

BENCHMARKING GOOD PRACTICE IN QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH¹

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Introduction

This paper is based upon the findings so far of an ESRC funded project investigating the use and evaluation of qualitative methods in management research. Work began in March 2003 and is scheduled to run until February 2005. The project is part of a larger programme of work being funded by the ESRC, which focuses specifically on extending and improving Research Methods in the research and practitioner communities.²

The project brings together three grant holders from the management field, and a full time employed research associate. In the short time we have been working together on the project we have entered into some interesting debates and philosophical discussions, as well as encountering a number of difficult areas where decisions needed to be made, assumptions challenged and boundaries set. These have included: making the scope of the project manageable; defining what **we** (in the project team) mean and understand by the term *qualitative management research*; and, defining what **we** mean and understand by the term *qualitative methods*. We have not arrived at any conclusive or definitive answers, nor do we necessarily expect to during the coming months. What we do know is that the question of evaluation and assessment of quality in qualitative management research is not a straightforward area. We are moving towards some ideas and understanding about the issues that might influence the quality of qualitative research and where this might lead in terms of the development of more training, education and dialogue. In this paper, we discuss our work so far in exploring this area and the issues that it raises.

Drivers for the research

Reading many of the 'prestigious' journals in the management discipline gives the impression that most research is guided by the hypothetico-deductive approach and is dominated by quantitative techniques of analysis. A number of explanations have been put forward for this situation. Symon and Cassell (1999) identify several barriers to change that are based on deep-seated yet partial assumptions about what constitutes good scientific practice. These tend to undermine the credibility of qualitative research. Of particular interest here are the lack of knowledge and expertise in the area and the use of inappropriate assessment criteria.

Lack of knowledge and expertise in the area

If management research and practice are to be more innovative, equal consideration needs to be given in journals and training programmes to alternative approaches to analysing,

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² <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/>

understanding, and intervening in organizational life. A cursory view of the methodological training provided on University doctoral programmes suggests that there is still a dominant focus on quantitative methods that operationalize the hypothetico-deductive framework. The US Academy of Management has drawn attention to this emphasis, and estimated that there are five times as many quantitative courses as qualitative (Boje, 2001). If management researchers are to make the most of the diverse range of qualitative methodological tools and approaches available they need to: be aware of their existence; have knowledge of how to use them; and be able to evaluate the quality of the research produced, using assessment criteria appropriate to the varying ontological and epistemological commitments encoded in the different methods. One of the aims of this paper is to provide a review of the extent to which studies based on qualitative methods are appearing in management journals, thus gaining some insight into their current presence within management research.

The use of inappropriate assessment criteria

An additional barrier to the use and publication of qualitative research in the management sciences is the application of inappropriate assessment criteria (Symon et al., 2000). Even writers who promote qualitative research (e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) may evaluate it in terms of the concepts of objectivity, validity and reliability with little modification (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). These concepts tacitly articulate positivist metatheoretical assumptions (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Johnson and Cassell, 2001) which translate into particular evaluative stances on, for example theoretical vs statistical generalizability (Mitchell, 1983); induction vs deduction (Gill and Johnson, 1997); ecological vs internal validity (Bracht and Glass, 1968); reliability and replication (Marshall and Rossman, 1989); objectivity vs social construction (Burr, 1995); and the role of reflexivity (Holland, 1999). There is a need for more explicit recognition that different evaluation criteria need to be used within different metatheoretical approaches (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

Therefore, another aim of this working paper is to set out some of the predominant arguments and themes relating to the evaluation of qualitative management research, and to question how these might influence the judgement of such work in the management field. In addition, we speculate on how more appropriate methods of evaluation might be developed and used to enhance the status, quality and value of qualitative management research.

Structure of the paper

In the first place, we present a preliminary review of the literature concerning the development and use of evaluation criteria. Some of the initial findings from the project are then presented, which identifies qualitative methods currently in use within a range of management journals. The conclusion draws together some of the main points and strands of thought evident within the literature, and raises questions about the discrepancies found within the methods in use in management journals. This will inform the further development of the project and shape the continuing fieldwork.

Preliminary review of development and use of evaluation criteria

In reviewing the literature it appears that there is little clarity in relation to evaluating qualitative research. Presenting our work so far it should be acknowledged that one definitive answer or definition of evaluation criteria might not be appropriate or possible, and that the development of such is an ongoing project which can never be static or set in stone. Having said that, some of the arguments found within both the management literature and social theory about doing, assessing, or evaluating, qualitative research methods are now presented.

Table 1 Definitions/descriptions of qualitative research

<p>“Grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experience or produced. Whilst different versions of qualitative research might understand or approach these elements in different ways (for example, focusing on social meanings, or interpretation, or practices, or discourses, or processes, or constructions) all will see at least some of these as meaningful elements in a complex – possibly multi-layered – social world.</p> <p>Based on methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced (rather than rigidly standardized or structured, or removed from ‘real life’ or ‘natural’ social context, as in some forms of experimental method).</p> <p>Based on methods of analysis and explanation building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context. Qualitative research aims to produce rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data. There is more emphasis on ‘holistic’ forms of analysis and explanations in this sense, than on charting surface patterns, trends and correlations. Qualitative research usually does use some form of quantification, but statistical forms of analysis are not seen as central.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Mason, 1996, p4)</p>
<p>“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p3)</p>
<p>“<i>qualitative</i> is a not-so-descriptive adjective attached to the varieties of social inquiry that have their intellectual roots in <i>hermeneutics</i>, <i>phenomenological sociology</i>, and the <i>Verstehen</i> tradition. Most scholars use the phrase ‘qualitative inquiry’ as a blanket designation for all forms of such inquiry including <i>ethnography</i>, <i>case study research</i>, <i>naturalistic inquiry</i>, <i>ethnomethodology</i>, <i>life history methodology</i>, <i>narrative inquiry</i>, and the like. It has been used as a modifier for the terms “data,” “method,” “methodology,” “research,” and “paradigm” and as a synonym for “nonexperimental” and “ethnographic.” Because the adjective does not clearly signal a particular meaning, a great number and variety of scholars have attempted to define just what is the so-called qualitative paradigm, what are the basic characteristics of qualitative research, and so on.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Schwandt, 1997, p8)</p>
<p>“Qualitative research has become associated with many different theoretical perspectives, but is typically oriented to the inductive study of socially constructed reality, focusing on meanings, ideas and practices, taking the native’s point of view seriously without questioning either the wider context of it or the processes forming it.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p1)</p>
<p>“<i>Qualitative research</i> seeks to collect the interpretations given by organizational actors to aspects and events of organizational life, emphasizing the nuances that emerge from them. Qualitative research usually makes joint use of participant observation, in-depth interviews and archival information, more occasionally of only interviews, and much more rarely of observation alone.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Bryman, 1989 in Strati, 2000, p4)</p>
<p>“The label qualitative methods has no precise meaning in any of the social sciences. It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Van Maanen, 1979, p520)</p>
<p>“In life in general, and in qualitative inquiry as a particular kind of research pursuit, we are always engaged in trying to “make something of that”; we are always about the business of construing the meaning of something... always trying to understand the meanings that actions and utterances have in the inhabited world, the world of everyday life, the world in which we go about living our lives.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Schwandt, 1999, p452)</p>

Defining qualitative literature

In order to understand how qualitative research is currently ‘judged’ or ‘evaluated’ in terms of quality and how some form of benchmarking might be appropriate in the future there needs to

be some understanding or just what qualitative research is. This in itself is no mean task and numerous definitions and assumptions abound. Some examples are provided in Table 1. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) acknowledge *qualitative research* means different things to different people. Thus, arising out of these different understandings, are a multitude of assumptions, approaches, and criteria, being applied to make assessments and judgements about quality. The whole idea of even using criteria is a contested one. According to Schwandt (1996, p60) the use and development of criteria is based upon a positivist epistemology, which “is a systematic and methodical process for acquiring genuine, positivist scientific knowledge. A preoccupation with *method* or process as a sure path to genuine knowledge has come to characterize much of what we define as legitimate social scientific investigation”.

To attempt to find ‘one best’ definition of qualitative research is perhaps a misguided endeavour (Cassell and Symon, 1994) and an alternative approach might be to look instead for *defining characteristics* (Bryman, 1988) of qualitative research and how these are applied in specific circumstances.

Evaluating qualitative research

That there is no one single definition or agreed set of principles or guidelines as to what *qualitative research* is, means that the job of evaluating or judging its quality, whether by the researcher themselves or ‘the researched’, or policy makers/managers or journal editors, is also fraught with difficulties and contradictions. To attempt to lay out a set of defining criteria is itself a complex issue within the scheme of methodological questions and answers. So, should the whole project be abandoned as a lost cause? We think not, as Schwandt (1996, p59) argues “we must learn to live with uncertainty, with the absence of final vindications, without the hope of solutions in the form of epistemological guarantees. Contingency, fallibilism, dialogue, and deliberation mark our way of being in the world”. At the same time this uncertainty “does not translate into anything goes and obviate the necessity of our taking a stand on what it is right to do and good to be as social inquirers”.

Whilst this array of descriptions of qualitative research (Table 1) differ in their presentation they do all share a common view of qualitative research being about *interpretation* flowing from the *Verstehen*³ tradition. However, a largely shared commitment to *Verstehen* does not explain the heterogeneity evident in what can broadly be classified as *qualitative management research*. Nor the way in which judgements are made regarding the worth of such material through the application of inappropriate criteria or evaluation. To understand how and why this might be the case, and what the possible alternatives are, we need to look more closely at the development and history of evaluation criteria.

Historically, the criteria applied to judging qualitative research have been derived from those criteria used in judging and evaluating quantitative research, such as *validity*, *reliability* and *generalisability* (Reid and Gough, 2000). Such criteria have to some extent been developed and refined by Lincoln & Guba (1990) cited in Reid and Gough (2000) into *resonance*, *rhetoric*, *empowerment*, and *applicability*; and then into notions of *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, *authenticity*, and *goodness*. The notions of validity, rigour, relevance and other such criteria have come to be so taken for granted in much of the training and literature on using research methods that it is sometimes difficult to stand outside this and argue for an alternative position or set of ideas within which to frame quality evaluation. According to (Schwandt, 1996, p62) the *interpretive* tradition of social inquiry stills clings to “objectivating

³ “*Verstehen*: the interpretive understanding of the meaning a set of actions has to an actor through some form of contact with how they experience their experience” (Johnson, P. and Duberley, J., 2000, p 34)

approaches in investigating lived reality”. In other words the idea that there is a world ‘out there’ to be discovered and explored in an objective and value free way. This distinction between social facts and social values is often maintained in social research and where values are judged to have entered the research process render the findings void (May, 2001, p60) or at least less credible.

Who applies the criteria and in what context for evaluating and judging the quality of research is a crucial question, because unless we all agree, which we do not, that there can be some sort of ‘objective’ criteria in use across the board, then the application of such is always going to be mis-placed. This leads to judgements and decisions that hinder rather than assist in the development of better quality and higher standards in carrying out qualitative research. Within the academic circle of peer review this process can lead to gatekeeping powers being exerted and lead us to question, “how we come to value some reports above others” (Reid and Gough, 2000, p64). The definition and application of criteria stems not only from the definitions of good quantitative research but rest upon those assumptions explicit within positivist and post-positivist approaches to ‘validity’. The question of validity arises out of a search for ‘testing’ and ‘truth values’ which “has underpinned conventional social science as a criteria for measuring the worth of research” (Scheurich, 1997, p81). The implications of making such ‘validity’ judgements are, according to Scheurich, that boundaries are established which, seek to “exclude that which questions or attacks the paradigmatic status quo as well as views outside the understanding available to that status quo. In other words, validity boundaries are always already ideological power alignments. They always create insiders and outsiders” (Ibid., p84). Such criteria and the values associated with them are in everyday use (Scandura and Williams, 2000; Cooper, 2001) and reflected in editorial policy statements for certain management journals (Lee, 2001).

The literature review so far is pointing towards an array of different evaluation possibilities which might be applied in a complex world where qualitative research might not provide the ‘solutions’ or ‘answers’ to problems historically associated with management research, and stemming from more traditional ‘social scientific’ beliefs and assumptions. In order to gain greater insight into current approaches and methods of qualitative management research in use a review of some of the management journals was undertaken. This is by no means a full and comprehensive review of *all* management journals or *all* disciplines within the management domain, which would have been impossible within the scope of the project. Some of the difficulties and decisions upon which the review is based are elaborated upon below, and to some extent highlight again the complexity and diverse nature of management research and how this might need to be considered in the context of the quality debate.

Methods-in-use

The main aim of this part of the research is to identify qualitative research methods in use within the management field and the methodological perspectives informing the use of qualitative methods, in order to gain a better insight into what is being published and where. This in turn will be used to help develop the research project further in terms of the questions to be posed with selected interviewees (journal editors, research commissioners, doctoral programme academics, business researchers and academic researchers using qualitative methods). Initial scoping of the review highlighted a number of problems, which required decisions within the project team to create boundaries and make explicit the approach, and methods used.

Scope and search parameters

Firstly, the multi-disciplinary nature of management research was an issue. How should we decide which journals to include or exclude in the search? This decision has evolved during

the course of the project and was based upon: the highest impact scoring of journals according to the ISI Citation Reports; discussion and agreement in the project group of the most relevant and useful journals for this exercise; the need to focus on journals that are specifically “management” rather than specialising in any particular interest/discipline.ⁱ

Second, which search terms should we use and how would these influence what we might find in terms of qualitative methods? Several different words were used within the initial scoping searches, which threw up an unmanageable number of articles, which it appeared did not necessarily utilise qualitative research methods. The final list of search termsⁱⁱ for the first searches to identify methods in use was based upon the most common methods that could imply the conduct of qualitative research. The first set of searches carried out combined the keywords with ‘management’ in the journal title, but was not confined to the specified journals listed in note (i).

Thirdly, in order to identify some more of the perspectives and gain greater in depth understanding of the methods in use a further search was carried out within the named specified journals in note (i) using the search terms encompassing a wider range of research approaches believed to be associated with qualitative researchⁱⁱⁱ. One single database (EBSCO Business Source Premier) was used to search, and method/methodology/analysis extracts from the journal articles reviewed.

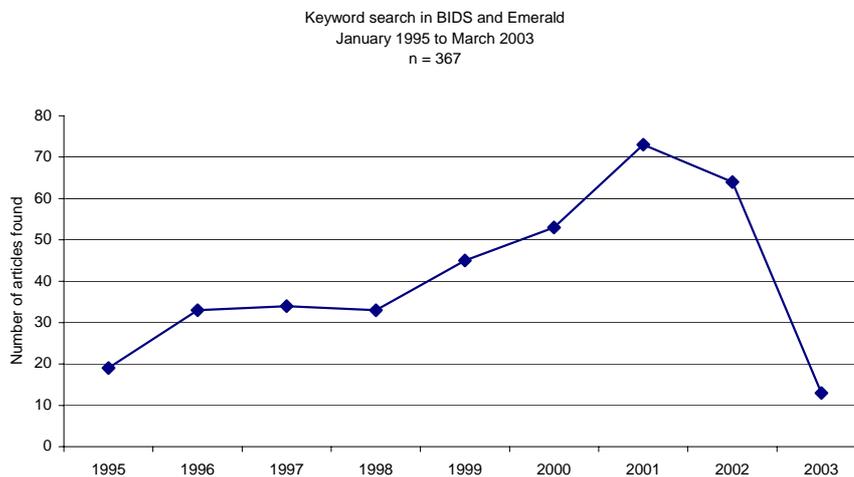


Figure 1 Trends in the number of articles found using qualitative methods criteria

Search results

The findings presented here were undertaken at the start of the project. Further work is still being carried out reflecting upon the findings so far and what we will learn during the continuing research process.

The search from 1995 to 2000 revealed a steady upward trend in the number of articles identified using the qualitative methods search terms (Figure 1). Whilst this does not substantiate an increase in the use of qualitative methods itself - the rise may also be due to an increased number of published articles in general, or to changes in publisher/editorial board considerations - it does indicate a possible steady rise in their popular use. This historical

search was confined to reviewing the abstracts only, and therefore may contain some anomalies in the number and type of qualitative methods found. However, for the purpose of this literature review it was felt adequate in identifying a possible change in the use of qualitative methods, and the types of methods in use.

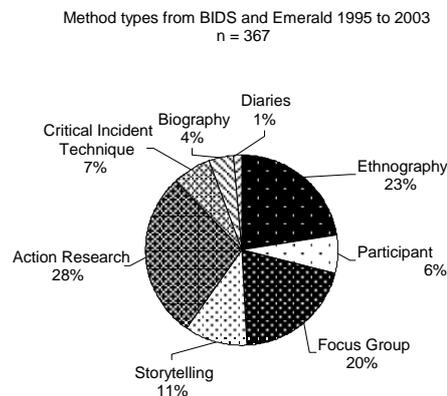


Figure 2 Types of qualitative methods identified 1995 to 2003

Journal Name	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Totals
Academy of Management Journal	2	0	0	0	1	3	1	3	0	10
Administrative Science Quarterly	0	3	4	3	2	1	0	1	0	14
British Journal of Management	0	1	3	0	1	3	2	1	0	11
California Management Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Harvard Business Review	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
International Journal of Management Reviews	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Journal of Management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Journal of Management Inquiry	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	0	7
Journal of Management Studies	2	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	14
Management Communication Quarterly	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	4
Management Learning	0	1	1	0	6	1	2	4	1	16
Management Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MIT Sloan Management Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Omega	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	4
Organizational Research Methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Scandinavian Journal of Management	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sloan Management Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strategic Management Journal	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
All others	15	28	23	28	32	40	59	48	10	283
Total	19	33	34	33	45	54	73	66	14	371

Table 2 Number of articles found between 1995 and 2003

The percentage of different methods identified can be seen in Figure 2. This again can only be taken as a broad indication of the types of methods in use, because of the difficulty in identifying details of the studies from the abstracts.

Table 2 shows the number of articles found across each of the journals, highlighting a split between some of the UK and US based journals. The search found a number of articles in the following journals: California Management Review; Harvard Business Review; Journal of Management; Management Science; MIT Sloan Management Review; Organizational Research Methods; Sloan Management Review; Strategic Management Journal which, on closer scrutiny were found not to be based on empirical research or were theoretical discussions about the merits or otherwise of using qualitative methods. These were excluded

from this analysis because of the focus of this research on use of qualitative methods in practice.

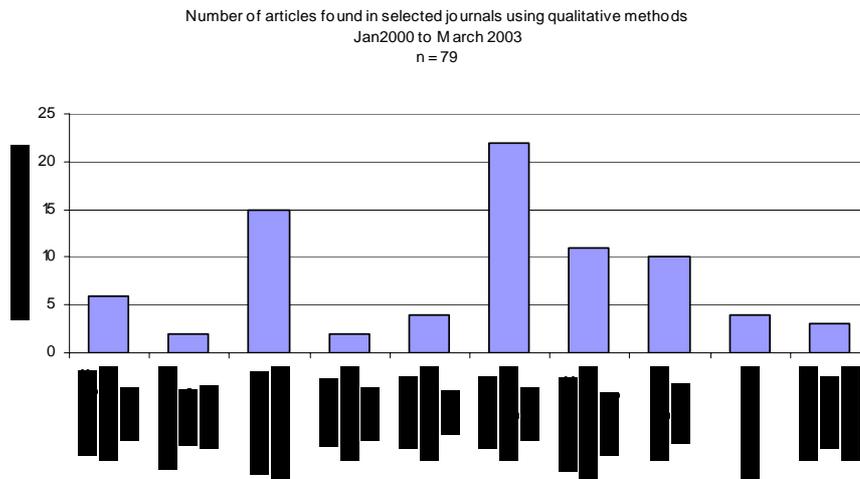


Figure 3 Number of articles found in selected journals

A further search was designed to look in more depth at the different methods and perspectives in use within qualitative management research. The number of articles found appears in Figure 3. As far as possible the type of methods and perspectives were identified, where these were made explicit, as well as any underlying theoretical approaches. The full text articles in most journals were reviewed and in particular the paragraphs on methods and analysis. At the same time observations and notes were made about some of the characteristics, content and style of the journals and journal articles, and these will be reported later. Figure 3 highlights the disparity between the American journals and British journals, as well as the low numbers of articles found overall.

The types of methods found (Figure 4) were categorised as far as possible using the explicit statements in the text of the journal articles. However, in some cases reference was made to more than one method or one method seemed to take a more prominent role in the research. In these cases a judgement was made to record the one that seemed to represent the overall approach taken in the research i.e. ethnography where a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis were used over a period of time. Clearly a wide range of methods have been found, however bearing in mind the relatively small number of cases, some of these i.e. focus groups equate to only one record.

Types of qualitative methods found in selected journals
Jan 2000 to March 2003
n = 79

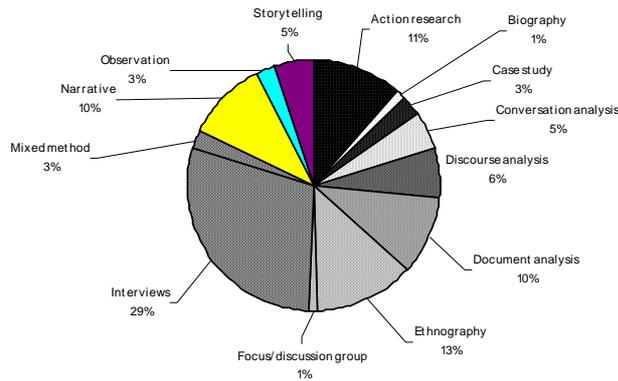


Figure 4 Types of methods found in detailed search

A number of perspectives were identified and made explicit in the articles found however, it was often difficult to identify what these were or they were referred to in a cursory fashion. Where a research perspective was mentioned, even though little explanation or elaboration was made about it, it has been included. For example, many articles did refer to social constructionism or constructivism with no more than a cited reference. This has been noted by other authors such as Czarniawska (2001, p254) who says “Many interpretively minded theorists simply reiterate, following Berger and Luckmann (1966), that ‘reality is socially constructed’”.

Comment: find article and put into endnote

Instances of research perspectives in selected journals Jan 2000 to March 2003

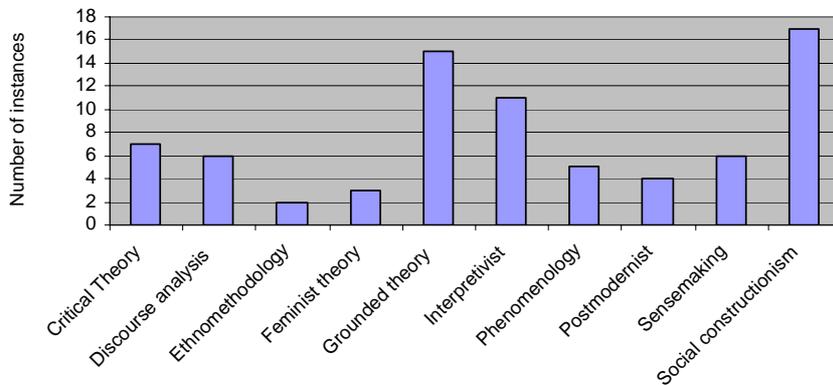


Figure 5 Types of research perspectives and methodological approaches

The number and type of perspectives and methodological approaches are shown in Figure 5. Where for example an article talked about using a social constructionist perspective with feminist theory then both have been recorded. Further work on this aspect of the review is being carried out and will be forthcoming.

The following points were noted while reviewing the full text articles:

- Whilst some articles were explicit and open about the choice and applicability of methods used in relation to the research question, in others it was difficult to find the methodology and rationale behind the empirical work and methods used. In some cases where methodology and research perspectives were made explicit they seemed to show a conflicting epistemological position with the methods used. For example, one article stated that she had drawn from critical theory and social constructionist perspectives, but then went on to use quantitative methods for hypothesis testing.
- There was a tendency mainly in the American journals, to write about the use of qualitative research almost in an apologetic manner, i.e. that it does not conform to quantitative criteria of validity, generalization, and bias. Data analysis was often carried out using some sort of coding method, but without any reference to ‘interpretation’ of the findings. The coded text was then translated into numerical data and presented statistically. For example, “Like all methods, our approach has limitations. While allowing us to delve deeply into the interactions between the decision-making process and the surrounding context, our ethnographic approach limits the generalizability of our findings. However, the utility of our approach lies not in the direct transferability of our findings, but in the ability to produce grounded theory that could not be identified with a broader-brush data collection method. Further, by using causal loop diagrams to specify our emerging theory, we have made it easier for scholars to mathematically formalize and empirically test our results” (Perlow et al., p934)
- A number of prominent authors were repeatedly cited in many of the articles. Some of these have been recorded and are presented in Table 3. This might be significant in developing interview questions regarding evaluation decisions based upon certain assumptions or ways of thinking that are represented in these texts. (Klein and Myers, 1999) identify Yin (1994) and Benbasat et al (1987) as examples of management researchers carrying out qualitative research from a positivist perspective, carrying with it the underlying philosophical assumptions of this perspective. Scheurich (1997) also cites Miles and Huberman (1984) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) as examples of post-positivists who retain their allegiance to validity criteria despite discarding conventional science.

	Berger & Luckmann	Denzin	Glaser & Strauss	Miles & Huberman	Pettigrew	Weick	Yin	Total number of instances cited	Total number of articles found
Academy of Management Journal	1	1	2	2	2	3	2	13	6
Administrative Science Quarterly	1		1	1		1		4	2
Omega (Oxford)			2	1			4	7	4
Scandinavian Journal of Management			1		1	1	2	5	3
Journal of Management Studies	5	1	7	2	6	13	1	35	22
British Journal of Management	2	3	3		4	7	1	20	15
Journal of Management Inquiry	1		2			2		5	4
Management Learning			1			3		4	10

Table 3 Frequently cited authors

Summary

The findings presented here are the beginnings of an analysis of what is going on out there in the world of qualitative research and publication. There are indications that differences exist

between and within the US/UK/ journals identified within this study⁴. These are apparent in the numbers and types of articles identified here within particular journals, and might be explained partly in terms of the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions being made by the ‘gatekeepers’ of academic journals.

Questions arising from this review so far lead us to ask, is it that qualitative management research is not being carried out (or at least to the same extent as quantitative management research is)? Or, is it being done but not being reported in the most prominent management journals, despite editorials welcoming its contribution?

These questions are now developed in the concluding part of this paper.

Conclusion

By studying the use and evaluation of qualitative methods it is not the intention to de-value quantitative research methods or to promote qualitative ones as somehow superior. They exist in relation to one another and in effect define each other as “nonnumeric data in the form of words” and “numeric data” (Schwandt, 1997, p130). Such a simple and straightforward distinction is helpful in a technical sense but is not satisfactory if you adhere to the epistemological view that, “quantitative and qualitative research are located in different ways of knowing” and as such methods are not ‘neutral devices’ to use to go and discover the world out there, but are loaded with assumptions and presuppositions (Bryman, 1998, p139).

We have started to highlight some of the seemingly contradictory applications of methods in use with different epistemological perspectives in the journal articles found. Whilst it may be possible to hold a positivist or neo-empiricist approach and use qualitative methods, these perspectives are rarely made explicit within the research leading to inconsistencies in understanding how this informs the method, empirical study, analysis of data and application of quality assessment criteria. Further investigation is underway within the project to explore some of these issues in greater depth.

Because of the variety of forms of qualitative research evident in the management literature, providing criteria for its evaluation becomes a problematic process because ‘quality’ becomes polysemous, and therefore a somewhat elusive, concept. This plurality may be, in part, an outcome of the diverse disciplinary roots at play in management research. However, it is also evident that a significant influence upon how qualitative research is variably constituted, and, in principle, should be differentially evaluated, lies in how qualitative researchers may articulate diverse metatheoretical commitments. While it is important that methodological issues in qualitative research should be transparent and hence open to critical scrutiny, a degree of confusion may arise especially when evaluative criteria constituted by particular metatheoretical commitments are universally applied to what is a heterogeneous field inspired by a number of incommensurable epistemological and ontological dispositions.

In order to further understanding of these issues, we have started to develop a metatheoretical analysis of evaluation. This entails specification of the overarching structures of thought within a substantive domain so as to indicate the conditions under which particular perspectives are deemed appropriate. Such a metatheoretical examination can serve as a heuristic device enabling us to describe and explain the contingent nature of criteriology in management research and foster some consistency between a priori knowledge constituting assumptions, methodology and evaluation.

⁴ We acknowledge that we have excluded many other management journals from specific management disciplines that might also actively encourage the publication of qualitative research. However, our concerns were to look at the most prominent non-specific journals as explained earlier in the text.

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Journal Name: Academy of Management Journal; Administrative Science Quarterly; British Journal of Management; California Management Review; Harvard Business Review; International Journal of Management Reviews; Journal of Management; Journal of Management Inquiry; Journal of Management Studies; Management Communication Quarterly; Management Learning; Management Science; MIT Sloan Management Review; Omega-International Journal of Management Science; Organization; Organizational Research Methods; Organization Studies; Scandinavian Journal of Management; Strategic Management Journal

Keywords: ethnograph*;critical incident technique; action research; storytelling; focus group; participant observation; biograph*; diary or diaries AND “management” in the journal title

- in BIDS and Emerald
- from 1995 to 2003
- abstracts only
- This covered all the journals in our selected list except, Harvard Business Review; Omega; Organizational Research Methods, which were searched separately using same key words in ISI Web of Science.

Keywords and search parameters for detailed search: ethnograph* OR critical incident technique OR action research OR storytelling OR focus group OR participant observation OR biograph* OR research diary OR research diaries OR discourse OR narrative* OR sensemaking OR constructivis* OR constructionis* OR interpretivis* OR interpretis* OR grounded theory OR symbolic interaction* OR phenomenolog* OR hermeneut* OR subjectiv* OR critical theory OR critical inquiry OR feminist theory OR feminist standpoint OR postmodern* OR epistemolog* OR ontolog*

- From January 2000 to March 2003
- In EBSCO Business Source Premier
- Each of the named journals were searched independently