


Slide 1



Reflexivity

Workshop Number 3
ESRC Workshops for Qualitative Research in
Management

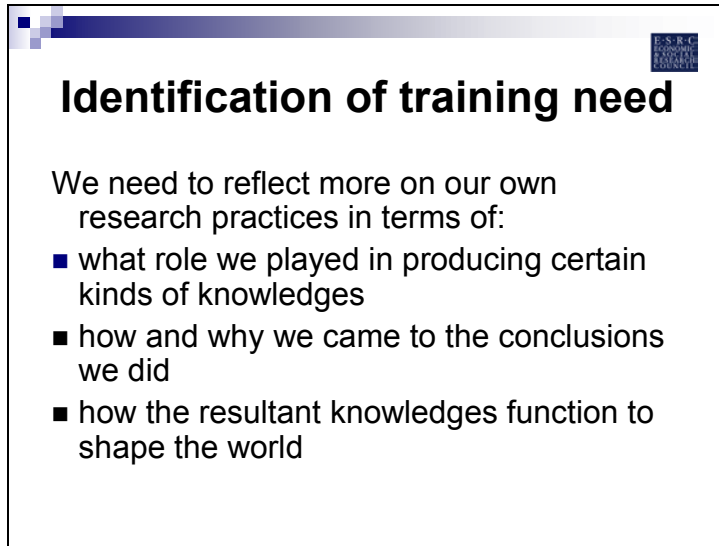
Reflexivity: The Facilitator's Guide

Pre-reading: Johnson, P. and Duberley, J. (2003). Reflexivity in management research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40, 1279-1303.

Handouts: N/A

Target audience: Researchers, PhD students

Any thing else to note?: N/A



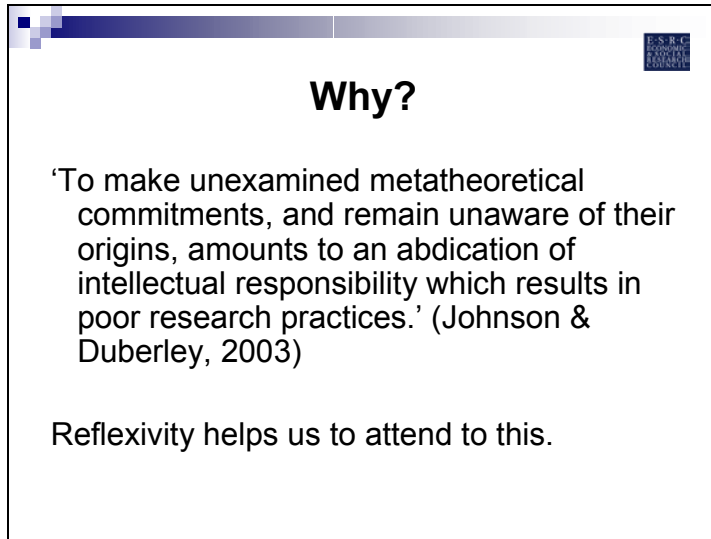
Identification of training need

We need to reflect more on our own research practices in terms of:

- what role we played in producing certain kinds of knowledges
- how and why we came to the conclusions we did
- how the resultant knowledges function to shape the world

Additional Comments:

While we tend to view the 'findings' of research as naturally emerging from the data collection and analysis methods, they perhaps should be viewed as shaped by the choices made by researchers over the course of the research process.

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Why?

'To make unexamined metatheoretical commitments, and remain unaware of their origins, amounts to an abdication of intellectual responsibility which results in poor research practices.' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003)

Reflexivity helps us to attend to this.



Additional Comments:

Researchers are in a powerful position to say what does and does not constitute knowledge.



Aims

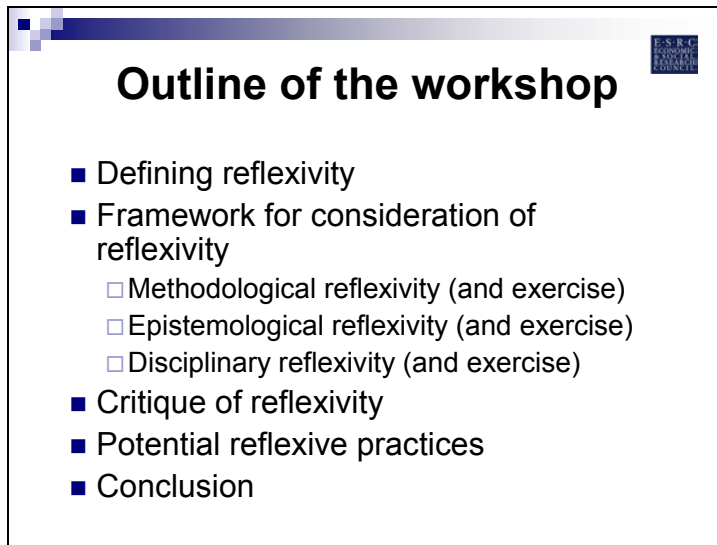
- Define reflexivity
- Present framework of different areas of reflexivity to stimulate discussion
- Introduce some relevant writing in the area
- Encourage reflexive (research) practice



Objectives

By end of the session you should be able to:

- Define reflexivity
- Conduct a critical appraisal of your own research work
- Recognise the limitations of various aspects of reflexive practice
- Consider various practical ways of enhancing reflexivity in own practice
- Source further reading

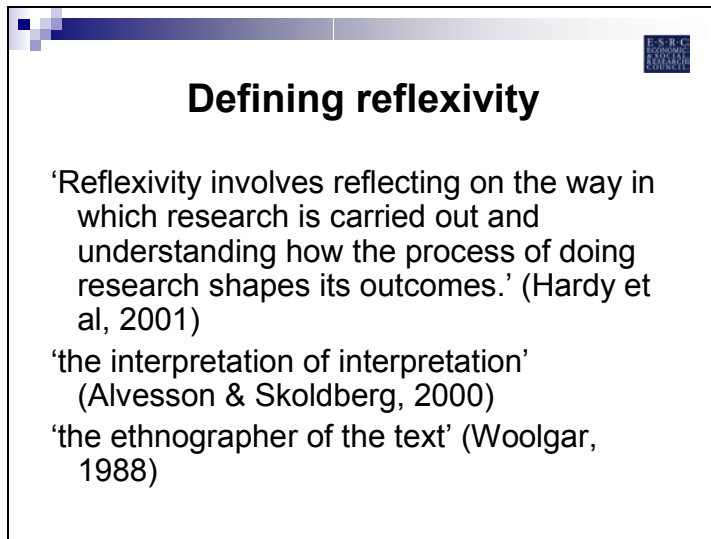


Outline of the workshop

- Defining reflexivity
- Framework for consideration of reflexivity
 - Methodological reflexivity (and exercise)
 - Epistemological reflexivity (and exercise)
 - Disciplinary reflexivity (and exercise)
- Critique of reflexivity
- Potential reflexive practices
- Conclusion

Additional Comments:

In the exercises, participants should be asked to discuss their answers to the questions in small groups. It is most beneficial if the groups consist of no more than 4 – 5 participants (or less depending on numbers in larger group) and include researchers who use a mix of research approaches. Participants should reflect on a recent research project – for PhD students this may be the project they intend to pursue.



Defining reflexivity

'Reflexivity involves reflecting on the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes.' (Hardy et al, 2001)

'the interpretation of interpretation' (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000)

'the ethnographer of the text' (Woolgar, 1988)

Additional Comments:

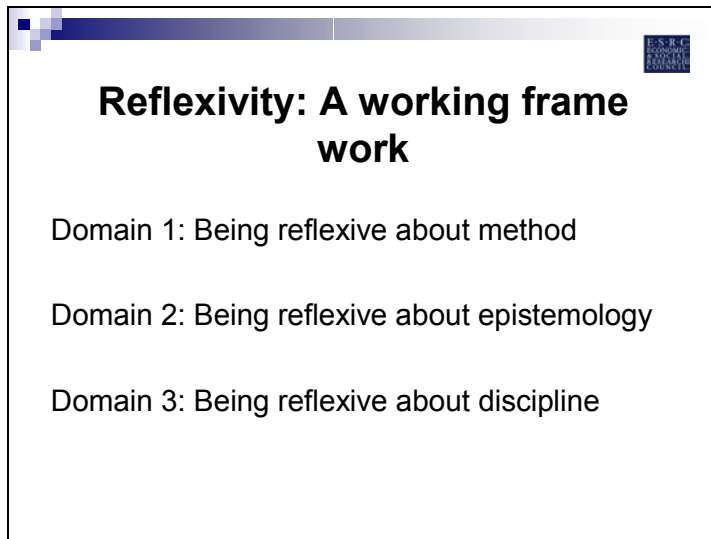
In essence, reflexivity entails engaging in critical appraisal of own practice - whether this be research or client work. Reflecting on why we frame issues in particular ways, investigate them in particular ways, and how such approaches lead us to particular kinds of solutions and theories and not others.

Having produced a particular interpretation of the data, considering how we arrived at that interpretation.

By 'ethnographer of the text' is meant: what seems mundane to insiders becomes interesting and questionable - exposing underlying assumptions.

It is important to emphasise that reflexivity is not a method or validity technique with which one could engage by the following through of particular mechanistic practices.

Another important point to emphasise is that reflexivity should not be confined just to particular kinds of epistemological approaches - no approach should be immune from considering its origins, commitments and impacts.

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Reflexivity: A working frame work

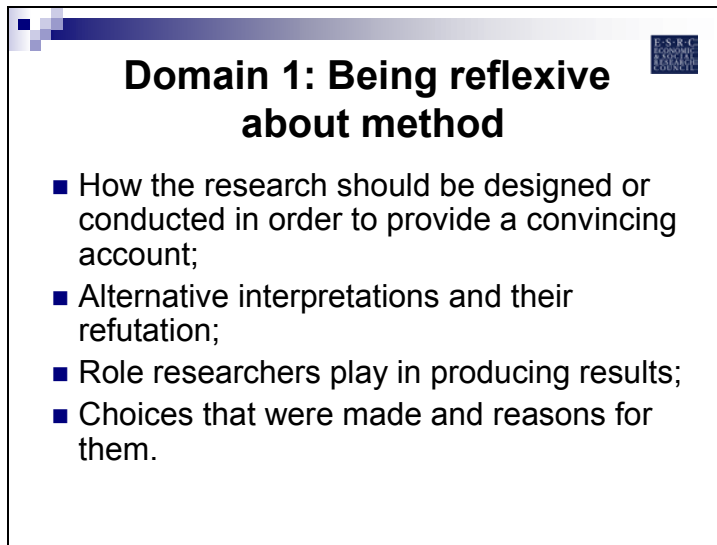
Domain 1: Being reflexive about method

Domain 2: Being reflexive about epistemology

Domain 3: Being reflexive about discipline

Additional Comments:

Various frameworks for considering reflexivity have been offered by different organizational researchers. For example Johnson & Duberley equate different kinds of reflexivity with different kinds of metatheoretical commitments (eg positivism, postmodernism and critical theory), Holland talks about 4 different 'levels', Finlay suggests 5 different 'maps'. Here we are confining ourselves to talking through the importance of reflexivity with respect to three aspects of research/practice: methodology, epistemological commitments and disciplinary framing.



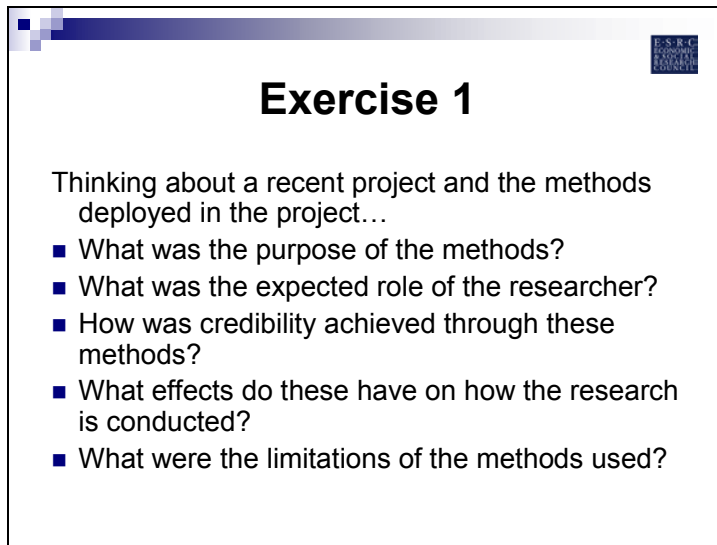
Domain 1: Being reflexive about method

- How the research should be designed or conducted in order to provide a convincing account;
- Alternative interpretations and their refutation;
- Role researchers play in producing results;
- Choices that were made and reasons for them.

Additional Comments:

In this domain, we are centrally concerned with practices and procedures for research and intervention and how these are implicated in the conclusions reached through the research i.e. how and why the research was designed, conducted and analysed, and how this led to particular conclusions. Thus methodological reflexivity may entail reflecting on these kinds of issues (as outlined in the slide). This is the area of reflexivity in which we are most practiced and which is encouraged in the processes of peer review etc.

Reflexivity on this issue is important because by making the research process transparent, we make it public and therefore accountable (Finlay, 2002). We might consider these issues through a quantitative or qualitative perspective but our concerns in these areas would vary accordingly, as we shall see.



Exercise 1

Thinking about a recent project and the methods deployed in the project...

- What was the purpose of the methods?
- What was the expected role of the researcher?
- How was credibility achieved through these methods?
- What effects do these have on how the research is conducted?
- What were the limitations of the methods used?

Additional Comments:

The objective of this exercise is for participants to think through the assumptions of the methods they use and, if possible, compare them.

For example in considering purpose, participants might think about:

In quantitative research, trying to control or elucidate limitations to achieve objectivity

In qualitative research trying to achieve greater reflection on interpretation of empirical material.

In considering the role of researcher, participants may think about:

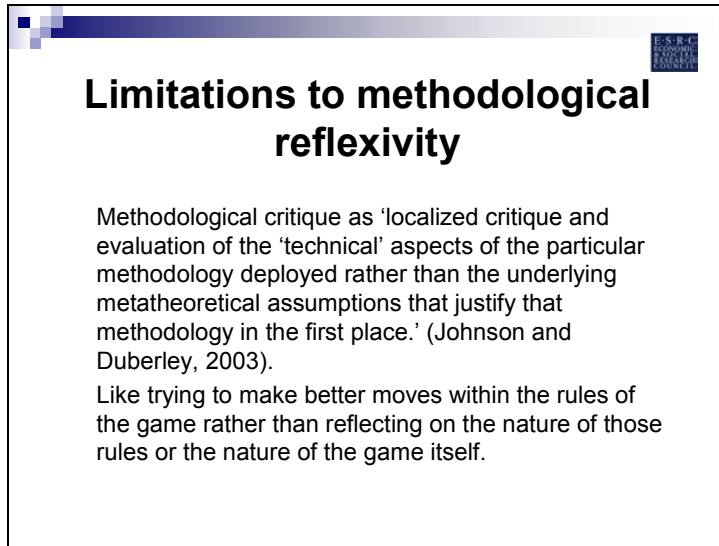
In quantitative research, trying to eradicate the voice of the researcher - this may be disingenuous as researcher always implicitly there by virtue of the structuring of the research

Qualitative research, may, in contrast, highlight the voice of researcher - this may function however to maintain the authority of the researcher

In considering effects, participants may think about :

In quantitative research (or normative positions), may be trying to achieve greater rigour in methods.

In qualitative research, may be about acknowledging relationships and the situated nature of research




Limitations to methodological reflexivity

Methodological critique as 'localized critique and evaluation of the 'technical' aspects of the particular methodology deployed rather than the underlying metatheoretical assumptions that justify that methodology in the first place.' (Johnson and Duberley, 2003).

Like trying to make better moves within the rules of the game rather than reflecting on the nature of those rules or the nature of the game itself.

Additional Comments:

Johnson & Duberley suggest that an emphasis on methodological issues may lead to the uncritical acceptance of expert management research because it seems technically sound.



Domain 2: Being reflexive about epistemological assumptions

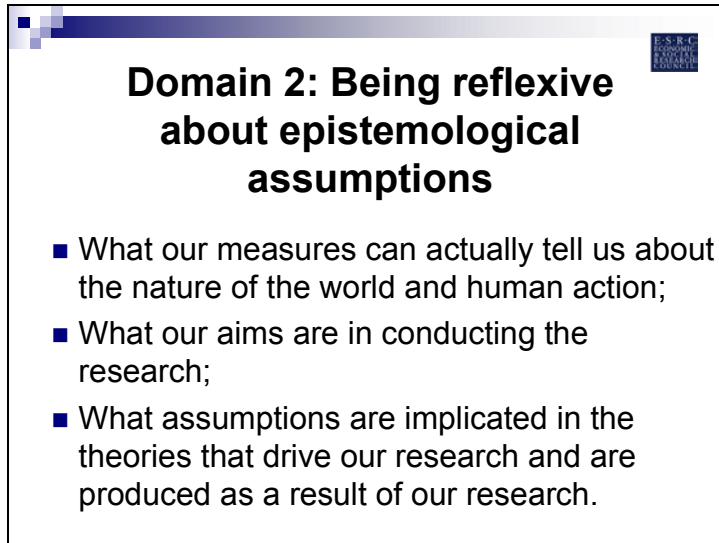
P.S.R.C.
PRACTICE
SCIENCE
RESEARCH
CONNECTION

‘An important function of reflexive analysis is to expose the underlying assumptions on which arguments and stances are built’ (Holland, 1999)

‘become more consciously reflexive by thinking about our own thinking, by noticing and criticizing our own epistemological pre-understandings and their effects on research, and by exploring possible alternative commitments.’ (Johnson and Cassell, 2001)

Additional Comments:

In essence, this domain entails reflexivity concerning our assumptions about what we can know and how we can claim to know it i.e. ontology and epistemology.



Domain 2: Being reflexive about epistemological assumptions

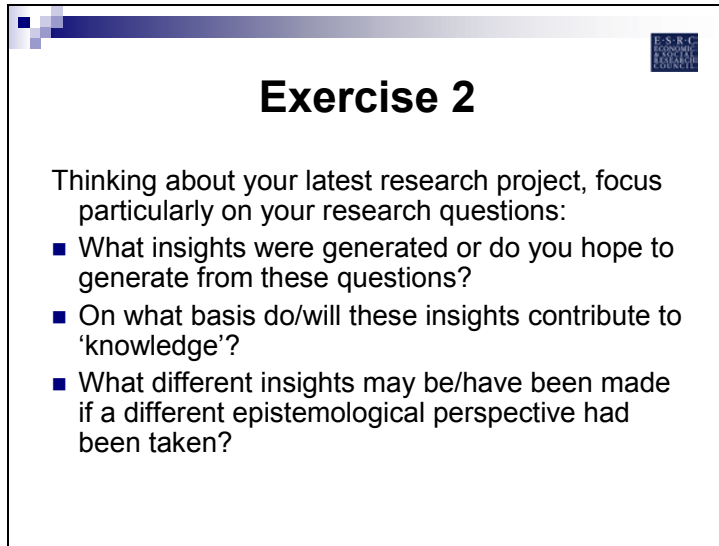
- What our measures can actually tell us about the nature of the world and human action;
- What our aims are in conducting the research;
- What assumptions are implicated in the theories that drive our research and are produced as a result of our research.

Additional Comments:

Thus epistemological reflexivity may entail reflecting on these kinds of issues (as outlined in the slide).

What we think we can achieve by conducting certain kinds of research.

What assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how we can understand people are built into theories (not just methods) e.g. cause and effect theories may imply that people react to situations rather than interpreting or creating situations? Sense-making theories assume that people are active in creating their own cause and effect 'stories'.

The slide features a blue gradient header bar at the top. On the left side of the header, there is a small graphic of a grid of squares. On the right side, there is a small logo for the Philosophy Society of the University of Cambridge. The main content area is white with a black border. The title "Exercise 2" is centered in a large, bold, black font. Below the title, there is a paragraph of text followed by a bulleted list of three items.

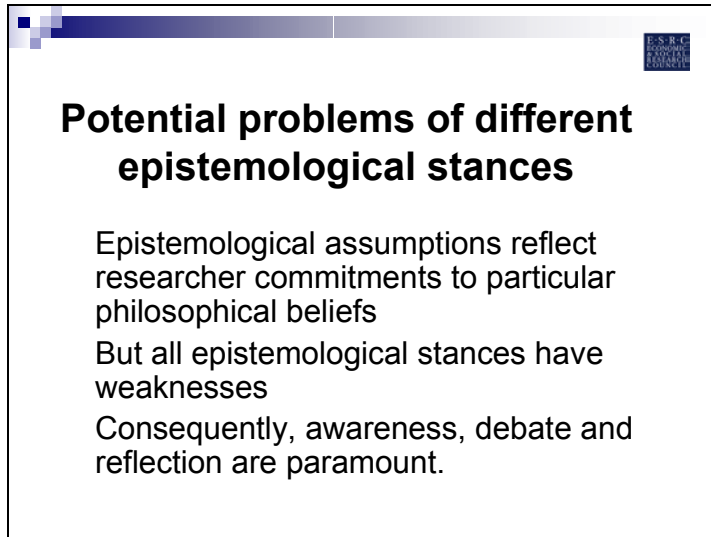
Exercise 2

Thinking about your latest research project, focus particularly on your research questions:

- What insights were generated or do you hope to generate from these questions?
- On what basis do/will these insights contribute to 'knowledge'?
- What different insights may be/have been made if a different epistemological perspective had been taken?

Additional Comments:

The objective of this exercise is to get participants to think about how different beliefs about the nature of knowledge and purpose of research may lead us to look for different kinds of insights in our work (and ignore or downplay others).



Potential problems of different epistemological stances

Epistemological assumptions reflect researcher commitments to particular philosophical beliefs
But all epistemological stances have weaknesses
Consequently, awareness, debate and reflection are paramount.

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Additional Comments:

In summary, weaknesses of the various positions considered in these workshops would include:

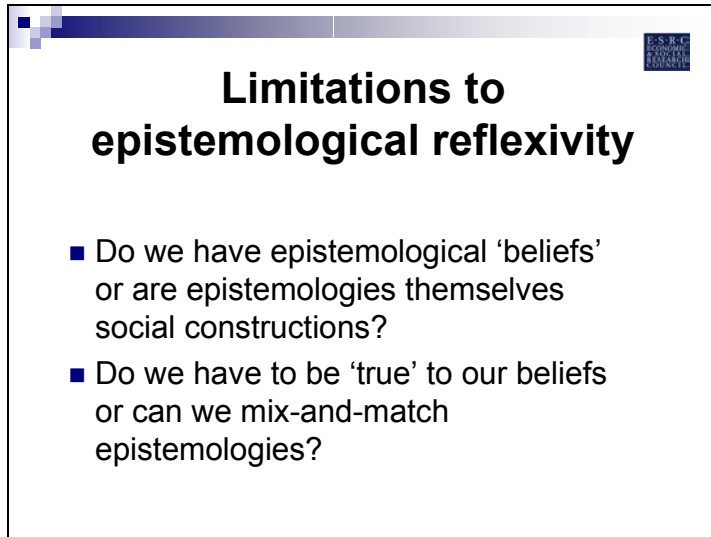
Positivist: Excessive control and assumptions of objectivity

Interpretivist/Neo-Positivist: Assumptions of transparency

Critical theory: False consciousness

Postmodernism: Relativist spiral.

We should be aware of how certain accounts may be privileged in this way but appreciate that no one approach has 'the answer'. Participants could reflect on the effects of privileging a particular approach (e.g. discounting other approaches as invalid, stifling debate, discrimination in the allocation of valued rewards like publications or grant money, stifling innovation?)

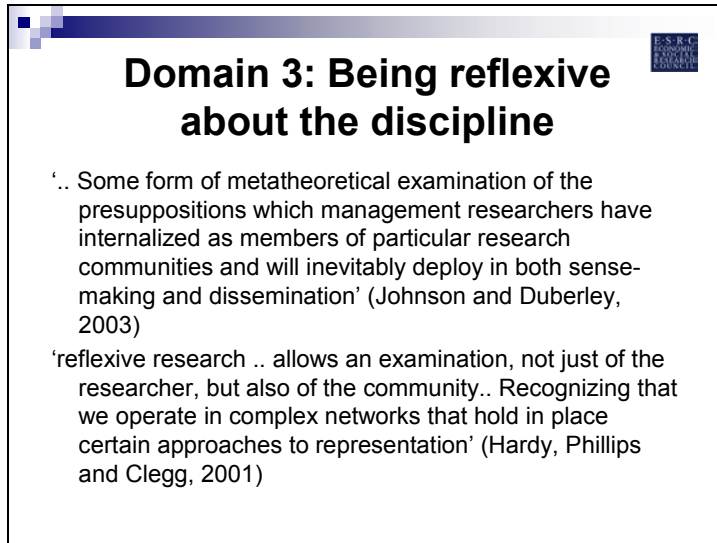


Limitations to epistemological reflexivity

- Do we have epistemological 'beliefs' or are epistemologies themselves social constructions?
- Do we have to be 'true' to our beliefs or can we mix-and-match epistemologies?

Additional Comments

Weick (1999) suggests that epistemological commitments encourage 'monologues that overwhelm rather than dialogues that reconcile' (Weick, 1999) i.e. that reflexivity may encourage a search for epistemological supremacy ('paradigm wars' of organization studies, the 'crisis' of social psychology). This doesn't however seem like a necessary outcome, rather it may encourage dialogue as people reflect on own positions as subjectively created.



Domain 3: Being reflexive about the discipline

‘.. Some form of metatheoretical examination of the presuppositions which management researchers have internalized as members of particular research communities and will inevitably deploy in both sense-making and dissemination’ (Johnson and Duberley, 2003)

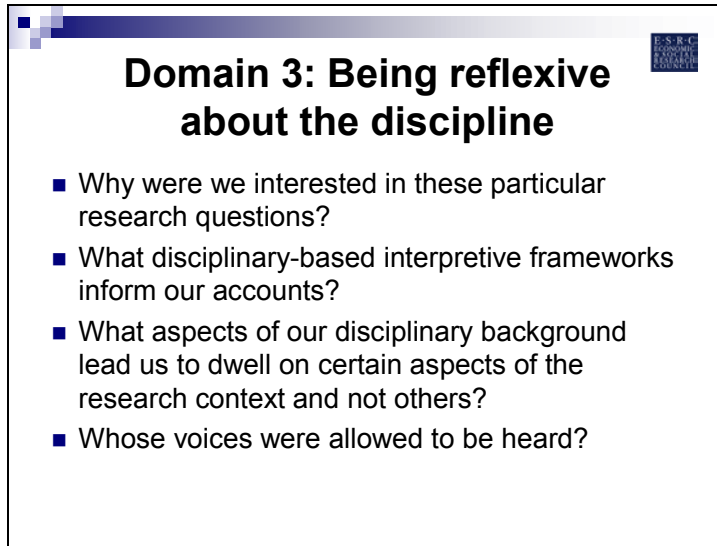
‘reflexive research .. allows an examination, not just of the researcher, but also of the community.. Recognizing that we operate in complex networks that hold in place certain approaches to representation’ (Hardy, Phillips and Clegg, 2001)

Additional comments:

In essence, this domain entails reflexivity concerning social and political limitations and ideological functions of our (various) disciplines. Exposing the interests behind knowledge.

How is a particular version of reality created through particular research practices and whose interests does this serve? For example, the participant gives an account to the researcher, the researcher makes knowledge of it: the participant is initially author of their own account but becomes the subject of the researcher’s account.

How does the research community maintain certain approaches? Knowledge is produced through a combination of the author’s (researcher’s) representation of it (report/write up) against a background of discipline specific theory and the participation of the actual organizational members. In addition, researchers act within certain conventions, rules and practices eg peer review, style guides (Hardy et al, 2001).

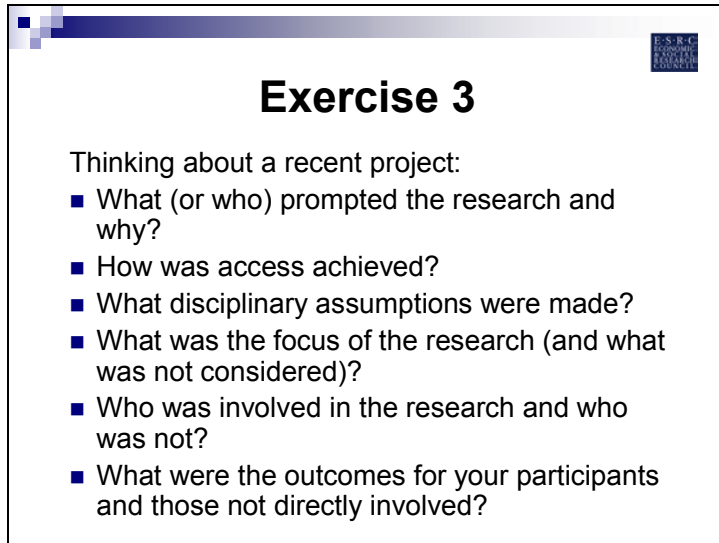


Domain 3: Being reflexive about the discipline

- Why were we interested in these particular research questions?
- What disciplinary-based interpretive frameworks inform our accounts?
- What aspects of our disciplinary background lead us to dwell on certain aspects of the research context and not others?
- Whose voices were allowed to be heard?

Additional comments:

Thus epistemological reflexivity may entail reflecting on these kinds of issues (as outlined in the slide).



Exercise 3

Thinking about a recent project:

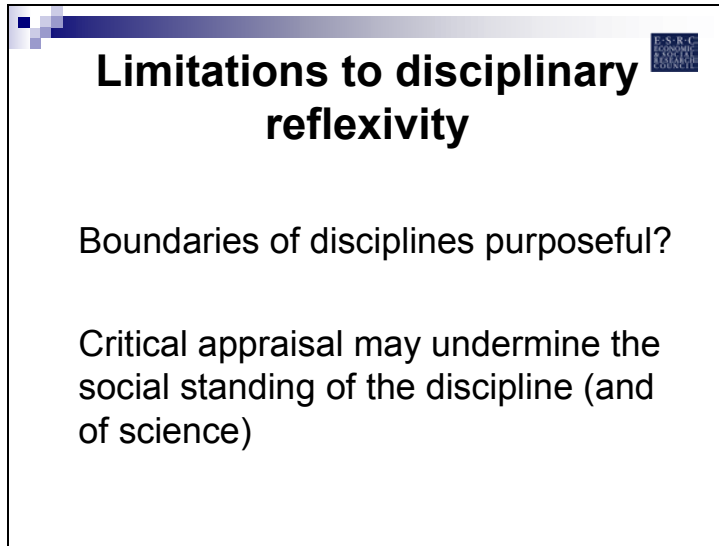
- What (or who) prompted the research and why?
- How was access achieved?
- What disciplinary assumptions were made?
- What was the focus of the research (and what was not considered)?
- Who was involved in the research and who was not?
- What were the outcomes for your participants and those not directly involved?

Additional Comments:

The objective of this exercise is for participants to reflect on how disciplinary assumptions may structure a research project, how such assumptions may favour the production of certain types of knowledges and how participants may be affected by or even constructed by the process.

For example, in psychology, the ‘psychologising’ of the individual (examination of ‘internal’ cognitions etc) can have the effect of individualising, putting responsibility on the individual and ignoring the structural/policy aspects of a situation.

Conversely, in business studies, the emphasis on business outcomes may gloss over individual differences or privilege managerial accounts to the detriment of employee accounts.



**Limitations to disciplinary
reflexivity**

Boundaries of disciplines purposeful?

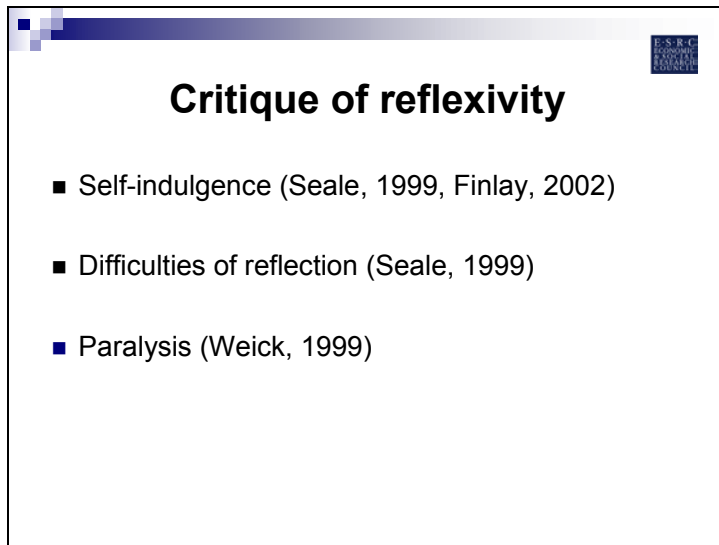
Critical appraisal may undermine the
social standing of the discipline (and
of science)

Additional Comments:

Problems with disciplinary reflexivity include:

Is there a point to disciplinary boundaries (explore here politics, focus etc)

It introduces an element of uncertainty into the discipline? On the other hand, a more reflexive and inclusive discipline may be a more credible one?



Critique of reflexivity

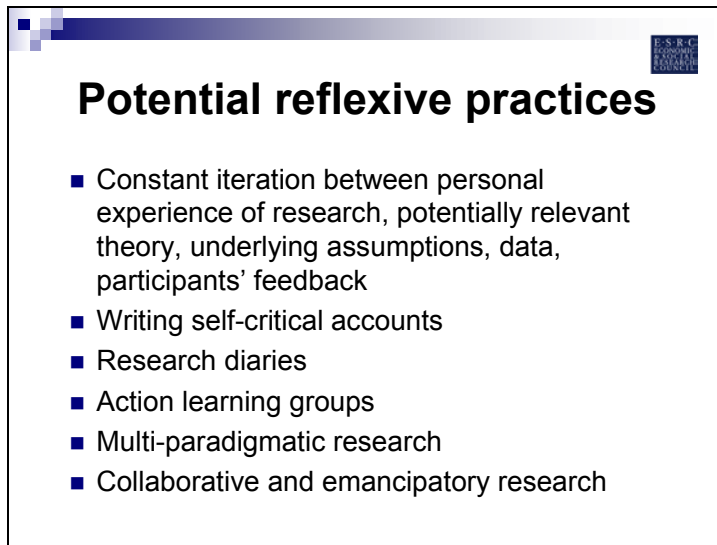
- Self-indulgence (Seale, 1999, Finlay, 2002)
- Difficulties of reflection (Seale, 1999)
- Paralysis (Weick, 1999)

Additional Comments:

Self indulgence Reflexivity as (inappropriate) psychoanalysis, Seale (1999) suggests that this maintains the authority of the researcher (and may function as a claim to greater authenticity/validity).

Difficulties of Reflection The exposing of subconscious influences is impossible? Can we access our presuppositions?

Paralysis Excessive reflexivity may imply that we can't say anything or make any interventions; may lead to personal doubt; lack of creativity; no longer respect our own roles as researchers because of our position and purpose in the social institution of science.



Potential reflexive practices

- Constant iteration between personal experience of research, potentially relevant theory, underlying assumptions, data, participants' feedback
- Writing self-critical accounts
- Research diaries
- Action learning groups
- Multi-paradigmatic research
- Collaborative and emancipatory research

Additional Comments:

Some (practical) ways to overcome some of these difficulties and to pursue reflexivity (notes below expand on each point of slide):

Finlay suggests that to avoid self-indulgence we should be constantly linking our personal experience of the research to theories and grounding it in the data.


Giving our audiences the tools to criticise our accounts may overcome our paralysis.

Diaries may encourage reflection on the day to day practices of our research.

To expose our underlying (sub-conscious) assumptions, we could consider an involvement in action learning groups.

Lewis & Grimes give examples of how we might achieve different perspectives on research by viewing the problem from different epistemological positions.


Johnson & Duberley suggest the production of knowledge not just from the privileged authoritative few - but as an outcome of public debate and agreement - the democratic negotiation of the social construction of reality. Practical outcome of this they see as participatory research such that participants are also involved in determining the research agenda and new interests and objectives currently excluded are pursued.



Conclusion

The sort of critical appraisal, evaluation and development reviewed here is a continual process.

Therefore reflexivity is always a pursuit and never a destination.



Further Sources

Alvesson, M. and Skoldberg, K. (2000) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2, 209-230.

Hardy, C., Phillips, N. and Clegg, S. (2001) Reflexivity in organization and management theory: A study of the production of the research 'subject'. *Human Relations*, 54, 531-560.

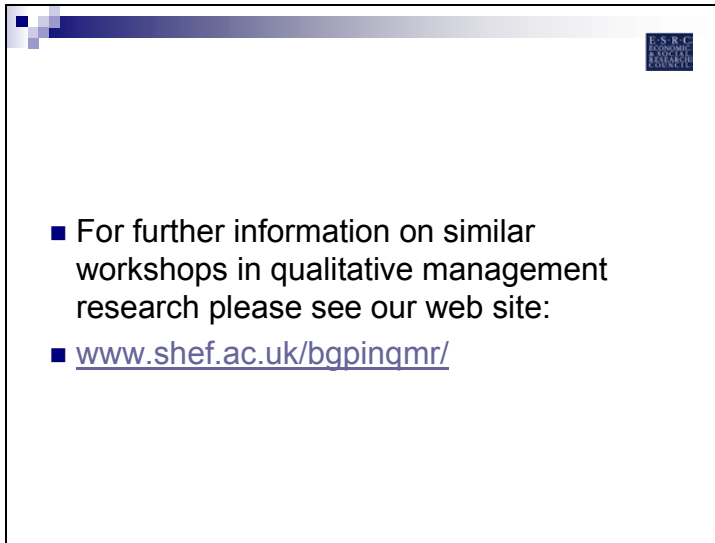
Johnson, P. and Duberley, J. (2003) Reflexivity in management research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40, 1279-1303.

Lewis, M. and Grimes, A. (1999) Metatriangulation: Building theory from multiple paradigms, *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 672-690.

Seale, C. (1999) *The Quality of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.



Weick, K. (1999) Theory construction as disciplined reflexivity: Tradeoffs in the 90s. *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 797-806.

Woolgar, S. (ed.) (1988) *Knowledge and Reflexivity*. London: Sage: Publications.



- For further information on similar workshops in qualitative management research please see our web site:
■ www.shef.ac.uk/bgpingmr/

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



References

Johnson, P. and Cassell, C. (2001) Epistemology and work psychology: New agendas. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 74, 125-141.

Holland, R. (1999) Reflexivity. *Human Relations*, 52, 463-483.

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