

Slide 1



Evaluating Qualitative Management Research: a Contingent Criteriology.

**Workshop Number 7
ESRC Workshops for Qualitative Research in Management**

Evaluating Qualitative Management Research: a Contingent Criteriology: The Facilitator's Guide

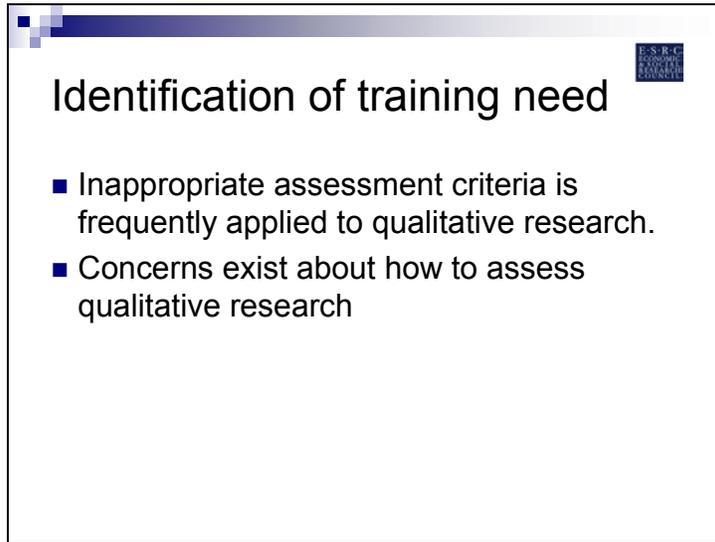
Pre-reading: Prior to this workshop participants must have completed Workshop Number 2: "The Philosophical Commitments and Disputes which Inform Qualitative Research Methodologies". >>

Facilitators need to have read "Evaluating Qualitative Management Research: Towards a Contingent Criteriology" by Johnson, P., Buehring, A., Cassell, C. and Symon G. This is supplied within this facilitator's handbook

Handouts: N/A

Target audience: PhD Students

Extra Notes: Save for a review of further reading at the end of this workshop, facilitator's notes are not provided. This is because this workshop is directly based upon the supplied paper "Evaluating Qualitative Management Research: Towards a Contingent Criteriology" by Johnson, P., Buehring, A. Cassell, C. and Symon G.



Identification of training need

- Inappropriate assessment criteria is frequently applied to qualitative research.
- Concerns exist about how to assess qualitative research

This training need was identified in the accompanying study carried out by Cassell et al 2005 entitled 'Benchmarking Good Practice in Qualitative Research'. >>

Slide 3



Aims



- To illustrate how competing philosophical perspectives underpin different ways of evaluating management research and different research agendas;
- To illustrate the dangers of using particular evaluation criteria, constituted by particular philosophical conventions, to assess all management research;
- To develop a contingent criteriology where appropriate evaluation criteria might be used which vary according to the philosophical assumptions informing the research.



Objectives

By the end of the session you should be able to:

- Outline the problems associated with criteriology with regard to competing processes of research evaluation;
- Explain the constitutive and contingent relationship between philosophical assumptions and the development of different evaluation criteria;
- Describe the key evaluation criteria relevant to four different approaches to management research.

Slide 5



- Historical dominance of quantitative methodology in anglophone countries;
- Nevertheless qualitative management research has a long established pedigree;
- Qualitative research management research characterized by:
 - substantive diversity;
 - competing philosophical assumptions.
- Confusion arises when evaluation criteria constituted by particular philosophical conventions are universally applied to this heterogeneous field;
- To avoid misappropriation there is a need for a **contingent criteriology**.

Slide 6



Four Key Approaches to Management Research:

Knowledge constituting assumptions

Management Schools of Thought:	Ontological Status of Human Behaviour/action:	Epistemology:	Ontological Status of Social Reality:	Methodological Commitments:	Key research questions:
1. Positivism	Determined	Objectivist	Realist	Quantitative methods to enable erklären	<i>What are the causes of variable x?</i>
2. Neo-empiricism	Meaningful	Objectivist	Realist	Qualitative methods to enable verstehen	<i>How do people subjectively experience the world?</i>
3. Critical Theory	Meaningful	Subjectivist	Realist	Qualitative methods to enable a structural phenomenology	<i>How do people subjectively experience the world and how can they free themselves from domination?</i>
4. Post-modernism	Discursive	Subjectivist	Subjectivist	Qualitative methods to enable deconstruction	<i>How and why are particular discourses being voiced while others aren't?</i>

Slide 7



Constituting evaluation criteria in management research
(1). Positivism

Popper's modified positivist methodology emphasizes objectivity and unbiased data collection in order to test hypotheses against an accessible independent social reality in order to protect against "**fanciful theorizing in management research**" (Donaldson, 1996: 164).

Hence 4 key evaluation criteria:

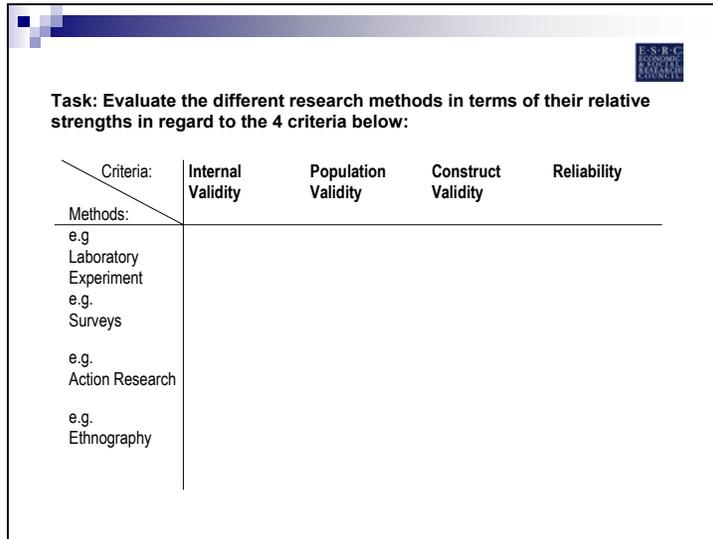
- **Internal validity** - whether what are interpreted as the "causes" produce the "effects" in a given piece of research - necessitates creating, or simulating, conditions of closure which allow empirical testing;

Slide 8



- Testing hypotheses requires the operationalization of abstract concepts causally related by the theory into indicators that measure what they are supposed to measure - **construct validity**.
- A key concern is **external population validity** - generalizing findings to a defined population beyond those respondents participating in the research.
- Need to preserve distance between the researcher and the researched - **reliability** of findings through replication - this refers to the consistency of research findings and refers to the extent to which it is possible for another researcher to (i) replicate the research design with equivalent populations; (ii) find the same results.

Slide 9



Task: Evaluate the different research methods in terms of their relative strengths in regard to the 4 criteria below:

Criteria:	Internal Validity	Population Validity	Construct Validity	Reliability
Methods:				
e.g. Laboratory Experiment				
e.g. Surveys				
e.g. Action Research				
e.g. Ethnography				

Additional Comments

In doing the above exercise make sure that participants chose at least one qualitative method - e.g. ethnography.

A pattern should emerge around how well different methods cope with the above criteria.

Get participants to redo the exercise using a criteria that comes much more from neo-empiricist traditions –

Ecological Validity: the extent to which the social setting in which data has been collected is typical of informants' "normal" everyday lives (i.e. how natural is the research setting?)



Ecological Validity

*“Do our instruments capture the daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat?”
(Cicourel, 1982: 15)*

Raises questions around:

- the extent to which the social setting in which data has been collected is typical of informants' normal “everyday” lives?
- are research findings artefacts of the social scientist's methods of data collection and analytical tools?



(2) Neo-Empiricism

- Through verstehen, and the collection of qualitative data, aims to inductively develop thick descriptions of the patterns actors use to make sense of their worlds - sometimes also used to generate grounded theory.
- But retains positivist commitment to objectivity expressed now as a subject-subject dualism: "**the third- person point of view**" (Schwandt, 1996:62).
- The question is are the philosophical differences with positivism seen as significant when it comes to evaluations research?
 - For Lecompte and Goetz (1982) **no** - hence can use unreconstructed positivist criteria.
 - VS**
 - For Lincoln and Guba (1985) **yes** - hence emphasize the following

Slide 12



- Internal validity with **credibility** (authentic representations);
- External validity with **transferability** (extent of applicability);
- Reliability with **dependability** (minimization of researcher idiosyncrasies);
- Objectivity with **confirmability** (researcher self-criticism).
- Meanwhile Morse (1994) focuses upon the analysis of qualitative data....
- **Comprehension** (learning about a setting);
- **Synthesizing** (identifying patterns in the data);
- **Theorizing** (explanations that fit the data);
- **Recontextualizing** (abstracting emergent theory to new setting and relating it to established knowledge).

Slide 13



- Hammersley (1989; 1990; 1992) adds to these criteria by developing **internal reflexivity** -
- Researcher's critical scrutinization of the impact of their field role (s) upon research settings and findings so as to reduce sources of contamination thereby enhancing **ecological validity (i.e. naturalism)**.
e.g..
 - avoid over rapport with members;
 - treat setting as anthropologically strange;
 - retain balance between insider and outsider;
 - retain social and intellectual distance to preserve analytical space.
- As explained by Seale (1999: 161) - through revealing aspects of themselves and the research process as a traceable audit trail, the qualitative researcher persuades readers that they "can rely on the writer's hard won objectivity" thereby establishing the credibility, dependability and confirmability of findings.
- But a contradiction within neo-empiricist interpretive stance and their **"immaculate perception"** - *repudiation leads to social constructionist approaches.*

Slide 14

(3). Critical Theory



- **Rejection of theory neutral observational language;**
- Kantian philosophical legacy;
- Democracy and reflexivity as epistemic standards - key to enabling this is the development of a critical consciousness where ...

"...first to understand the ideologically distorted subjective situation of some individual or group, second to explore the forces that have caused that situation, and third to show that these forces can be overcome through awareness of them on the part of the oppressed individual or group in question" (Dryzek, 1995: 99).
- Epistemologically legitimate knowledge arises where it is the outcome of empowered democratic collective dialogue.
- This leads to five key evaluation criteria....

Slide 15

e.g. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) 

- **Reflexive interrogation** by the researcher of the epistemological baggage they bring with them;
- Through a **critical ethnography** researchers attempt to sensitize themselves and participants to how hegemonic regimes of truth impact upon the subjectivities of the disadvantaged;
- Positivist conception of validity rejected in favour of the **credibility** of socially constructed realities to those who have democratically participated in their development;
- Generalizability rejected in favour of **accommodation** - where researchers' use their knowledge of a range of comparable contexts to assess similarities and differences;
- **Catalytic validity** - extent to which research changes those it studies so that they understand the world in new ways and use this knowledge to change it - link to pragmatist criterion of **practical adequacy**.

Slide 16



(4). Postmodernism

- Evaluation a controversial issue here - often written off as a modernist anachronism.
- Postmodernists eclectic about what they want whilst being relatively clear about what they are against - e.g. critical theory's essentialism.
- Nevertheless anything does not go! We can infer from subjectivist epistemological and ontological stance the following...
- A relativist position - no good reasons for preferring one representation over others...
- Hence mission is to undermine any claim to epistemological authority, subvert conventional ways of thinking and ...
- Encourage plurality and indeterminacy - **a normative agenda by default..**



Results in several possible evaluation criteria: 

- Display and unsettle the discursive rules of the game through **deconstruction** to reveal those meanings which have been suppressed, sublimated or forgotten and thereby develop;
- At most deconstruction can only evoke alternative social constructions of reality within a text which can themselves be deconstructed - **hyper-reflexivity**;
- **Paralogy** - need to destabilize their own narratives to avoid the a contrived invisibility around the authorial presence behind the text that privileges the text and encourages discursive closure - **decentering the author**;
- The result - a preference-less toleration of the **polyphonic or heteroglossia** - where multi-vocal authors are empowered to manipulate signifiers to create new textual domains of intelligibility which are then destabilized ad infinitum.

Slide 18

<i>Schools of Thought</i>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Neo-empiricism</i>	<i>Critical Theory</i>	<i>Postmodernism</i>
Underlying Philosophical Assumptions	Real world independent of human cognition which science can neutrally access to produce privileged knowledge.	Real and intersubjective worlds which science can neutrally represent and explain.	External reality which science can never know save through the lens of human phenomenal worlds.	Hyper-realities produced through discourses, narratives, language games etc..
Research Aims	Description of the world, and explanation through prediction to improve management decision making.	Discovery of the intersubjective to describe and explain action in and around organizations.	To understand managerial hegemony, explore its causes and develop strategies through dialogue to change the situation.	To understand the ways in which discourses are sustained and constitute subjectivities and identities.
Methodological Commitments	Methodological monism: erklaren and deductive testing of hypotheses through quantification.	Verstehen to inductively describe and explain patterns of actors' meanings - sometimes through quasi-causal accounts.	Critical ethnographies etc. to facilitate transformational change and emancipation.	Deconstruction of texts whether written or spoken; new styles of writing which challenge authorial privilege.
Evaluation Criteria for assessing management research	Internal validity; construct validity; external validity and reliability.	Internally reflexive audit trails to demonstrate credibility, dependability, confirmability and ecological validity; transferability.	Accommodation, catalytic validity and various forms of authenticity expressed through reflexive dialogue/democracy.	Heteroglossia; unsettling of hegemonic, in which author is de-centred through multivocality.

Conclusions

- Management research embraces a diverse array of practices driven by varying knowledge constituting assumptions;
- This legitimizes distinctive perspectives, research agendas and promulgates particular evaluation criteria;
- Therefore trying to articulate an all embracing, indisputable, set of regulative standards to police management research is both a forlorn hope and an unfair practice;
- Hence the need for a *contingent criteriology* that sensitizes management researchers to the particular quality issues that their own and others' research should address.
- But there are institutional barriers to a contingent criteriology - hence need to be concerned about how and why in particular social contexts certain research practices are deemed valuable while others are discounted as valueless aberrations.

Futher reading:

- Bochner, A.P. (2000) Criteria Against Ourselves, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(2): 266-272.
- Mitchell, T.R. (1985) An Evaluation of the Validity of Correlation Research Conducted in Organizations, *Academy of Management Review*, 2: 192-205.
- Scandura, T.A. and Williams, E.A. (2000) "Research Methodology in Management: Current Practices, Trends, and Implications for Future Research", *Academy of Management Journal* 43(6) 1248-1264.
- Cronbach, L.J. & Meehl, P.E. (1955) Construct validity in psychological tests. *Psychological Bulletin*, 52, 281-302. .

Additional Comments:

A review of the literature on criteriology.

Although talking generally about social science, Bochner (2000) lays out some of the problems inherent in criteriology. In doing so he argues that the philosophical diversity evident in the social sciences suggests a need for caution since there may be a tendency to universally apply evaluation criteria constituted by particular philosophical conventions, as if they were "culture-free" (ibid.: 267), to what is a heterogeneous field inspired by a number of competing epistemological and ontological dispositions which articulate competing justificatory logics. Clearly such misappropriation is not a trivial matter, not least of all to those management researchers whose work might be unintentionally misjudged.

The potential problem of misappropriation is often ignored in statements concerning how to evaluate business and management research. For example, Mitchell (1985) lays out an overview of positivistic evaluation criteria which he uses to identify how published research might be improved. This is followed by a more recent article by Scandura and Williams (2000) who in their review of research in three top-tier American business and management journals examine

changing practices in the triangulation of methods and how different forms of validity have been addressed. Their research suggests that business and management research may be “moving even further away from rigour” (2000: 1259) by failing to methodologically triangulate findings - something which has resulted in a decrease in the internal, external and construct validity of studies.

Whilst the evaluation criteria proposed and used in these two articles are appropriate to positivist hypothetico-deductive research, they could be inadvertently applied in a universalistic manner and thereby would be open to the charge of being philosophically parochial and lacking sensitivity to difference, by producing what amounts to a one-sided reductionism. Hence there is a need for considerable caution in applying such positivist criteria.



- Schwab, D.P. (1980) Construct validity in Organizational Behaviour, *Research in Organizations*, 2: 3-43.
- Campbell, D.T. & Fiske, D.W. (1959) Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod index. *Psychological Bulletin*, 56, 81-105.
- Campbell, D.T. (1957) Factors Relevant to the Validity of Experiments in Social Settings, *Psychological Bulletin*, 54: 297-312.
- Bracht, G.H. and Glass, G.U. (1968) The External Validity of Experiments, *American Educational Research Journal*, 5: 537-74 .

Additional Comments:

Such positivist criteria are explored in articles by Cronbach and Meehl (1955); Schwab (1980). Rice (1978), Campbell and Friske (1959) and Campbell (1957) who elaborate underlying rationale of different types of validity and how they interrelate with regard to an array of deductive research strategies.

Bracht and Glass (1968) point to the serious problems that arise when extrapolating inferences from results of research undertaken in experimental conditions. These problems occur because of the experiment's relatively artificial setting causes a lack of ecological validity, or naturalism, which raises questions around whether or not the behaviour observed in experimental conditions would be repeated in everyday life. Thus Bracht and Glass (ibid.) add ecological validity to the list of evaluation criteria for hypothetico-deductive research and present certain strategies that might be used to ameliorate this problem.

Cicourel's (1982) contribution explains the implications of ecological validity as a criterion for assessing interview and survey research whilst Knapp (1981) discusses the issue of validating ethnographic accounts in an organizational

setting. Issues such as ecological validity and Knapp's member validation have important implications for how neo-empiricist research can be evaluated. However they have also provoked some controversy to the extent that we can also see some divisions within neo-empiricism regarding evaluation criteria.

Slide 22



- Knapp, W.S. (1981) On the validity of accounts about everyday life, *Sociological Review*, 29(3): 543-526.
- Cicourel, A.V. (1982) Interviews, Surveys, and the Problem of Ecological Validity, *American Sociologist*, 17: 11-20.
- Lecompte, M. and Goetz, J. (1982) "Problems of reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research", *Review of Educational Research* 52(1): 31-60.
- Morse, J.M. (1994) Emerging from the data: the cognitive process of analysis in qualitative enquiry, in J.M. Morse *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*, London: Sage.

Additional Comments:

In the article by Lecompte and Goetz (1982), the idea that qualitative research is philosophically distinct from quantitative research is downplayed and leads them to apply relatively unreconstructed positivist evaluation criteria to ethnographic research whilst identifying some methodological strategies qualitative researchers could use to ameliorate possible weaknesses. In contrast, in the article by Seale (1999), philosophical differences are considered to be more significant and therefore he traces the evolution and proliferation of various alternative sets of evaluation criteria with regard to different forms of qualitative research and their underlying philosophical commitments. However Seale is not content to just review others' work, therefore he develops his own ideas around criteriology to present a form of triangulation as a pragmatic device to ensure quality in qualitative research which seems to articulate a form of methodological pluralism. This theme that qualitative research is philosophically different to quantitative research is continued by Guba and Lincoln (1994). Here they interrogate the philosophical underpinnings of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to undertaking research and propose that different evaluation criteria must be deployed depending on the paradigmatic location of the researcher whose

research is being evaluated. In doing so they explore how it is necessary to evaluate some qualitative research in terms of trustworthiness and authenticity rather than different types of validity and reliability.



- Seale, C. (1999) *Quality in Qualitative Research*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5(4): 465-478.
- Kinchloe, J.L. and McLaren, P.L. (1998) "Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research" in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, London: Sage
- Tsoukas, H. (1989) The Validity of Idiographic Research Explanations, *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 551-561.
- Mabry, L. (2002) Postmodern Evaluation - or not? *American Journal of Evaluation*, 23(2): 141 - 57.
- Schwandt, T.A. (1996) "Farewell to Criteriology", *Qualitative Inquiry* 2(1): 58-72.

Additional Comments:

A significant philosophical shift away from neo-empiricist assumptions is also evident in Kinchloe and McLaren's consideration of evaluation criteria in their article upon qualitative research and critical theory. Within this mode of engagement they argue that trustworthiness is a more appropriate concept to use to evaluate critical research since it signifies very different philosophical assumptions about the research process in comparison to positivist approaches. They proceed to identify how trustworthiness may be assessed and produce three key criteria which fit the critical theory's emancipatory agenda: the credibility of the portrayals of constructed realities; anticipatory accommodation; and catalytic validity. A somewhat different stance upon the issue of validity is illustrated by Tsoukas' contribution (1989). Here he addresses the issue of external validity from a critical realist epistemological and ontological stance and shows how this philosophy, with its distinctive understanding of causation and explanation, reconfigures how we can make general claims about the world.

For some postmodernists their commitment to relativism means that the development of specific evaluative criteria for the outcomes of qualitative inquiry

cannot be sanctioned. Indeed any evaluation per se is seen as a positivist anachronism because postmodernists argue that phenomena are constituted by the methodologies used by the researcher to examine them.

Therefore any evaluative criteria must be rejected as rhetorical devices in a hegemonic scientific discourse which masks the researcher's own subjectivity to produce truth-effects. Indeed, postmodernism's nihilistic tendencies could promote a wholly permissive stance that denies any chance of developing criteria for judging the quality of any business and management research, including the postmodern, since such evaluation frameworks themselves must represent discursively constituted regimes of power and must be, therefore, subverted.

Slide 24

- 
- Locke, K. and Golden-Biddle, K. (1997) Constructing Opportunities for Contribution: Structuring Intertextual Coherence and “Problematizing” in *Organization Studies*, *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(5): 1023-1062.
 - Bedeian, A.G. (2004) Peer Review and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Management Discipline, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 3(2): 198-216.

Additional Comments:

Mabry (2002) and Schwandt (1996) articulate important stances on these issues. Although not specifically concerned with criteriology per se, Mabry (ibid.) is concerned with the possibilities and problems of evaluation from what she considers to be two different postmodern stances: affirmative and extreme postmodernisms - a rupture primarily due to the different ontologies she sees to be at play. In contrast, Schwandt (ibid.) writes more from the stance of critical theory and focuses upon how to redefine social inquiry, as a practical philosophy, with a postfoundationalist epistemology. This project entails dialogue, critique and democracy, without recourse to criteriology as it abandons any “any indisputable criteria for distinguishing legitimate from not so legitimate scientific knowledge” (ibid: 70).

The last two articles we recommend are about how credibility and scientific rigour are established in practice by looking some of the social processes which influence what research gets to be published in refereed journals. In doing so each article, in different ways, casts doubt upon the possibility of impartially using evaluation criteria to assess the quality of research in practice. Nevertheless they

each provide important insights into the process of getting published which are relevant to any researcher. The first (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997) uses grounded theory to show how the authors of journal articles textually construct opportunities for making contributions to the field of organizational research through the use of a variety of rhetorical practices. The” function is to persuade an intended audience by establishing the uniqueness of their contribution and whilst crafting the legitimacy of their work in the context of science. The second, by Bedeian (2004), looks at the social processes that shape the content of what is published in management research. Here the focus is an examination of the social interactions between referees, editors and contributors during peer-review processes and how those interactions influence the constitution of knowledge-claims, quality-control and notions of rigour. Here Bedeian argues that the development of the management discipline requires a more “sophisticated understanding of how knowledge claims are socially constructed and validated” (ibid: 213).

Slide 25

There is a space on our website for feedback on the training modules. Please use it to record any feedback including modifications/ adaptations made to the original modules. >>

Contents

Introduction and user instructions

Workshop 1: Skills of the qualitative researcher

Workshop 2: Philosophies that inform qualitative research

Workshop 3: Reflexivity

Workshop 4: Range of qualitative methods

Workshop 5: Qualitative analysis

Workshop 6: Qualitative writing and publishing skills

Workshop 7: Assessment criteria

Workshop 8: Reviewing qualitative papers and research grants

Workshop 9: Supervision for qualitative research