

Qualitative Research: Achieving the Potential

Although there has been a rise in the number of qualitative studies published in leading management journals [e.g. *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ) and *Organization Science* (OS)], and journal editors generally profess interest in receiving papers utilizing qualitative methods, the training in qualitative methods, both among doctoral students and as well as faculty members teaching in the business schools, has lagged. Although there are cross national differences in the emphasis on qualitative research in doctoral training, the trend in doctoral education seems to be oriented toward quantitative methods. There is a widening chasm between qualitative and quantitative researchers. Thus, 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 , and this can be complementary to the workshop track in quantitative methods (such as structural equation modeling) that has been part of the past four EAMI bi-annual conferences.

The proposed two session panel is an effort to nurture a dialogue on qualitative research in EAMI. This proposal builds upon the successful pilot panel conducted at EAMI's Sydney conference two years ago. The Sydney panel was an attempt to gauge the interest of the attendees in qualitative research, and constituted both North American and Australian scholars. The panel offered valuable lessons in moving the initiative forward. First, there was confusion among some attendees between case studies for teaching and qualitative methods for research. Second, many attendees expressed the need to spell out the criteria for good qualitative work, in order not to fall into the trap of mimicking quantitatively oriented research. Finally, there was expressed interest in providing more depth to a select set of methods.

This year we propose a two-session panel with the expectation of significant interaction between the panelists and the audience. During the first session, the panel will focus on a set of broad questions: What role qualitative methods play in research, e.g., how are case studies for teaching different from case study based research? What are the differing criteria for good qualitative research? And how are they different from quantitative methods? What are the challenges faced by qualitative researchers in various fields—Organization behavior, Strategy, Information technology and project management? During this session, the panelists seek to incorporate the experiences of attendees, especially those who have had previous experience in qualitative research.

In the second session, we focus on two specific methods of qualitative research. Although qualitative researchers have developed several 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 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 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.

The organizers of the panels

Professor Darren Dalcher (Lancaster University, UK) has been a leading voice both in the UK and globally, in the movement of project management from a technocratic to a human centered management field. Over his career, he has led several faculty teams in field research on program management, and is currently spearheading the strategy execution initiative in the British Academy of Management.

Professor Henry Linger (Monash University) 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.

Professor Narayanan (Drexel University) has been involved in major projects of a qualitative nature such as in detailing the early management history of the Space Station Program, nine-year field work on in pharmaceutical industry, and most recently in the study of incubators in India.

Professor Joan Weiner (Drexel University), 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.

Plan of the Panel

In the first session, the panel will focus on broad questions related to qualitative research. 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 highlight the distinction between qualitative methods for teaching (e.g. in case studies) and for research. She will also offer her thoughts on the presence of qualitative research in EAM. Narayanan will summarize the findings from a four-year project on tracking trends in qualitative research in major management journals. He will highlight how the criteria for good qualitative research differ from the norms of quantitative research. Recent prescriptions on publishing qualitative research, and the philosophical, and narrative controversies surrounding those

prescriptions will be highlighted. Linger will highlight the applicability of qualitative research in IT, and the challenges and rewards associated with it. Dalcher will highlight the role of qualitative works in impactful research and linkages to external funding. Building up on his experiences, he will articulate how the field of Projects is moving from a technocratic orientation to a human centered perspective, stimulated by the finding from qualitative research.

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.

During the second session, action research and comparative case study will be explored in depth. Linger and Weiner will lead the discussion of action research and Narayanan and Dalcher will lead the discussion of comparative case study. In this session, the organizers will invite experiences of the attendees to enrich the discussion and broaden the topics included in the discussion.

References

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