answered and the research methodological intentions to be met within the constraints of time and accessibility. The objective was successfully met.

The initial pre-questionnaire page of 10 questions (Appendix 2) summarised the line of research and was designed to attract a condensed response from participants who may have balked at completing the main questionnaire. In this intention it was successful (fig 4), attracting shorter responses in various forms of contact, and in some instances replies in letterform, which contained specific historical contextual information, with private papers attached. The pre-questionnaire (questions 1-10) was more structured in design, this was to obtain explanatory evidence around the data themes of an NFC “culture”, NFC organisational structures and relationships, the general NFC employee reactions to the MEBO, and notions of efficiency from the participants in the operational companies. The response from this short survey also indicated that there would be a sufficient quality of content in the data resource available to make the research viable<sup>6</sup>.

### **Questionnaire responses**

Monitoring revealed that the questionnaire was copied and re- distributed by some respondents and used as a supplementary by other respondents to additional information supplied by written papers, telephone calls or e-mails and visits. The “cascading” of these re-distributed questionnaires brought in respondents who would not normally have self-selected and added to the richness of the data by introduction of information that may be considered “none-representative” of the original sample. Some 20 additional

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<sup>6</sup> See Saunders et al (2000) ch 9.

questionnaires were received from this re-distribution, together with numerous telephones and e-mail contacts which resulted in a further series of interviews.

The questionnaire was distributed from June 2001 via the MMU post room, and with additional responses and requests, distribution continued to April 2002 at which time the majority of responses had been received and follow-up contacts began.

**Fig 4. NFC data response summary**

<b>Initial Survey Responses</b>	<b>Questionnaires dispatched</b>	<b>Questionnaires returned</b>	<b>Telephone Responses</b>	<b>E-mail Responses</b>	<b>Additional Material returned</b>	<b>Letters</b>
230	230	143 (long) 50(short)	11	17	7	5

The total number of responses of all kinds as a result of the questionnaire publicity was 148, which gave a return rate of 64%<sup>7</sup>. It is considered that the high response rate was partly maximised by the articles written for the Foundation magazine, which were intended to encourage participation in the project by a sense of continuing the inclusiveness of the respondents within the project, an intention that had been promulgated in the initial introductory letter with the questionnaire. However another factor was the continuing theme throughout respondents communications that the NFC “story” as some termed it needed to be recorded, as a phenomenon unlikely to re-occur<sup>8</sup>.

### **Interviews**

Follow-up interviews were again constrained by time and resource limitations, and were focused on a range of NFC employees from the Chairman through senior management and middle, line and supervisory staff and operational employees in transport,

<sup>7</sup> The response rate was remarkably high when considered against reasonable expectations for a questionnaire-based survey in the literature from a low of 30% (Saunders et al: 2000 p282), to a peak of 61% (De Vaus 2002).

<sup>8</sup> The theme of the need to record the NFC transformation as a historically situated event occurred repeatedly in contacts with the respondents.

distribution, warehousing and administration. This second component of the prosopographical methodology consisted of semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al 2000:243), depending upon the state of health and availability of the interviewees. The interview samples were purposive, from their relationship to responses in the questionnaires that indicated the possibility of a rich and descriptive contribution to the research questions. The specific interest of the researcher was in generating phenomenological evidence about the existence of influential cultural values and subsequent operational practices at all levels within the diverse range of NFC companies. Structured questions were submitted by letter to a range of key political players who declined interviews but offered limited contributions in their written responses.

### **Conclusion**

This paper began with reviewing researcher concerns around methodological *modus operandi* generally, and then examined and justified a triangular orientation upon which to base the research methodology for this case, and discussed the models applied by the researcher. The design of a methodology is of course neither singular nor prescriptive and will be the result of the unique requirements for each research undertaking. The methodology discussed in this paper is offered as a distinctive approach that may be useful to other researchers as a guideline from which to construct their own specified procedure for the study of a research case, and which may contribute to the development of those higher order skills required from the research student (Easterby-Smith et al: 1991)

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**Appendix 1 NFC questionnaire**

NFC QUESTIONNAIRE -Confidential when completed. X-Reference Number . . . . .  
PLEASE HELP YOUR RESEARCHER BY COMPLETING AS CLEARLY AS  
POSSIBLE, PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS. USE EXTRA SHEETS IF YOU  
WISH AND CROSS REFER TO THE SECTION NUMBER.

1 Personal

Name: Address:  
(For screening duplicate responses and validation  
purposes and copying final study)

Post Code:  
Tel/e-mail:

Gender: Male Female

Education: Secondary  Further/ Adult Ed  University

Age: Now 31-40 41-50 51-60 Over 60

Age: At Buyout under 20 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 Over 60

Are You Active  Retired  now?

Religion: Active  Not active  agnostic  atheist

Ethnicity: White  Asian  Afro-Caribbean  Other . . . . .

2 Which NFC Company were you with? (PLEASE CIRCLE):  
NFC. BRS. PICKFORDS. NCL. ROADLINE. TANKFREIGHT. TEMPCO.  
WASTE MANAGEMENT. COTRALI-PICKFORDS. SPECIAL TRAFFICS  
GROUP. PICKFORDS INDUSTRIAL/HEAVY HAULAGE.  
CONTAINERWAY. ROADFERRY. SCOTTISH FREIGHT COMPANY.  
Other.....

Length of Time with the Company: 1-3 years 3-5 years 5-10 years 10-20  
years 20+ years

Location. . . . .

- From (Dates): \_\_\_\_\_ to: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Are you an NFC Pensioner? Yes No  
Do you consider your NFC pension to be?
- Good Satisfactory Adequate Poor Bad
- 4 Which of the following best describes your Position with the company:
- Full-time  Part-time  Agency  Casual  Cadet
- Unskilled operative- Warehouse/DC  Semi-skilled operative-Warehouse/DC
- Skilled operative Warehouse/DC  Driver/Operator
- Office/Administration  Office/Finance/Cashier  Office/Personnel
- Office/Secretarial  IT operator  Skilled Support Staff  Unskilled
- Support Staff  Supervisor/Team Leader  Other
- Management – Describe:  Trainee  Junior  Line  Middle  Senior
- 5 Which of the following do you consider describes your social class now?
- Working Middle Upper Other (.....) None  
Political allegiance: Conservative Labour Liberal Social Democrat Socialist  
Communist Other (Please Circle)
- 6 Which of the following do you consider describes your social class whilst employed in NFC operations?
- Working Middle Upper Other (.....) None  
Political allegiance: Conservative Labour Liberal Social Democrat Socialist  
Communist Other (Please Circle)
- 7 Which of the following do you consider describes your social class when you were a child?
- Working Middle Upper Other (.....) None  
Political allegiance: Conservative Labour Liberal Social Democrat Socialist  
(Family) Communist Other (Please Circle)

8 Were you a member of a Trades Union/ Staff Association? Yes No

9 Did NFC employ any other members of your family group? If so, please give details including dates:

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_

Where employed: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

10 Were any of your close friends NFC employees? Please give brief details:

Where employed: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

11 THE NFC ORGANISATION:

Was there an overall NFC “culture” or “atmosphere”? Yes/No

If yes, why and how did you see it as operating? What were the indications? Was it positive or negative? Did you think it was good or bad? What were the state of Company/Trade Union relations? etc

If No, why do you think this was?

Did the NFC Company for which you worked have a distinct and separate culture or atmosphere? Yes/No

If not a company culture was there a Depot or Office culture? Yes/No

If yes, what were signs of this culture? Was it nicknames, a team focus, pride in the operation, an “us and them ” thing, a company club?

If Yes, Why do you think this was?

If No, what were the signs of this? Non-co-operation, bad relationships in depots or between depots, bad atmosphere, etc?

Why do you think this was?

Do you think NFC/your Company was efficient at what it did?

Before the buyout: Yes  No

Why?

After the buyout: Yes  No

Why?

12 Your Work at NFC: Before the Buyout (Tick appropriate column)

How much do you agree with the statement below?	Not at all	A little	Sometimes	Very much
A You approached your work at NFC as a dedicated professional. Whatever your position you wanted to provide high quality work & to practice & demonstrate your skills & confidence.				
B You approached your work as at NFC a helper. You wanted to help people.				
C You approached your work at NFC as a believer in high standards and an example to those who questioned the values important to a good operational environment.				
E You approached your work at NFC as a part of self-fulfillment, you wanted to develop yourself and succeed.				

Your work at NFC: After the buyout (Tick appropriate column)

How much do you agree with the statement below?	Not at all	A little	Sometimes	Very much
A You approached your work at NFC as a dedicated professional. Whatever your position you wanted to provide high quality work & to practice & demonstrate your skills & confidence.				
B You approached your work at NFC as a helper. You wanted to help people.				
C You approached your work at NFC as a believer in high standards and an example to those who questioned the values important to a good operational environment.				
D You approached your work at NFC as an innovator who knew how to contribute to the business game. You wanted to win by making the operation more successful.				
E You approached your work at NFC as a part of self-fulfillment you wanted to develop yourself and succeed.				

14 Which of the above work approaches were of most importance to you? Please circle:

First Choice:            A            B            C            D            E

Second Choice:        A            B            C            D            E

How much did your NFC job allow you to apply this positive approach?    Never    A little    Sometimes    Very much

First Choice

Second Choice

15 Before the Buyout:

How much does the following statement apply to you?    Never    A little    Sometimes    Very much  
You had a positive approach to work as an employee but found that the company system and its management prevented you from making a meaningful contribution to operations

16 After the Buyout:

How much does the following statement apply to you?    Never    A little    Sometimes    Very much  
You had a positive approach to work as an employee owner and found that the company system and its management now enabled you to make a meaningful contribution to operations

17

How much does the following statement apply to you?    No            A little            Mostly            Very much  
Your attitudes to your NFC work were the same before and after the Management/Employee Buyout

If there was a change in your attitudes, why do you think this was? If there was no change in your attitudes why do you think this was? Please explain:

18      What was your experience of Pay & Conditions after the buyout? Were they?

Improved    No Change      Reduced

Comments:

19            Please confirm your political affiliation at the time of buyout?

Labour    Conservative                      Liberal            Other/None (Please state)

Had your political view changed from before the buyout? Yes    No

If yes, please state why:

20. NFC prior to the buyout was considered by influential members of Government to be “technically bankrupt”, particularly in the late 70’s.

Do you agree?    Yes      No

Why?

21 Did you take part in the Management Employee Buyout? Yes/No

If Yes, Why?

If No, Why not?

Do you think your participation was?:

A: Self-interest      B: Opportunism      C: Both  
22 Were you given advice about the Management Employee Buyout? Yes/No

If yes, by: Management      Trade Union      Other      Own Research  
(Please circle)

If No, why not? Please explain briefly:

23 Did you buy shares? Yes/No

If Yes, Why?

If No, Why?

24 Did you leave the company after the buyout? Yes No

Why?

25 Do you think the Management Employee Buyout was?

A good thing  A bad thing

Why?

26 What happened between shareholders & none-shareholders after the buyout? Was there any noticeable change in relationships between people?

Yes No

If Yes, what did you see happen to indicate this change?

27 Do you think the Management Employee Buyout of NFC was a unique event that could have been used as a new model for employee participation in Business?

Yes No

Why? Please explain:

28 How do you now see the whole idea of privatisation in the UK from 1982? Please give your opinions and thoughts (you may submit a separate sheet if necessary):

29 In your own words please describe your view of the NFC organisation and your own company before privatisation, and after privatisation. (Feel free to continue on separate sheets).

30 Do you see Peter Thompson as a visionary with the idea, promotion and leading of this particularly unique Management Employee buyout? Yes No

Why?

31 What were your impressions of NFC management as an employee owner after the buyout?

Co-operative

Democratic

Still Managerial and Autocratic

Thank you for your assistance. Will you be prepared to take part in a follow-up interview if requested?  Yes  No

Appendix 2-NFC pre-questionnaire

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE GRADUATE BUSINESS SCHOOL  
MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
Aytoun Building  
Aytoun Street  
Manchester M1 3GH  
Tel: 0161 247 2000 e-mail: a.w.carroll@mmu.ac.uk**

Dear

As mentioned in "*Changing Gear*" I am working on a case study of the transformation of the National Freight Corporation from the public to the privatised sector. I am particularly interested in the period around 1962 to post-buyout in 1982, from the view of the participants at the time of the Management/Employee buyout.

A questionnaire will follow later for you to complete, but I would be interested in preliminary information relating to the following topics:

1. Were all employees encouraged to take up the share offer? Why was there any resistance to buying shares from the staff? How did people finance it generally?
2. What was the general ethos within the NFC organization in the years prior to privatisation? Was there a positive company culture, shared values or an "us & them" culture with operatives/operational management/senior management?
3. Did you or those with whom you worked have any sense of a specific and unique type of new development of industrial democracy in the making as a result of the style of the Management/Employee buyout?
4. Can you recall any instances of specific influences at work either for or against privatisation once it became apparent that the organization was headed that way?
5. Did shareholding put you "all on the same side" once you and your colleagues became employee shareholders?
6. What were relationships like (if at all) with none-participants in the buy-out who did not take up shares?
7. What did you expect to happen with the organisation post-buyout? Did reality meet the vision?
8. Did efficiency in the organisation noticeably improve after privatisation, what was it like before, and how did they measure efficiency?
9. Had the various Parliamentary Acts, over the years that involved periodic change in the nationalised NFC structures, any effect on the attitudes and culture within the organisation and its subsidiaries?
10. Did your political attitudes change as a result of becoming an employee shareholder? What were your political attitudes over the years you worked for NFC in its various forms?

**I ask for your assistance by attempting to recall any information relevant to the above. ANYTHING you can put forward for the historical record of this case study is valuable, and will let the voice of the important part of the NFC organisation, its people, be heard and recorded for future reference.**