

## **A Panel on the Potentials and Pragmatics of Qualitative Research**

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Submitted to:

Eastern Academy of Management International conference  
December 5, 2016

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There has been a rise in the number of qualitative studies published in leading management journals such as the *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ) and *Organization Science* (OS). Journal editors generally profess interest in receiving papers that report the results of qualitative studies: Witness the Editorial Essay in AMJ. However, this rise in publications is not matched by training in qualitative methods imparted to doctoral students as well as faculty members teaching in the business schools. Although there are cross national differences in the emphasis on qualitative research in doctoral training, the trend in doctoral education seems to be tilting toward quantitative methods.

There is also a widening chasm between qualitative and quantitative researchers. Qualitative researchers are expected to build theory, but as Kacmar and Whitfield (2000) found, only 9 percent of *Academy of Management Review* (AMR) articles were really tested, leading Wright (2016) to comment, in response to qualitative research, that the transfer of knowledge from theory builders to theory testers is almost non-existent. There is even some expressed skepticism that the published qualitative research had to mimic 'normal' quantitative research for the sake of getting the paper published (Cornelissen, 2016).

Put another way, there is a gulf between the promise of qualitative research and the pragmatics of skill building and publication. *Eastern Academy of Management International* offers an opportune venue for dialogue and discussion of issues related to qualitative research. For the past couple of years, EAMI has offered a workshop track in Structural Equation Modeling, a technique that can be safely labeled as belonging to

quantitative orientation in research. While a corresponding workshop in qualitative research may be attractive, for starters EAMI offers a venue for discussion and dialogue on the various facets of qualitative research.

The proposed panel is a *pilot* effort to nurture a dialogue on qualitative research in EAMI. The panel is constructed with three objectives: first, to provide an international perspective on qualitative research by constituting a panel of both North American and Australian scholars; second, to show case distinct styles of qualitative research; and third, to engage with the audience about the promise and pragmatics of qualitative research.

Although qualitative researchers have developed a number of distinct styles of research (see Creswell, 2013), we will feature *comparative case study* and *action research* as two exemplars of qualitative research. Both have had a long tradition in management, with case studies having been pioneered by Harvard Business School (although mainly for teaching purposes), and action research dating back to Kurt Lewin, who inspired the organizational change field. More recently, comparative case studies have become popular in organization theory and strategy, and action research has inspired scholars from Management Information Systems.

The panel is developed with several audience takeaways in mind: first, to sensitize budding scholars to the possibilities of qualitative research; second, to help explicate the notion of rigor in qualitative works for the larger audience; third, to underscore the skill sets and demands of this research orientation, and finally, to engage the audience for an interesting experience.

### **Plan of the Panel**

The panel will focus on the state of publication of qualitative research in

management field, showcase comparative case study and action research as two modes of qualitative research, and then discuss the pragmatic implications of adopting a qualitative research stance for budding scholars and doctoral students.

The organizer of the panel, V.K. Narayanan, will introduce the major themes of the panel. Although Narayanan works with quantitative tools, he has been involved in major externally funded projects of a qualitative nature such as the detailing the early management history of the Space Station Program (NASA), nine-year field work on in pharmaceutical industry, and most recently in the study of incubators in India. In his introduction, Narayanan will also summarize the findings from a four-year project tracking trends in qualitative research in major management journals. Recent prescriptions on publishing qualitative research, and the philosophical, and narrative controversies surrounding those prescriptions will be highlighted to set the stage for a discussion of two types of qualitative research—comparative case research and action research. In each, the presenters will be asked to address: the philosophical underpinnings, the skill sets and training needed to conduct the research and a walk through to publication of a qualitative piece from their own work.

The comparative case study method will be discussed by Johann Peter Murmann (PhD, Columbia University), Professor of Management at the AGSM - UNSW Australia Business School. Formerly on the faculty of Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, he has also been a visiting faculty at the Wharton School. Murmann has lectured widely on the comparative case study method, giving tutorials at Academy of Management meetings, the Wharton School, Alto University, the University of Lille, and other institutions. One key focus in his research has been the development of the

synthetic dye industry from 1850 to current times. This research that uses the comparative case research culminated in his book 'Knowledge and Competitive Advantage: The Coevolution of Firms, Technology and National Institutions,' which received the 2004 Joseph Schumpeter Prize.

Dr. Henry Linger, Professor from Monash University will make the case for action research and discuss the preparation and skills needed to engage in this form of inquiry. Linger is the Deputy Director of the Knowledge Management Research Program (KMRP) in the Faculty of Information Technology (Monash University), the permanent Chair of the International Steering Committee, the governing body of the International Conference on Information Systems Development. His expertise is at the juncture of Information Systems (IS), Knowledge Management (KM) and Project Management (PM). His research addresses how technical skills are complimented by knowledge-based practices, and focuses on the pragmatic, conceptual and cognitive practices that define knowledge work. Linger uses action research involving interventions in the workplace to understand how work is actually done and to reveal the knowledge processes that underlie those practices. This understanding informs the design of applications to support work tasks and to effectively deploy knowledge to support those activities. His research has found application in a wide variety of settings - from banking to defense through information systems development and project management and to research in bio-medicine and linguistics.

Joan Weiner (PhD University of Pennsylvania), Professor of Management in the LeBow College of Business at Drexel University, will serve as a discussant in the panel. Dr. Weiner was trained under the late Eric Trist in social system sciences and is

interested in educational innovation, inter-organizational and system design. She has worked in interdisciplinary research teams on projects in both the public and private sectors, projects that focus on organizations as the unit of analysis and invoke qualitative research of a longitudinal nature. Dr. Weiner's discussion will focus on institutional issues surrounding qualitative research, particularly as it relates to the training of the next generation of qualitative researchers, and challenges of promotion and tenure for early stage scholars as they try to migrate their work to publication. She will also offer her thoughts on the presence of qualitative research in EAM.

After the discussant's remarks, the panel will invite the audience to entertain their questions, narrate their own experiences with qualitative research, and discuss the panelists' observations.

### **References**

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