

- *ESRC Benchmarking good practice in qualitative management research*

Qualitative Management Research: A Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Stakeholders in the Field

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SUMMARY

- This report presents an analysis of assessment criteria and training needs for qualitative management research.
- 45 in-depth interviews were held with members of four panels: academic disseminators; practitioners; doctoral programme leaders; and qualitative researchers.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim and interpreted with the aid of template analysis. This report presents six major themes from this analysis concerning qualitative management research: definitions; status and credibility; good practice; assessment criteria; training needs; professional and institutional context.
- A variety of definitions of qualitative management research were identified ranging from indicating a central concern with the subjectivity of research practice to barely constituting research at all. Such a range of definitions indicates the range of work in the area but also implies that the derivation of a set of universal assessment criteria is problematic.
- Sources of research credibility also varied widely. To some extent judgements of credibility were seen to depend on aspects of the nature and conduct of the research itself (e.g. methodical, conclusive, technically skilled etc), but also as influenced by symbolism and context. In general definitions of credibility were seen to disadvantage qualitative research.
- Various elements of good practice in relation to qualitative management research were identified (and sometimes disputed) including flexible research design, epistemologically coherent analysis, reflexivity concerning process and product of research and a persuasive, engaging presentation.
- Assessing qualitative management research appeared to be more of an intuitive decision-making process than an application of known and agreed criteria (cf quantitative research). Judgements in these areas vary according to the beliefs and commitments of the individual. Reflecting this variety, a summary table of contingent criteria is presented at the end of the report.
- Provision of qualitative research training was seen to vary but be generally scarce and of poor quality. Specific training needs included: 'technical' skills, such as data analysis techniques and writing; knowledge of underlying philosophical issues; reviewing skills; and PhD supervision.
- Current research practice was seen to be deeply affected by pressures within the current academic context including audit processes and career needs. Such pressures may work against the adoption of qualitative management research.
- In general all these issues were seen to be highly related and inter-dependent. While some contextual issues cannot be addressed by this research, the report concludes with an overview of the qualitative management research workshops derived from our interpretation of the interviewees' observations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Objectives of the research project*

The research outlined in this report is part of a larger project, sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council's Research Methods Programme, entitled "Benchmarking Good Practice in Qualitative Management Research" (Grant No H33250006). The overall aim of the larger research project is to enhance good practice in the use of qualitative methods in management research. To achieve this aim, our objectives are to:

- Conduct a systematic investigation into current perceptions of qualitative methods in management research, including perceived barriers to their use;
- Identify perceptions of good practice in conducting qualitative management research;
- Identify current assessment criteria for qualitative management research;
- Ascertain perceptions of skill deficits in this area and the factors viewed as contributing to these deficits;
- Develop appropriate assessment criteria for qualitative management research which take into account different epistemological commitments;
- Develop materials and training workshops to encourage informed and reflexive practice in qualitative management research.

The first four objectives were addressed through interviews with a number of key stakeholders in the management research arena. This report presents our analysis of these interviews.

1.2 *Objectives of the Report*

In this report, through a thematic analysis of the interview data, we seek to:

- Describe various definitions of qualitative management research;
- Present an analysis of current perceptions of qualitative management research;
- Identify good practice in the conduct of qualitative management research;
- Identify key assessment criteria-in-use for qualitative management research;
- Identify key skill deficits and training requirements in the area.

1.3 The perspective of the research team

The five authors of this report are from a number of disciplinary backgrounds, including occupational psychology, information science, and sociology. All are currently employed in U.K. Business or Management Schools, and are involved in teaching aspects of research methodology. There is no one shared epistemological view held within the team, though all have a keen interest in conducting qualitative research. There is a shared view, however, that qualitative methodologies have much to offer the management discipline, but have been traditionally under-represented in key outlets in the field. One suggestion as to why this might be the case is that research using qualitative techniques is sometimes evaluated using sets of criteria derived from quantitative research that may not be transferable to assessing the quality of qualitative research. Therefore one of the team's key concerns in conducting this research was to examine the criteria people use to evaluate qualitative research. The overall aim from the research team's viewpoint is to enhance the quality and profile of qualitative research within the management field.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

As indicated above, this report presents information gathered from a range of interviewees who have a direct interest in the evaluation of qualitative management research. We conducted 45 in-depth interviews with individuals from different stakeholder groups (or ‘panels’ as they are referred to in this report). A thematic analysis of these interviews is presented.

2.2 The composition of the panels

We identified four major groups of interested parties (the ‘panels’) and recruited individuals to each of these. In practice panel membership was sometimes overlapping (i.e. individuals could be said to be members of several panels, although recruited with one particular panel in mind). Therefore, for the most part, we did not analyse the data from each panel separately.

Panel A: Academic Disseminators. This panel included editors of key management journals from the USA, UK and Europe; chairs of relevant professional associations; and those responsible for funding management research. The aim was to explore the views of those who have to regularly assess the quality of qualitative research, and who may be considered ‘epistemological gatekeepers’ (Symon and Cassell, 1999), in the sense of controlling access to the desirable inputs and outputs of research.

Panel B: Practitioners. This panel included those from the public and private sector who conduct or commission qualitative research, or are consumers of management research outputs e.g. management consultants; senior members of relevant government organizations; and those from organizations which specialise in survey and other research work. Such individuals need to know how to conduct qualitative research and how to interpret its outputs.

Panel C: Doctoral. This panel consisted of those who currently manage University PhD and Research Methodology Masters programmes in Business and Management Schools. Such individuals are closely involved in the training and assessment of junior management researchers and may most benefit from the outputs of this project. An even spread of pre- and post-1992 institutions was included in this panel.

Panel D: Qualitative Researchers. This panel included those who have published within the area of qualitative methods in management research; or who use qualitative methods regularly as part of their substantive research. This group can be considered experts in the subject matter of the research and also have a direct interest in criteria for the assessment of qualitative research.

2.3 Data collection

Although focused on qualitative management research, the interviews were quite wide ranging and, over a period of one or two hours, thoroughly explored the topics at hand. While the structure of these interviews did vary somewhat according to panel membership, generally these interviews focused on the following questions:

- Definitions of qualitative management research;
- Perceived problems in conducting and disseminating such research;
- Perceptions of good practice in undertaking qualitative management research;
- Beliefs about appropriate assessment criteria for evaluating such research;
- Perceptions of skill deficits in this area and the factors viewed as contributing to such deficits;
- Perceived training needs.

Individuals were initially contacted by email or telephone. We outlined the nature of the project and the contribution we felt the individual could make to this. We explained that all interviews would be taped but that the material gathered would be considered confidential within the research team: individuals are only identified by Panel membership in this report. Most of the individuals we approached were happy to contribute to the project, many suggesting that this was an important area which needed some investigation.

The majority of interviews were conducted at the interviewee's work place, however the practicalities of the situation sometimes necessitated telephone interviews (i.e. when the panel member lived in a different country). Additionally a small number of interviews were conducted at the 2003 American Academy of Management Conference in Seattle.

2.4 Data analysis

2.4.1 Initial stages of the analysis

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The overall analytical approach adopted largely followed the conventions of template analysis, where the researcher produces a list of codes (template) representing themes identified in the textual data (King 2004).

The qualitative data analysis package NVivo was used for the initial stages of coding. This is a useful organizational tool which allows the researcher to: index segments of the text to particular themes, carry out complex search and retrieval operations quickly, and link research notes to coding. However software is only an aid to the organization of the material and is not in itself an interpretive device (King 2004). Nevertheless, computerisation does allow the researcher to work efficiently with large amounts of text and complex coding schemes facilitating depth and

sophistication of analysis.

One member of the research team, trained in the use of NVivo, was primarily responsible for this initial coding of the interview material. This coded text was stored in free nodes. Nodes can be understood as containers for both the research material collected itself and also thoughts around this material. This type of node is unorganized and represents as yet unconnected ideas about the text, in essence capturing general themes. Each free node was given a heading and all text relevant to that category was stored under that heading creating a broad subset. Each member of the research team then worked on a subset of the material in conjunction with the aforementioned individual.

2.4.2 Generation of themes and categories

Using template analysis (King 2004), the transcripts were coded into broad themes (the nodes identified above) based on the research objectives and interview questions to create an initial template. This template was further discussed and modified within the research group. Each broad theme was then subjected to a more detailed manual analysis by two members of the research team, which led to the formation of more specific categories within each theme. This hierarchical coding allowed the researcher to analyse texts at different levels of specificity. Broad higher-order codes help provide a general overview of the direction of the interview, while detailed lower order codes enable fine distinctions to be made, both within and between cases (King 2004). As categories became more tightly defined, text stored in free nodes was moved into 'tree nodes'. This type of node is particularly useful because it allows the researcher to split up these broad categories through the use of interlinking 'children' which serves as sub-categories under the broad headings. Whilst the use of separate categories (through free nodes) allows the exploration of the data and a comparison of the similarities and differences, it can destroy the bigger picture. The tree nodes help depict the categories' relationship with each other, something which is important in maintaining the overall perspective (Bishop 2004). Dey (1993) explains that codes must be meaningful with regards to the data but also meaningful in relation to other categories.

2.4.3 The final template

This report represents the final template: each chapter covering a broad theme and its associated categories. These themes directly address our initial research objectives. The chapters that follow focus on the panellists' views of:

- How qualitative management research is defined (chapter 3);
- The perceived status and credibility of qualitative management research (chapter 4);
- Perceptions of good practice in conducting qualitative management research (chapter 5);
- How the quality of qualitative management research is assessed (chapter 6);

- Skill deficits and training requirements in this area (chapter 7);
- The professional and institutional context of qualitative management research (chapter 8).

These themes overlap to some extent but taken together provide a comprehensive overview of our interpretations of the panellists' perceptions of qualitative management research. Our analysis does not seek to make grand claims concerning the state-of-the art in this area. Throughout the report, we have been concerned with identifying issues in the areas of interest rather than drawing conclusions about the strength or generalizability of such views. Our aim is to use the research findings to both influence the design of training in this area, plus stimulate discussion and debate about the quality of qualitative research in the management field.

We refer to the participants in the research as 'interviewees' throughout the text. Any quotes are "*written in italics surrounded by double quotation marks*" to indicate that this is not our wording but the words of the interviewees. Direct quotes are attributed to panel members rather than individuals.

In each of the chapters a summary of the data within each theme is presented. In the final discussion chapter we review the implications of the analysis presented in relation to our key objectives, and present both a summary of contingent assessment criteria for qualitative research and a set of specific training needs derived from the interview material, including an overview of the workshops designed as a result of this research.

3.0 DEFINING QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

Here we identify and categorize the different ways in which interviewees defined qualitative research generally and qualitative management research in particular. Analysis of the interviewees' accounts of qualitative research suggests an array of definitions. Often, but by no means always, these definitions are intimately bound up with their conceptions of the purpose of qualitative research.

Below we present a taxonomy of eight different definitions of qualitative research:

- As verstehen
- As verstehen but with reflexivity
- As a general bag of tools
- As a specific bag of tools
- As exploratory research
- As a disposal category
- As specific data collection techniques

3.1 *As verstehen*

One key definition of qualitative methods deployed by interviewees emphasizes how, in contrast to quantitative methods, the former have a direct concern with accessing the actor's subjective, culturally derived meanings in order to explain their behaviour through verstehen. In other words qualitative methods are defined in terms of an interpretive understanding of the meaning a set of actions has to an actor through some form of contact with how they experience their experience. So here interviewees claim that qualitative methodology involves taking an interpretivist stance and "*trying to understand meaning*", or "*understanding how meaning is actually constructed*", or "*accessing and understanding how meaning is constructed through social interaction*". Thus qualitative research entails taking "*an interpretivist perspective where one is particularly interested in being able to... investigate the perspectives that subjects have and to interpret their view of the world*".

Here significant philosophical differences seem to be posited between quantitative and qualitative research in that quantitative methodologies are construed as being incapable of exploring actors' subjectivity - however why this is so remains unexplored by most of the interviewees. A possible exception to this lack of understanding is illustrated below where one interviewee casts doubt upon the possibility of providing deterministic accounts of behaviour in terms of causation by measurable antecedent conditions:

"I think that there just has to be an acceptance... that qualitative methods are valid and they are probably more appropriate.. for studying the social world and let go of

this notion that we can build some general laws that we can apply and predict and control society because it doesn't work like that! We're conscious human beings and we can't always predict how people are going to behave" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Here the implication is that there is something distinctive about human behaviour in contrast to the behaviour of objects in the physical world and therefore how we investigate this area must entail different methods.

However amongst these interviewees the 'management' focus of these qualitative endeavours could vary in two ways. For instance for some of these interviewees qualitative methods enabled access to "*the way in which [managers] see the world*" whereas for others it was about "*giving managers some insight into the different cultures of the organization and how other people think*".

While the overall stance remains one of verstehen, this can for some interviewees be a key stage in the inductive generation of theory:

"It affords a degree of interpretation...qualitative allows you to probe the individual...the micro level...and if we are going to really...understand people, we need to go to the micro and build it into a macro picture... You can use qualitative methods for ... theory generation...with theory testing built into the...process" [Panel C: Doctoral]

3.2 As verstehen but with reflexivity

While still emphasizing the aim of verstehen, a new mutually exclusive category emerges where other interviewees also argued that a significant characteristic of qualitative research was reflexivity on the part of the researcher:

"the most significant characteristics of qualitative research would be to do with trying to reflect the experience and interpretation of people that are involved ... partly the researchers themselves as well as what you might call the informants" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

In addition:

"[its]... much more about trying to get an acceptable representation of people's experiences and to be authentic... by being reflexive in your own approach to research" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Whilst the concept of internal reflexivity has been used to suggest that qualitative researchers should critically scrutinize the impact of their field roles upon research settings so as to reduce sources of contamination and thereby preserve objectivity, the emphasis of the above is also upon critical interrogation of how the qualitative researcher interprets and make sense of his/her own experiences during field work. This kind of reflexivity implies that these interviewees were alluding to a social constructionist stance that rejects the tacit empiricist commitments of much

qualitative research.

3.3 As a general bag of tools

“[Qualitative research] is appropriate for certain kinds of research questions... horses for courses” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

This view of qualitative research implies the possibility of rapprochement between quantitative and qualitative methods since different kinds of information about management and organization are most comprehensively and economically gathered in different ways. Therefore it is the nature of the research question and what is under investigation that should pragmatically dictate the correct methodology to use. Such a definition implies that, unlike 1 and 2, quantitative and qualitative methodologies do not necessarily reflect a fundamental philosophical conflict rather they complement one another in a variety of ways that can potentially add to the credibility of a study by providing an internal cross-checking or monitoring device during the research process. For instance:

“I guess I’m very eclectic and by that I mean that I value and appreciate the diversity in all methodological processes. I feel that they all have their place and can... inform... our understanding of management related phenomena... so I think there is value in different approaches and they can inform different phenomena in the same [study]”
[Panel C: Doctoral]

3.4 As a specific bag of tools

At first sight this definition is similar to 3.3 except that it entails specification of what phenomena qualitative methods are especially good at accessing. However it also emphasizes that this utility is a key concern in all management research thereby downplaying the relative utility of quantitative methodologies rather than emphasizing rapprochement. Thus these interviewees emphasized that qualitative research enables “*depth of insight... into the workings of organizations that you simply don’t get from quantitative research*”, or that “*gets behind the surface of things... so that you get a more rounded picture of the issue that you are faced with*”, or “*tries to grasp complexity... by being closer to actual management practice*”. Other interviewees emphasized how, in comparison to quantitative methods, qualitative methods enabled the researcher to access aspects of organizational realities that otherwise would be missed. An example of this possibility and its importance to management research is outlined below:

“It gets to decision-making processes of management in a way that I think quantitative approaches can’t and to me that’s a particular strength in management research” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

3.5 As exploratory research

Here qualitative methods are seen as being useful for exploratory work to develop concepts and theory while quantification of those data using content analysis and statistical techniques enable theory testing and evaluation. The result is that all qualitative management research is relegated to a preliminary role prior to the use of more rigorous, that is quantitative, management research. Thus qualitative management research may be used to:

“Explore issues ...to get a range of views on an issue...good at teasing out attitudes...so it’s got a distinctive role to quantitative research” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

However as this interviewee also observed:

“What I would say is qualitative; in so far as it means anything, can only ever be a preliminary piece of work... To me any research that is worth doing must be replicable or at least produce predictions” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Indeed not developing inherently exploratory qualitative research by identifying hypotheses to test through quantitative deductive methods was, for one interviewee, an abrogation of intellectual responsibility:

“A lot of stuff people call qualitative...[is]...just lazy because they can’t be bothered to...quantify what they find and make predictions” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

3.6 As a disposal category

Here qualitative research is condemned as something that isn’t compatible with proper management research because it is something which inherently lacks rigour and is unreliable due to its subjective nature:

T: Do you think that qualitative management research has got any defining ... special defining characteristics?

R: No. I think people use the word in a rather lazy manner. I think people often use it as an excuse for not doing rigorous research” [Panel C: Doctoral]

By implication, because qualitative research is seen to stand outside what these interviewees perceive as rigorous research, the latter being defined as a preference, it is incisively disposed of as a kind of *pseudo-science*:

“Or whether they take the view that this qualitative stuff is, you know, case based, it’s not representative, so on and so forth, and also, you know, it doesn’t give us hard numbers. It’s a sort of journalism and so on and so forth and that values come into it

and therefore the whole thing is kind of interesting, but basically unreliable for doing anything with it. [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

These interviewees defined qualitative management research in terms of it not having the aims or characteristics of quantitative research. However what qualitative research is remains shady in these definitions. Qualitative research is defined by what it is not. Thus qualitative research is not about “*establishing what causes what variables and how variables are actually associated*” and it “*is something which is not statistically based*”.

3.7 As specific data collection techniques.

In this category interviewees defined qualitative research in terms of an array of specific data collection techniques such as case study research or “*in-depth interviews, focus groups, in-depth –probing, semi-structured interviews*?”. Therefore it was the technique used that defined something as qualitative.

3.8 Conclusion

Within this chapter we have described a variety of definitions of qualitative management research in use. This diversity in the range of definitions means that when individuals are talking about qualitative research they may be talking about different things. There is no consensus about what qualitative research actually is. This diversity in itself provides the context for understanding the chapters that follow and the findings within. It is important that the reader is aware of the variety of meanings of the term ‘qualitative’ that interviewees may be using. This diversity also has practical implications for our objectives in conducting this research. For example, it means that addressing the notion of quality criteria as we outline in chapter 6, is a complex process, making the design of a universal set of quality criteria very difficult. The different definitions in use are important, not only because they present the context for the research that follows, but also because they may influence how qualitative management research is evaluated.

4.0 THE STATUS AND CREDIBILITY OF QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

This theme encompasses perceptions of the credibility of qualitative research and its status within the academic and practitioner communities. As well as providing some context to the general research area, this theme casts some light on our objective of exploring how qualitative research is assessed. Thus there is some overlap with the chapter that considers the assessment of qualitative management research (Chapter 6). However here the focus is on current general perceptions of the area rather than the active assessment of research.

Here we present the interviewees overall assessments of the status of qualitative management research. Additionally, we identify various ways in which credibility was defined by the interviewees and the implications these different conceptualisations have for qualitative management research:

- Credibility comes from quantification and science
- Credibility comes from being able to draw conclusions
- Credibility comes from being methodical, rigorous and objective
- Credibility comes from having technical skills
- Public and business perceptions of the credibility of research
- Credibility comes from impression management
- Assessment of overall status of qualitative management research

4.1 *Credibility comes from quantification and science*

A general perception, either reflecting the interviewees' views themselves or accredited to others (business, quantitative researchers, a general 'world view') was that quantification of the data and statistical analysis convey credibility. In a management environment, with an organizational emphasis on the "bottom line", numbers may be especially convincing:

"I suppose a lot of people in business.. I don't want to put them down but they may not have a very strong research background and, if they look at a piece of quantitative research, they might focus on the figures rather than the design. So they may be taking on board something that hasn't been terribly well designed and might say, "Oh yeah, this is really good and we should adopt this because we can get X % improvement"
[Panel B: Practitioners]

Without measurement, data cannot be transformed into research but remains a 'story':

"...but until he [postgraduate student] starts to do a comparative study between us and other organizations and actually gets some measures in place, then all it is is an

interesting story. That's my view" [Panel B: Practitioners]

While it could be recognized that qualitative research may draw its credibility from sources other than quantification (e.g. richness of the language), those other sources may not be regarded themselves as credible:

"... my own philosophical inclination is I have somewhat more confidence in them [statistical studies using large data sets] than I would in studies which depended upon, you know, the richness of the language or the understanding of one's interviewee where, you know, how well does he or she understand the question, the lack of facility with the language, a lack of intelligence perhaps and all of those things seem to me to run the risk of in a way dirtying the data and making it, from my point of view, less reliable" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The phrase "*dirtying the data*" implies that the qualitative research model in some way contaminates the research process. Qualitative research was also described as "*quick and dirty*". This contaminated (or shoddy) research process cannot then lead to dependable results.

As an alternative to the widely held (or attributed) view that quantification confers credibility, it was suggested that "*you can have millions of things which are completely unimportant ... that something is more doesn't mean that it's stronger*". Thus greater numbers does not necessarily equate with being more interesting or useful and may not, of itself, indicate a more convincing argument. However, the scientific status that may be associated with quantification may convey some credibility:

"Well, I think the problem is that to be seen to be credible you've got to be bulging, overflowing with stats otherwise it's like, "Oh, you're not a scientist!" It's not scientific" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

4.2 Credibility comes from being able to draw conclusions

Closely related to this perception of qualitative research being unscientific, is the notion that the results that emerge from qualitative research are inconclusive:

"But I think where quantitative work wins out a little bit, if that's the right expression, is that it's generally concluding something that's a relationship between X and Y on a reasonably large sample. It's obviously got to be large enough to do some technique of analysis so therefore what you can take away from that article is some summary of, you know, "In this sample X and Y are related in this way." It's much more difficult to do that with a qualitative piece because it might simply be a single case study. It might even be, you know, a single meeting that took place in an organization so the ability for anybody to kind of take away from that and then to communicate that to another audience is much more limited. So I think that what then happens is qualitative pieces like that are very much more open to a "So what?" kind of question" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Here the argument is that a small sample size means that researchers cannot make decisive pronouncements and the results are not generalizable to other situations. Thus the audience for research reports of this kind do not feel the results have any implications for their own situations.

However, having a larger sample may not make a difference to the perceived usefulness of qualitative data:

“There’s a feeling and I’ve actually met it internally, that qualitative data are just anecdotes

Interviewer: Anecdotes?

Yeah. You can collect lots of stories, but that simply gives you a lot of stories. It doesn’t give you any evidence that ... in the sense that a sample survey you know, ‘60% believe this, that and the other’ gives you.

Interviewer: Right.

And I think sort of within the ... where there is a reluctance to trust or use qualitative research, it’s because there’s this perception that really it’s just collecting anecdotes.....And an anecdote doesn’t prove anything. It’s always ... You know, whatever rule you come up with, there’s always a story that contradicts ... there’s an exception. And every story you come up with to say that my policy’s wrong, I can come up with an example as to how it’s right and therefore we’re just trading stories”
[Panel B: Practitioners]

Here, as before, qualitative research is equated with “telling stories”. The problem then is not a numerical one but the association of qualitative research with story telling, which is neither evidence nor proof. You cannot reach a definitive answer with qualitative methods because other interpretations are allowable. In other words, qualitative research, in this example, cannot adjudicate between right and wrong answers in the same way that quantitative research can. This can be seen as problematic in the policy environment in which some individuals worked.

4.3 Credibility comes from being methodical, rigorous and objective

Rigour of both process and thinking may be considerably valued in the research community, and this is another area in which qualitative research may be viewed as falling down by some quantitative researchers:

“I will tell you... I don’t know how this kind of fits in but I think part of what has created a negative perception about qualitative research historically has been that there is a lot of sloppy thinking by qualitative researchers ... this was how quantitative

people would perceive this” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The problem here is directed at a certain inadequacy in the researchers themselves – an inability to think carefully and incisively. More fundamentally, it may be a concern with the ability of the researchers to provide an unbiased account:

“I think greater importance is put on questionnaire data and I think less importance is put on the qualitative data. In my experience you’ve got to be careful about the way you use qualitative data. People question it more. They interrogate it more. They want to know more about it. ‘How did you reach ...?’ Because there is that degree of subjectivity and what they’re really doing is questioning your own objectivity in looking at the data, especially when it’s on a sensitive subject. People really do. And it can come out quite harsh in the verdict, or the judgement of the organization is quite harsh, then they do kind of question it by saying, ‘Who said this and how many people?’ Ultimately, I kind of feel that they’re questioning our objectivity. You know, did we come to this organization with the correct view and that what we’re doing now with the qualitative data is just contorting it to fit our own perception of their organization really. So I’ve just learnt over the years you’ve just got to be very, very careful about the way you present it” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Particularly perhaps in organizational contexts, where consultants (such as the individual above) are financially implicated in the research, any suggestion of subjective judgements may draw suspicion. In the quote above, the credibility of quantitative research may be taken at face value, while the credibility of qualitative research has to be earned.

The qualitative research process may also be in danger of being judged as badly conducted or misguided or simply “*made up*” (i.e. not “*grounded in the evidence*”):

“I think most people here can be convinced of the value of the qualitative research. I think you’ve got to show them that you’ve approached it methodically, systematically and appropriately and that the conclusions that you’ve drawn are truly grounded in the evidence that you’ve collected” [Panel B: Practitioners]

In contrast to the suspicion that qualitative researchers may be “*contorting*” their data, it was suggested by one individual that quantitative research may be somewhat “*dishonest*”:

“it’s partly a feeling that you are honest, that you want to be open, that you don’t hide. You know, if everything is very smooth and everything is very linear and very logical, then there is something wrong because no research project in practice works like that. I find when I read quantitative studies that a lot of the anomalies and deviations from what is accepted have just been swept under the carpet. They’ve just cut away the difficult parts of it. You have to be open about it, especially if you get conflicting information and information that you cannot really squeeze into your categories: Don’t squeeze them in. Say that I’ve got some left-overs here and I don’t know what to do with them because I cannot find a place for them, but here they are! That, I think, adds to credibility” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Here, we get the suggestion that it partly comes down to the presentation. Quantitative research may appear more rigorously conducted simply because of reporting styles. Qualitative research, on the other hand, may appear indecisive, inconclusive, even unfinished, because contradictions and problems are acknowledged. Quantitative research may be less credible because of what it leaves out and qualitative research may be less credible because of what it leaves in.

For some, the idea of a methodical (recipe book) approach to qualitative research may be incongruent:

“So I think there are a number of ways where you can be open about what you’re doing, but you cannot lean on any set regulation on what to do or not to do really as you can do sometimes in quantitative research” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

4.4 Credibility comes from having technical skills

The skills of quantitative analysis, specifically the use of computer-based statistical packages like SPSS, may be seen to be intrinsically more valued:

“I suppose it’s the way different skills are valued as well, isn’t it? So, if it’s something to do with technology it’s more skilled than if it’s something where you’re doing something with paper and using your brain a bit more and things. It’s sort of not quite seen in the same way” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Indeed, qualitative researchers may be positioned as conducting qualitative research, not as a positive choice, but because they are insufficiently skilled at quantitative analysis:

“I’ve got this maths phobia!” and they’ll swing right into qualitative research not knowing that it could be more difficult and it’s got to be more rigorous” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Qualitative research may be viewed as essentially “unskilled” work:

“I don’t think that there’s quite as clear a recognition of the sort of technical expertises and competencies that are required in qualitative research as in survey work. So somebody who doesn’t actually know about survey research I think will tend not to feel it’s their place to comment on sample size or interview length or whatever. I think in qualitative research there’s more of a sense that it’s really just the application of basic intelligence, common sense and social skills really and that as long as you’ve got a bit of all of those, you can actually head off and do some perfectly good qualitative research work, or you certainly feel entitled to comment on somebody else’s qualitative research design. I just think that the sort of technical issues involved in survey research paint some clear boundaries around who’s an expert in it and who isn’t and I think those technical issues exist, but in a different sort of way in qualitative research and just ... They don’t make people think, “Oh Christ! I don’t know what those words mean! I

really shouldn't comment!" You know? It makes people think, "Oh yeah! 40 people? That doesn't sound like very many! I'd better say, you know, surely 40 people isn't enough for us to come up with robust findings?" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The problem presented here is not so much with quantitative or qualitative research or indeed researchers, but with the people who judge the research and the language employed in describing research. Quantitative research, by virtue of its technology may put itself beyond criticism to the uninitiated. The panoply of technical terms and measurement technology gives an overall perception of a specialist, expert domain that is unarguable. Qualitative research, on the other hand, may also involve specific complex skills but they are not recognized as such. Qualitative research, therefore, is more open to criticism. This particular individual argued that qualitative research was often then 'inappropriately' criticized because commentators underestimate the skills involved, and are unaware of the (epistemological) assumptions behind the research – they don't know how to judge qualitative research (but think they do):

"There just isn't that sort of recognition that there is a specific historical knowledge of ... a body of knowledge, a set of expertises, a set of technical competencies that go to making qualitative research good, whereas I think there is that recognition around quantitative research" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

These issues will be returned to later when we consider training needs in Chapter 7.

4.5 Public and business perceptions of the credibility of research

Management research specifically faces the issue of interesting organizations in its insights and outputs. It was suggested that this was harder to achieve with qualitative research because the organizational world is dominated by facts and finance:

"At the risk of wanting to sound too black and white about it, I feel that when you're dealing with a world that rather likes concrete, which I think the business world does, and they like specifics and they like figures, I just think you are struggling a little bit with the whole area of qualitative research if it's going to be taken really seriously" [Panel B: Practitioners]

These issues are sharpened by the need for researchers to gain access to organizations to conduct their research, and to maintain their credibility and the credibility of their contacts while they are there. Beyond the organizational world, it was suggested that qualitative methods were associated with "*pseudo-science*" because of the uses they had been put to in public arenas:

"And I also think, you know, the late '90s passion within government to run focus groups has actually damaged the reputation of qualitative research, which I don't think as an industry we've managed to recover really" [Panel A: Academic]

Disseminators]

While the public may be suspicious of focus groups, they may also be unable to distinguish between academic research and marketing research – such that poor examples of both qualitative and quantitative studies may be accepted as credible.

It was also argued that the credibility and acceptability of qualitative research may be increasing in the eyes of the public because of the current political climate:

“I think actually under the Tory government they were always much more keen on sort of facts ... numbers and I think now there’s much more interest in the processes and things. So, I think qualitative research which explores the processes is more influential than it may be. And it’ll probably swing the other way at some point”
[Panel B: Practitioners]

In this view, credibility of research methods is tied to changes in wider public contexts. Credibility is not an essential attribute of the method itself but conferred on the basis of current (public) interests.

4.6 Credibility comes from impression management

Given the perceptions above, it was claimed that qualitative researchers had to be more careful about the way they present themselves and their data.

“I guess it’s an issue of credibility in terms of whether the person feels that you have got your act together and you know what you’re looking for. ... you know, I entirely accept that if I have to provide an account of what I’m doing, then something reasonably coherent has to be presented” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

In contrast to the view given in an earlier section, this individual suggests that it is not appropriate to give a “messy” (if honest) account of the research but that credibility is gained if one at least gives the impression of a focused (as in objective-driven, rather than exploratory), methodical research process. In order to get published, academics may go further:

“... I can only assume it is, you know, a ritual almost that you have to go through to get your qualitative findings published in journals that are traditionally associated with quantitative research.

Interviewer: So it gives a kind of legitimacy to it?

Absolutely, yeah. It makes it look like pseudo quantitative research” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

In this view, as with public perceptions, credibility is not an essential attribute of a research process but something that can be achieved with the right kind of

presentation. Qualitative researchers may be producing sanitized versions of their research (in the same way, it was suggested earlier, that quantitative researchers do) in order to achieve an account likely to be judged credible.

4.7 Assessment of overall status of qualitative research

In comparison with the United States, and, seemingly despite the misgivings described above, qualitative research was seen as increasing in status in the U.K. and Scandinavian academic circles. However, in the U.S.A.:

“... within academics, within Business I think there’s a long way to go in this country [US] before we’re actually going to accept qualitative research to the same degree as quantitative research. There is in my opinion a huge bias” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

It is also argued, however, that this situation is changing in the US through education in academic circles:

Interviewer: “And what sort of status or importance do you think is placed on qualitative research in management?”

R: “More and more! More I think. There’s a few schools that are training people well and other people are picking it up on their own. I think more people are being asked to use different methods” [Panel C: Doctoral]

While there is seen to be an increase in the status of qualitative research recently, there is no sense here that it is, however, to be treated on the same level as quantitative research.

4.8 Conclusion

The analysis here suggests various conceptualizations of ‘credibility’. One is that credibility is an intrinsic aspect of some research processes. Claims were made that quantification, statistical analysis, rigour, systematization, were indicators of credibility. In this conceptualisation, qualitative research is by definition, not credible because it does not adopt many of these processes and measures. However, credibility is also presented as a judgement made by assessors – here it is argued that such assessors may not have the skills or knowledge to make a proper judgement of the credibility of qualitative research. Credibility is also presented as an achieved status – not intrinsic to the research process but accomplished by presenting the research report in particular ways – and this is something in which quantitative researchers are well-practised. Judgements of credibility are also seen to be influenced by particular (political) contexts – such that what constitutes credible research may change from period to period, being something of a cultural artefact.

The idea that credibility itself may not just have one definition or aspect raises all sorts of questions about how the label ‘credible’ is attached to one kind of research

but not another. The general pattern of responses here, suggests that quantitative research is equated with science, while qualitative research is equated with story-telling. No matter how interesting the story, it is not science and therefore is inconsequential. This perspective assumes that science is 'better' than story-telling, however, this is a claim perhaps open to some debate. Indeed, this debate is further explored in chapter 6, where we turn to a direct consideration of how research is assessed.

How might this situation relate to our objective to enhance good practice in qualitative management research? The current research context outlined above might lead us to conclude that qualitative research may be increasing in status in some respects but may never be regarded as 'truly' credible because many of the definitions of credibility in management research are based on criteria that qualitative research could not fulfil (such as quantification, producing 'bottom line' figures). If qualitative research was to remain not credible by definition, then there would be little point in enhancing good practice in the field. While qualitative research is equated with story-telling and story-telling is under-valued in a social science informed by the natural sciences (rather than, for example, literary criticism), it may be difficult to achieve any credibility. Enhancing good practice in this context may imply encouraging researchers to adopt the characteristics of quantitative research (e.g. objectivity, scientific 'rigour'). However this may do great disservice to some forms of (non-positivist) qualitative research. Alternatively, the judgement of credibility may rest on criteria that are difficult to influence (e.g. a general cultural awareness). If we regard credibility as a judgement, however, we may be able to influence the credibility of qualitative research, not by training qualitative researchers in particular methods or processes, but by training all management researchers in appropriate methods of assessment.

5.0 PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD PRACTICE IN CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

This category is concerned with perceptions of good practice with regard to the practical processes of doing qualitative research. As such it is closely linked to our objective of understanding how qualitative research is judged and what makes ‘good’ qualitative research. Here we focus on some of the methodological issues in the conduct of research. The section is divided into five broad categories:

- Design;
- Mixing methods;
- Analysis;
- Reflexivity;
- Presentation and dissemination.

In some of the areas, further more specific issues are identified as sub-categories.

5.1 Design

Issues to do with the design of a research project revolved predominantly around the choice of methods needed to answer the research questions and sampling issues.

5.1.1. Choice of methods

In planning and designing a research project considerable emphasis was placed upon the importance of choosing the ‘*right tools for the job*’ in order to answer the research question. This approach was typified by a view that:

“you get what you measure and there’s always a danger that if you mis-specify a project which is essentially quantitative, you run pretty much the same risks as you do if you mis-specify a project which is qualitative” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Here there was an emphasis on planning the research beforehand and having “*a clear idea of what it is [you’re] looking for*” or “*a clear view of the problem which is being addressed*”. In this sense the use of any method was seen as appropriate in terms of “*whatever will answer the person’s question*”. There was a sense that qualitative research is a tangible affair, in which questions and objectives are clear from the start. However there was also a sense that “*one has to be clear about the assumptions one is making and how these will help you to... pursue you research*” and that in this sense “*one needs to know why one is asking certain questions*” particularly in relation to our own mental models. An emphasis upon choosing and deploying the right tools and techniques to make “*an informed choice*” to look at a “*particular problematic*” was associated in this case with the production of “*good, robust qualitative research*”.

At the same time the emphasis on taking the correct procedural and pre-planned

decisions could also be contrasted with a preference to “*not go in with a strong agenda*” and to “*leave that open to discover what is interesting to explore*”. By contrast to procedural correctness it was acknowledged that this might be perceived as being rather “*flabby and confused*” and that there was inevitably a need to provide an account of the research in a “*reasonably coherent*” fashion.

It was felt that qualitative research approaches could offer opportunities to be more flexible and receptive to unknown possibilities than could quantitative approaches which are often constrained by a more rigid pre-planned design:

“what you’re getting with qualitative research... is the flexibility to be able to change direction and move from one thing to the other and not just have a pre... a fixed idea of what questions you might want to ask, which is perfectly okay because everybody gets asked the same question in the same way or the same words, but it’s... well you know from interviewing people that you can just veer off at a tangent and think ‘Oh, that was an interesting idea! This is going to help throw a light on things’” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Taking a flexible approach to the utilisation of methods and being open to the possibilities that this might present meant also that there is more of “*an interaction within yourself because you are part of what you’re studying. You’re not just a detached observer*”. That during the research process itself you are “*being challenged by people... by the transcripts trying to make sense of them... [and that this] has an important part to play in terms of... developing the work or regressing work*”.

Using qualitative methods was regarded as a freer, less technique driven, approach to doing research in which:

“if it’s used right, it doesn’t drive. It allows the research to be driven and it allows these emergent themes... that like we don’t know it all, because if we did, we wouldn’t do the research in the first place. And how do we find out anything new if we’re not ready to allow it to inform us?” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Whichever approach was taken in deciding upon methodology the importance of showing “*that those techniques are used in a proper and appropriate manner*” and that “*the whole thing is logically consistent from that point of view*” was stressed throughout the interviews. It was emphasised that there needed to be “*evidence of the researcher’s own sort of general reference sources about how they approached it*”; and that “*you’re allowed to do anything in science as long as it’s transparent... you can do anything as long as you try to be explicit*” and “*give a rationale as to why [you’ve] selected what [you] have*”. Such openness and explicit documenting were seen as imperative in giving the research some credibility and enabling the reader to understand what was going on:

“ You need to be vocal about what you’re doing and understand what’s going on during the research and that means lots of different strands, that you’re having to play with ambiguity all the time and sometimes that’s not good for some people. Some people can’t cope with that so you have to be very careful about how you choose your methodology. It’s not just a question of saying, ‘Well, this research question means that this method would be better and I’ll just apply it.’ You can’t. You’ve got to

have some commitment to the whole notion of why you would use qualitative research and how it actually plays out in practice” [Panel B. Practitioners]

5.1.2. Sampling

Sampling choices for quantitative methods were seen to be associated with specific sets of rules that guide and stipulate those choices. Decisions about sampling in relation to qualitative methods were identified as being less clear cut, but still influenced by the power of numbers:

“I think we’re a lot more lenient with the qualitative work because we will accept a convenience sample. In quantitative work that would be just looked down upon. In qualitative we’ll also permit snowball sampling, purposeful sampling and on the quantitative side we kind of obviously look down on that because you can’t make any generalisations if you have something that’s a non probability sample. On the other hand, we’ve taken a number of the sampling type ideas from the quantitative and tried to use in the qualitative sense. For example, if you’re going to have a sample of so many people from an organization that are going to have a qualitative interview, why not go ahead and randomly select those just to get a little bit more rigour with it? And so I’m seeing some of those techniques come over from quantitative to qualitative” [Panel C: Doctoral]

There is a perception here that sampling presents a problem in relation to the rigour, validity and quality of qualitative research, especially in relation to issues such as generalizability (see also chapter 6). This also manifested itself in relation to how many interviews were needed in qualitative research in order to make it appear credible or representative to the outside world, and that rather than being dictated by a specific set of rules, this was something the qualitative researcher had to work at:

“By the time I got to 12 interviews, I was much more confident. Having read a number of different approaches to evaluation, I was confident that the data I was getting was just reinforcing the data that I’d previously held and the surprises were less and less and at that point I felt that that was... you know, I had 50... What I keep saying to them is 12 interviews, 2 to 3 hours long, can get you 50,000 words of data. How does that compare to a questionnaire?” [Panel C: Doctoral]

On the other hand it also appeared to be a balancing act between how good or how many?:

“there’s been a tendency again in more positivist approaches... that you have to have a certain number of interviews... for it to be good you might have 10 interviews, you might have 20, you might have 40 or 50, but for a doctorate if you’ve got 100 to 150 interviews, does that make it any better than if you’ve got 50 or even 20 that were really well done, well constructed, well reported? It’s like the numbers game comes in again and I think that comes back to the research method. You know, what is the method? How deep are you having to go in? But how valid that is seen then is... I mean there seems to be a magic number here of around 30 and somewhere between 25

and 35 seems to be the norm” [Panel C: Doctoral]

There were also pragmatic choices to be made about sampling and gaining access to research participants:

“snowballing is sort of opportunistic... and I think that’s fine... and you can be overly fussy, especially when you are doing research that is very relevant and it is involved with real organizations. To get access often you have to be opportunistic and you can’t always be too fussy about how you go about designing the research... I mean I’m quite broad and quite open and quite catholic as long as people are explaining what they’re doing” [Panel B: Practitioners]

For one interviewee access was a “*pain*” that could easily “*scupper*” a great research design, and that this was not just a problem in the initial stages of getting access, but in negotiating “*field relationships*” and “*maintaining co-operation*”, as well as “*having sponsors who put in a good word*”. This problem was identified in material terms as well as design terms when:

“so much of the problem of a qualitative sample is to do with the kind of proportionality of the cost of getting a sample. I mean I am clear that it’s not just the case that people don’t think. It’s that if you want to do a sample of court files or hospital files and you’ve got to negotiate access, you can’t go to 500 hospitals and negotiate access and do all of that. Whereas starting with a kind of sample of individuals and asking ‘would you mind if we re-interviewed you’ – can kind of break through some of those log jams. So there’s some practical issues there about having the luxury of being able to disperse your sample” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

5.2 Mixing Methods

The use of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) was advocated by a number of interviewees, although differences in approaches were recognised: “*.. in the way qualitative and quantitative researchers think about research questions, how they go about collecting their data, their expectations of their data, [and] how they go about analysis*”. It was suggested that: “*if you want to be a good qualitative researcher, don’t just focus exclusively on qualitative methods... you’ve really got to know what quantitative work does*” and that “*its much better for people who do qualitative research to actually have a really good understanding of what quantitative research is and vice versa*”.

A lack of understanding or different perceptions of the usefulness or role of qualitative and quantitative methods was highlighted not only in relation to the researchers themselves but in relation to the customers and clients commissioning research:

“Sometimes I encounter it in government departments you know, quite senior people who really ought to know these things by now, policy makers or research managers. It’s unforgivable among research managers. It’s forgivable, but regrettable among the

policy makers. Collaborators, academic collaborators, who will swallow everything that my quantitative colleagues say about what the design should be and think 'You're the experts. Yeah you're absolutely right,' and will just ask completely inappropriate questions of the qual part of the design. And also you notice it when you do things like have to go for ethics approval in health related research where the ethics form is completely inappropriate to qualitative research and the sorts of questions that the ethical committee will come back with about qualitative research you just think, you know, 'Why are you asking me why we're not using a probability sample?' You know, you shouldn't be on that committee if you can't evaluate qualitative research methods" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Such perceptions of qualitative and quantitative methods were cited as examples of the 'political' shaping of research specifications:

"it was apparent that some quantification for some clients (if I can call funders clients) or applied work were looking for a quantitative solution. Their expectations were clearly that rigour and quality came from being able to prove it with numbers. So... methodologies... research designs were adapted to meet those requirements, even though one's main insight was going to come from the qualitative data" [Panel C: Doctoral]

There was a sense that quantitative and qualitative methods could support and complement each other in terms of qualitative methods going "*deeper into something*" and quantitative methods showing "*how broad or wide*" a research problem is. An ideal type of research project was described as being one that:

"set the result [of a qualitative study]... against a quantitative research [study] that took some kind of appropriately structured sample... Now that would be ideal because you get the stories coming from the leaders themselves and you get the... bigger picture, quantitative thing, about perceptions". [Panel B: Practitioners]

These roles however were perceived as unequal in terms of influence where quantitative research was "*always seen as rigorous*" and had the ability to "*add power and potency*" to the research. Whereas qualitative research whilst being acknowledged as useful and important, was placed in a supportive role to quantitative as an "*elicitation phase... to check and redesign measures*" in a study, or where "*you're getting in close... getting a rich data set... [and] getting behind some of the ticks on paper*".

In this sense the ideal use of mixed methods were seen as a "*qualitative, quantitative, qualitative*" sandwich, which could then "*nail it down at both ends*" because mixed methods were perceived to have the "*rigour of the scientific approach with the probability and the perceived richness of the qualitative approach*".

5.3 Analysis

It was suggested that qualitative research methods literature places great emphasis upon the methods used to go out and collect or generate data, but less emphasis upon the analytical techniques that can be used to interpret these data. From the

interviews there is some evidence that this reflects the techniques and perspectives more commonly associated with quantitative methods in that:

“most of the work with quantitative research, the time is spent designing the questionnaire, piloting it, sending it out, getting the data back. The analysis bit is fairly quick. Once you’ve got your data into the computer and you’ve decided what stats you want to run on it, you know, that it’ll do itself practically. With qualitative research it’s completely the other way round. Analysing is happening as you’re going along. There isn’t this nice break where you collect it and then you decide what you’re going to do with it... it’s also the bit that takes the longest... in terms of putting together a holistic understanding of all the data afterwards, that’s what takes most time” [Panel C: Doctoral]

There was also a feeling that whatever methods you use to collect data you “*get material which you use one way or another*” and in this respect the choice of analytical approaches and philosophies becomes critical in terms of what you do with the data and how “*that makes it qualitative or more positivistic or more quantitative*”. Different approaches to data analysis were evident amongst our interviewees reflecting a range of philosophical perspectives. From the ‘qualitative’ positivist:

“we did a lot of interviews... and did our coding afterwards... based on the Strauss & Corbin type categories and scales and dimensions... we came out with a final list of about 20... of sort of structural, contextual characteristics and so forth. And then this was a way of trying to make it more quantitative” [Panel B: Practitioners]

The ‘quantitative’ positivist:

“I think I would say that on the analysis the qualitative research remain... the main emphasis in the analysis is simply the quantification phase or the counting... The analysis of the qualitative data to my mind is it focuses more descriptively on quantifying the responses that are provided originally. So it really has this text information and then we put it through the software and we say 53% of the people said this, 37% of the people said this... so it’s the quantification that’s descriptively summarising the response whereas in quantitative research the emphasis is on looking at relationships between variables” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The interpretivist:

“the skill, particularly on qualitative work... is how you interpret qualitative data and I think we just haven’t got enough about how people got to the interpretations they got to. And I mean we joke about... having a huge dining table and a pack of twenty different colours of highlighter pen, but you know, people who are really talking about what they did and how they did it in terms of dealing with masses of qualitative data, which is what you end up with if you’re stupid enough to do twenty interviews...” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The narrative storyteller:

“it has to be systematic, yes. I mean anyone can just go and sit down with someone and get them to talk into a microphone and write up what they’ve said. Now that’s not qualitative research. That is just writing up someone’s story. The story I’m talking about is the story that links 10 interviews together where the skilled researcher has picked up the things that resonate between those stories and, in writing them up as a report or whatever, is showing where the links are and then you start to have really effective qualitative research... so the story is not just a write up of one person. It’s a narrative that goes across” [Panel B: Practitioners]

The critical storyteller:

“I think the narrative story telling, collecting the stories and number creation in the stories and how researchers engage in their analysis and their interpretations and their text presentations... [and] I think it contributes in a dialectic way with the quantitative, not as your choice way or not as a triangulation way... it’s a dialectic, [and] we all go in with our own background ideas, but hopefully there’s some conversation with people and you get to share what we thought were our naïve categories and they get to share what our categories mean to them... you can co-construct eventually” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

These various different approaches to the analysis of qualitative data illustrate the diverse possibilities available to researchers in how they deal with and present qualitative data analysis. Whilst it was felt that to some extent it didn’t matter *“which particular approach it is”* there needed to be some sort of *“systematic approach to analysis”* and demonstration of *“what you’ve done”*. That analysis needed to be *“done within a theoretical framework”* with *“some genuine interpretation”* rather than *“simply reporting things”* so that there was:

“a match at least or a congruence between the kind of data presented and analysed and the methods chosen to the theoretical problem and the problematic of the paper. So, you know, one could look for a match at least between ... if it were a qualitative piece of work, that at least the theoretical rigour and theoretical point of interest would have been at least reflected in and revealed by the data and the methods employed” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

At the same time, if the research was to be credible to the reader they needed leading *“into what he or she thinks is significantly important about the research findings”*. It had to be made *“transparent”* and choices and assumptions made explicit in relation to the methodological perspective. So that *“if you’re a positivist, you’ll tend to do this. If you’re a critical realist, you’ll tend to do that...”*. So whilst different approaches might be taken, there was also a requirement that there should be some consistency between methods, methodology and analysis, in order to demonstrate a logic to the story being told:

“if you have story data and then a story theory and then a story presentation those are the match. So if you’re taking story data, story text (as data is a hard word)... if you’re having theory, that could be a narrative theory, you know, or discourse theory or something else, not six categories of ‘leadership’ or something. Do you know what I

mean?” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

In addition to the analytical approaches taken and the way in which they are presented, concerns about practical and physical constraints were also expressed, and that these might mitigate against good quality analysis. One of these concerned the sheer quantity of data generated in qualitative research and how this is subsequently managed:

“my garage is full of the stuff because I hate to throw it away because it’s data... we had all this stuff and it was enormous... we couldn’t interact with it... we could not make sense of it. We could not help other people make sense of it... So, thinking about... what are the data that you are going to deal with and how can you deal with it” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Linked to the problem of quantity of data was also the question of the time needed to do the analysis and that this needed *“patience because the amount of data that you get... the patience of being able to go through that and pick out the key sections, the key moments”* and that *“it’s quite time consuming to do the analysis properly and that is the stage that sometimes gets skimmed on... because of tight deadlines and high costs... it’s a time consuming business however you do it”*.

5.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is almost a taken for granted part of the process of doing qualitative research. However, amongst the interviewees it was sometimes perceived as being overly *“self-indulgent”* and *“sometimes a bit too much... [in] a very conservative culture”*. Getting the balance right between *“helping the reader better understand what’s going on”* and making *“what you did seem more important to yourself”* was presented as problematic. This appears to be a rather fine line that the qualitative researcher needs to accomplish without bearing their soul to their audience. It was felt that they needed to be able to *“disclose... who are they?”* and present *“some kind of story about the process of the writing or about the journey they’ve been on to create the piece”* and that this should come as a *“front-end statement”* from which the reader can better make sense of the research and *“engage with [it] in the light of what you know about me and where I’m coming from”*.

This approach of *‘writing yourself in’* as the researcher, is totally opposite to the one which says a researcher should be taking an objective and disengaged role in the research, but is justified on the basis that:

“you’re not trying to pretend that you haven’t had an influence and therefore... you’re not in that camp that says anyone could have done this research and got the same results as me. You’re in the camp that says I impact and therefore I need to examine how I have impacted or how I think I might be going to impact and to be up-front to my readers and also my[research] participants” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

This was regarded as an iterative process *“of reflexive spiral”* or *“reflexive circle”*, which *“at some point you’ve got to get off... and just write it”*.

5.5 Presentation and Dissemination

We make a distinction here between dissemination and presentation of research in the sense that dissemination is concerned with distributing and publicising the research to an external audience, and may involve taking political as well as tactical decisions in doing so. Presentation is more concerned with the practicalities and skills needed to write and deliver a research paper, book or report in a particular style or format.

5.5.1 Presentation

The skill of translating a piece of research practice into an end product on the one hand was regarded as:

“a talent that some people have or don't have... to be able to then express that speaking, [or] pen on paper in the written word, in a way that helps the reader understand what you've done and presents your conclusions in a way that is true to the methodology, but is compelling to the reader” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Or that:

“qualitative researchers really have to learn how to express what we do in a way that engages readers, but that doesn't do the kind of 'trust me, I was there, you weren't and here's the story' but let's the reader see the kind of data that you engaged with and responded to so they have confidence that you did it, but makes them care” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

This perhaps reflects the contradictions in perceptions of qualitative research skills between being inherent and therefore possibly less highly regarded, or as being difficult to achieve and therefore needing both training and experience on the job. This latter perspective highlighted the need for development of rhetorical skills or the *“art of presentation, or art of persuasion”* that management researchers *“like in any other sub-discipline need[s] to learn to use”*. Such skills in presenting qualitative research could be done in a number of ways but unlike quantitative research *“could not lean on any set regulation”* and that to do this was harder in qualitative research because it does not have the *“immediacy that a set of survey results or a set of performance indicators has”*. At the same time telling a coherent qualitative story was regarded as a difficult task when *“there's no coherence to it usually at all. It's very messy”*.

One aspect of presenting qualitative research that was felt to be important was the need to recognise the limitations of the research and not make claims or *“attempt to go beyond what qualitative research actually tries to do, which is contextualise findings”*. This was really about trying to convey a *“believable”* account, one that doesn't just *“spring[s] out of nowhere”*. In this sense it was about:

“having an idea that organizations might be products of history, products of context, products of time, then a good piece of research will be one that which reveals some of

those interactions not all of them, but some of the key interactions there might be, some of the key associations, there might be... And that also gets reflected then in the way the narrative is presented". [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The presentation of research to a client or commissioner of research was seen as an interactive process but within specific boundaries. In this case the 'results' of a piece of research were open to scrutiny if they were of a "factual" nature, but not if it was a question of "perception". But, based on the presentation of the facts and the perceptions then, the recommendations coming out of the research would be a "collaborative exercise".

5.5.2 Dissemination

Almost all the comments and ideas with respect to dissemination came from the Panel A or B members who are predominantly involved in policy/practitioner research or grant funding bodies. This is not surprising given they would normally have a higher public profile or a brief more closely aligned with providing applied research than would academic researchers.

Two main issues were highlighted. Firstly, the problem of getting across messages and findings from qualitative research reports when they do not easily fit into the media soundbite:

"we are also reliant on getting the message out through the media and the press, which is where it is sometimes really useful to have some quantitative research because journalists do like it!. They do like to be able to say, you know, '50% of health service managers think Blab'!... and you get the sense that what they want when they get a press release is half the people said this, or the great majority said that..."
[Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

To some extent this was counterbalanced by another interviewee's more proactive approach in which they took control in their dissemination strategy to "take the theme and the message and use it... [to] stimulate debate and get ideas out" and that by doing this in a proactive and tactical way they managed to avoid the questions relating to number of interviewees in the study or robustness because they are presenting it "at an issue level, not as a piece of research".

The second issue was the dissemination between the academic community and the practitioner/manager community. This revolved around the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and how these could be shared in a two way process. The main barrier to this was the lack of incentive for academics to go out of their way in publishing their work in practitioner journals or practitioner conferences that did not count towards the Research Assessment Exercise (the regular assessment of university-based research carried out in the U.K. by the government body responsible for funding research). Whether this was the responsibility of the manager "to find out" or the responsibility of the academic to "communicate it" was unclear. Some interviewees pointed out that for research to be useful it should not just sit on the shelf and would probably have greater impact "by [publishing] something in the local paper... saying... 'Boffins of the OU have discovered X' and then lots of the local people say, 'Oh, that's interesting!'"

That affects me!.

5.5 Conclusion

We have presented perceptions of good practice in conducting qualitative research in five areas of qualitative research. These do not present a coherent consolidated range of views but rather a fragmented and disputed approach to doing qualitative research which seems to characterise many of the chapters in this report.

One view presented by the interviewees was that choosing the right methods to fit the research problem would inevitably lead to the right answer or to a good piece of research. At the same time qualitative research methods were recognised as having the possibility to be more flexible and less constrained in determining the outcomes before entering the research field. There was more possibility of an interaction between the researcher and the researched leading to unknown questions and answers.

These two perspectives again present a dichotomy running through this whole research project, concerning the extent to which prevailing assumptions, techniques and approaches perhaps more appropriate to quantitative research influence the design and execution of qualitative research. Whilst the use of quantitative and qualitative methods together might be seen as complementary it is not an equitable relationship when statistical analysis is still thought of as more robust and rigorous.

The process of analysis is important here in relation to the future training and support given to qualitative researchers. We present a range of approaches to the analysis of qualitative data reflecting a diversity of perspectives. This also highlights the possibility of creating different interpretations of the data. Which of these final presentations of qualitative research resonates with any of us in terms of credibility is to some extent determined by our own perspectives and biases too, but in order to come close to a more consistent credibility and acceptable quality there has to be an acknowledgement and understanding of these perspectives and how they fit together within the research approach taken (see also Chapter 7).

As well as these epistemological considerations the practicalities of doing qualitative research, and analysis and presentation in particular, needs far more recognition in terms of the time, effort and training needed to carry out this work well. A common concern was that the analysis of qualitative work was often undervalued, underestimated and mis-understood. Emphasis placed on the front end of research (i.e. planning and design, choice of methods and collection of data) are not necessarily the priority of qualitative research approaches.

The personal involvement and commitment to qualitative researchers' own role and involvement in their research is a demanding and involved process that is not easily separated into neat bites of time or thinking space. As such, qualitative research is not as easily 'learnt' or applied rote like, but requires experience, practice and application within an appropriate environment. Much more emphasis needs to be placed upon understanding and acknowledging that qualitative research requires different analytical approaches and different resourcing in order to make these approaches more acceptable to 'mainstream' management research.

6.0 ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

To investigate perceptions of ‘quality’ in qualitative management research was a key objective of the research project. The interview questions therefore focused particularly on how interviewees recognised quality in qualitative research, and how ‘gatekeepers’ perceived their own and others judgements through the peer review process.

Five broad categories relating to the assessment of quality are presented here:

- Quality as Making a Contribution;
- Quality as Technical Accomplishment;
- Quality as Presentation and Performance;
- Quality as Intuitive Decision Making or the Rational Application of Criteria

These categories are further broken down into various sub-categories. We also examine how the quality of qualitative work is assessed through the peer reviewing process.

6.1 *Quality as making a contribution*

For a piece of research to make an impact and be considered of good quality it had to make a contribution. Making a contribution was expressed predominantly in terms of providing “*new insights*”; “*practical outcomes and usefulness*”; and “*new problems to resolve*”.

New insights did not necessarily have to be “*novel*” but could be presented in terms of “*making a contribution that is not elsewhere*”; “*telling something you don’t already know*”; “*telling something that is not just common sense*”; or “*was something added to management knowledge*”. Practical outcomes on the other hand were associated more with some *pushing back the barriers*”; “*form of change where contribution was validated in action through informing policy and practice*. In this sense it had to be found useful or it would “*sit on the shelf*”. As well as providing us with answers to research problems, developing new theories, or generating practical outcomes it was also expressed that “*new problems and new issues to resolve*” are what we need from qualitative methods.

In addition to expressions of contribution the question of whether a particular piece was interesting or not played an important role in interviewees’ readings of research. This could be categorized in a number of ways as outlined below.

6.1.1 You may think it’s interesting but I don’t

This relates to a kind of ‘so what’ question where the researcher has presented their work but the reader can find no reason to engage with it. This appears to be due to

the lack of analysis and failure to interpret the data in such a way that gives the reader something to go on or to challenge them in some way:

“therefore people can say... but “so what, what’s this telling me?” Interesting, but it’s rather like reading a novel or like “four managers sat down and had a chat, and here’s the narrative, and it’s very interesting” and the conclusion is no its not clear because I can’t take away anything from that” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

6.1.2 It’s interesting in the particular but not in the wider sense

Whilst a piece could be found interesting for some, the credibility of the research as a whole was lacking because there were no clear ways shown or arguments made that linked the interesting study to a wider audience or wider applicability:

“Ethnographic, qualitative research is often very interesting, but again by definition, it’s difficult to draw conclusions from it, I think. Really robust conclusions anyway” [Panel B: Practitioners]

6.1.3 Interesting is a matter of taste

What is interesting to one is not to another, depending upon the pre-knowledge, cultural understanding, depth of knowledge of the subject, and possibly one’s own world view in terms of epistemological and ontological perspectives:

“I would never personally read anything that had... that I regarded as qualitative because it really wouldn’t be of any great interest” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Or

“so much qualitative research is just not interesting enough to keep me engaged” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

One aspect of the extent to which something is defined as interesting or not is in comparison to quantitative work. In this context quantitative research is described as “a bit dull” or “boring”:

“Quantitative studies are a way of telling stories but just... they’re not as interesting!” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

6.1.4 It’s interesting but – there’s a trade off

Long qualitative reports or papers need to be focused and keep the reader engaged and cannot assume that the reader, even if they are sympathetic to a qualitative piece, will stick with it:

“Sometimes they have something wonderfully interesting, but... 25 pages later they haven’t gotten to the point... if you get to the data, they have really interesting things and they have a lot of insights, but you know, they expect the readers to read 40 pages before they get to it and most people won’t waste their time” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The trade off in publishing qualitative work could be seen in terms of space and citation ratings but for one journal editor an interesting qualitative study made this all worthwhile:

“I still think that the benefit outweighs the cost because we do get more interesting studies. It’s more interesting to read and as an editor when you read it all, it’s very important that it’s interesting!” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

6.2 Quality as Technical Accomplishment

This section presents perceptions of quality as being achieved through technical accomplishment. However, the view that quality can be defined in terms of technical accomplishment was also disputed, indeed at the same time it was also argued that an ‘obsession’ with technique was likely to produce less interesting research or results. The three sub-themes presented here are: ‘classic detective work’, whereby following the correct procedures and utilizing the correct methods will result in the evidence needed to make the case; ‘qualitative research as the poor relation’, in which perceptions of quality are linked to the scientific discourse of what constitutes good scientific practice; and the ‘generalizability question’ in which the dilemma for the qualitative researcher is to conform or fit to the expectations and standards associated more commonly with quantitative methods.

6.2.1. Classic detective work

The concept of rigour in relation to qualitative research was in this case presented as choosing the appropriate methods to answer the research question and illustrating the logic of this through the presentation of data and analysis at the end of the written piece. This has been previously outlined as good practice in Chapter 5. This also follows a textbook approach to doing research as a straightforward and logical process from choosing the right tools for the job to applying them systematically to gather data. It is assumed that by doing so you can demonstrate an ability to answer the original research question(s). Such an approach might be seen as classic detective work – that we have a problem to solve and we set about trying to solve in a systematic way, documenting what we are doing and why, fitting bits of ‘evidence’ together, but in a qualitative way:

“validity is there, but it’s a different sort of validity. It’s a kind of: How can I demonstrate that what this person says or feels or views is what they say it is? You know, how have I done that through the methods I’ve used and... the way I’ve recorded the work and the way I’ve ... analysed what they’ve done?” [Panel C: Doctoral]

This approach is further validated through the sampling for the original design:

“if it’s clear... how the sample’s collected so you can see whether... the findings are obvious because of the way the sample was selected.” [Panel B: Practitioners]

However, this notion of the research process being a clearly defined linear path was not an indicator of quality for all interviewees:

“To me a marker of good qualitative research conduct is that something changes between the original plan and how you end up doing it” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The classic detective story illustrates how in some cases perceptions of quality may be underpinned by the values more commonly associated with a scientific discourse, which promotes structured systematic thinking and practice commonly suited to quantitative techniques and methods. The problem for qualitative research in relation to this discourse is expressed in the following section.

6.2.2. The poor relation

In this context, quality issues were seen to be defined and characterized in relation to quantitative approaches and vice versa. This manifested itself largely in perceptions of credibility, reliability and rigour normally associated with quantitative work rather than qualitative work (See also Chapter 4). Quantitative research, through its association with numbers, statistical equations, and technical procedural correctness, was regarded as assuming the status of rigorous scientific research in a way that qualitative work did not, even when quantitative work might not ‘in reality’ live up to these quality ideals or produce the best insights:

“And this is all to do with the legacy of qualitative research not being seen as valid or as valid as quantitative and so [the] more numbers around, the better. So [the] more interviews, the better” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Almost in reaction to this and as a defence, qualitative research tries to live up to the same expectations of the hard technical wizardry and procedural correctness to gain the status and respect associated with scientific methods:

“It’s kind of dressing up qualitative research in quantitative clothes, isn’t it? That you’re making a big deal out of the procedures and steps that you go through in the research process... in the same way as you would if you were reporting... I did this T test and I found R squared’... It’s that search for rigour, isn’t it? The appearance of rigour. But having said that I think it’s a good thing. It’s got to be a good thing to be more systematic and at least force people to think more about why they’re doing things the way they are even if it’s a bit finicky at times” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Others disputed the emphasis on methodological achievement and technique leading to the production of good quality work. In fact, on the contrary it was felt that by

following a rather prescriptive and formulaic process it might even produce less satisfying or interesting results:

“you’ve heard some of the other editors... they underscore or emphasize the methods part of it and you know what that produces, it produces sort of well known statements about the world. Sound, sensible statements, but they have been heard a million times before” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Emphasis on methodological rigour might also be seen as a post hoc construction of events, and an abstract procedure. It is easy to make out a case for the procedure having followed a clearly defined and unproblematic course of action after the event, but this does not necessarily make it a more convincing case. Again, we can see a contradiction here between the status of methodological rigour usually associated with the technical requirements and achievements of quantitative work and the worth of qualitative work if it does not conform to these criteria (See also Chapter 4). Rather than confirming that quantitative work is superior in the sense that it is inherently more rigorous and technically accomplished, and therefore produces better quality work, there were a number of points made that it does not live up to these expectations:

“usually mediocre quantitative work addresses... it’s solidly done – meaning that there’s no obvious flaws... but it addresses a completely trivial question or something that’s completely narrow... But because it’s solidly done it looks scientific” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

In the sense that quantitative research techniques are associated more often with a natural science model in which technical accomplishment is highly regarded, and the criteria we recognize as validity, reliability, and generalizability are the tools for judging this, qualitative research has been regarded as the ‘poor relation’. Despite recognition, by some of our interviewees, of the flaws and failures of quantitative approaches, it still appears easier for a mediocre piece of quantitative work to have more credibility or publishability than a mediocre qualitative piece. This can leave qualitative researchers having to jump to the defence of their methodological approach. One of the ways this manifests itself is through the ability to draw or make generalizations from the research.

6.2.3 The generalizability question

The generalizability question is one that constantly raises its head as a criticism of qualitative research. The dilemma for the qualitative researcher is to decide whether to try and conform to the standards and criteria set by more quantitative statistical approaches or abandon generalizability and argue that small qualitative research approaches cannot and should not be generalized to the wider population but are context specific:

“We can learn from almost any experience if we can make it relevant to us. So I think the issue of generalizability is often hung over from the scientific tradition and...”

so long as you can make some sort of logical connection about, you know, why something should be relevant to another context, I think... that's the kind of bottom line" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

It was emphasized that generalizability was not necessarily to do with quantitative research, but rather to do with *"can you say anything beyond the little story you told"* and that in this sense *"statistical generalization is not the same as general generalization"*. Yet generalizability was seen as a *"tricky term"* and, that statistical studies which often claim to be able to generalize were problematic because *"they are so full of restrictions and assumptions that you really have to think if they can be generalised beyond the study that you have done"*:

"Even then with your inferential statistics, the biggest problem in our field would be you can't assume it's generalizable because you have to describe the sample and it may only be generalizable to, you know, white males or, you know, managers... and even in that case if it's done well, they should be clear about what the group is that they're really referring to..." [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

It was acknowledged that qualitative research, in the form of a small study, can make a contribution outside of its own significance, and that this could be in the form of a *"cumulative understanding of what's going on"*; or that there might be *"implications for anybody else"*; or *"lots and lots of studies in different contexts"*; or *"generalizations at the level of processes and not inputs and outputs"*; and *"the kinds of meaning ascribed to things"*. Therefore, the general relevance of qualitative studies to the general world was recognised and acknowledged as important, but taking a different form to that of the large scale quantitative study:

"I'm keen that that kind of transferability issue I guess we call it, is attended to, you know. Malcolm Williams calls them moderatum generalisations where you recognise that the kind of generalisation you're making is specific to a particular context and you might kind of play that off against a generalisation that somebody else has generated from another context and kind of forge a comparison between the two so that you've got something approximating a cumulative understanding of what's going on. I think that's significant." [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Still, the dichotomy was evident in our research, with descriptions of qualitative research as the *"idiosyncratic piece"*, the *"manager's...chat"* or the *"version of journalism"* giving a hint that for some there is still a problem in taking qualitative research studies seriously. In this context qualitative researchers might feel they have *"a duty to try and look for generalizable rules"* in order to justify the study and make it more credible. So whilst the importance and significance of saying something beyond the immediate was expressed as: *"a fundamental human condition [that] we want to try and find things that help us predict the world around us... to be in control and be more effective in the world... [and] it's not even social science. It's fundamental to what human beings are always trying to do"*.

It was also articulated that:

“something that wasn’t generalizable was, ... just as important and finding something that was truly unique was just as important as finding something out that was ubiquitous, but you probably would never know it was truly unique... anymore than you can always claim that something can be totally generalizable” [Panel B: Practitioners]

6.3 Quality as Presentation and Performance

Three sub-themes emerged in this category encompassing writing and fitting into academic conventions; presenting a logical argument and coherent account of the research process and methodology; and the story telling capabilities and rhetorical skills needed to actively engage with an audience in an interactive or performative way.

6.3.1. Writing and academic conventions

The presentation of qualitative research data can be described as a post-hoc experience, where the researcher constructs an account after the event. In this sense you have the *“messy bits and pieces that you’ve got to make sense of”* and *“it should make sense. It should be credible. You must be able to convince people”*:

“you have to make sense of it and in doing so, you select material and I think that’s an aspect of social construction, which is informed by... all sorts of things... your philosophical background and fundamental beliefs probably... it’s not to say that I don’t try and be as true as I can to what people have said to me, I do, but I’ve got to abstract from that so therefore as soon as I make some choices about abstraction, they’re my choices and it’s my construction about the research” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Academic conventions, in terms of style and presentation, could be said to have an influence over how an article is written, *“where the norm [is to be] extremely dispassionate so that you can’t tell if somebody cares about [their research] or not”* and, *“that if you do show any enthusiasm in your writing, it would have to be done within a narrow framework”*.

For some of our interviewees however, this approach had been abandoned deliberately:

“if we only just cite everybody else, in every sense we write through this because you never express anything original... it’s incredible unlearning, I see my career is like 25 years of unlearning the dictum of putting everybody else’s words on paper, but never having your own words seems like death, you know...” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

And personal expression was regarded as a necessity within the creative process and not to be confined by the boundaries of academic conventions:

“there are those who write about methodology that never say anything without five

references to well known philosophers or scientists... so you get all these references. I don't do that that much because firstly, I don't know all these philosophers! I've heard of some of them... but I think I am allowed to do whatever I like because these people... they were not gods. I don't have to obey them. I can do anything, but I have to make it credible. If I have no audience, even if I am right, nobody will ask me anything! They won't invite me anywhere!" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

6.3.2. Logical argument and telling a good story

The pursuit of the technical scientific method as a means of making research more credible and valid is a traditional approach to doing social scientific research yet how we might do research is different from how we might present it. The research story was highlighted as significant in convincing an audience of the research claims being made. Telling a research story in this sense was about how a written piece reads, does it tell a story about the research, rather than 'telling other peoples' research stories. In this sense the story had to be "*really well argued and well presented. So that's how you get convinced actually because by and large you're not there, are you?*":

"I mean... how it is actually written up, in terms of [a] compelling story, is really important... I make judgements on the basis of it seems to have some kind of resonance, some context sort of with other things. It's told me... whatever's been studied has been written up effectively, compelling. Yeah" [Panel B: Practitioners]

Whilst the research process itself may appear to be a logical, linear, sequential affair when we read about it, it is also a post hoc construction conforming to the requirements of a particular outlet or audience.

"I think that there's a tendency to be more explicit about the qualitative research process now and, you know, when you write up your method statement in the journal article, you need to go through 'Step 1, we identified who we were going to interview' and you have to, you know, justify why you took those decisions much more than you used to, I think. I think it's a lot more tight and you have to be seen to be systematic" [Panel B: Practitioners]

Presentation through a logical argument was seen to be an important part of the process in convincing an audience that this was a credible piece of research. This manifested itself in terms of the "*internal consistency of the argument*"; that you can "*understand what [the author] has done and why [the author] did it*"; "*what sort of claims are being made... and, how well [do] the issues get explored*"; and the "*clear delineation of themes... [and] threads going through*".

Supporting the presentation of a logical argument were the logics of the research approach, in that "*you should be able to present the logic by which you draw your implications from your observations*" and that "*the explanation's got to be extremely robust and you need to have a very clear theoretical framework for your explanation*". However failure to achieve this was felt to be characteristic of certain research approaches adopted by some qualitative management researchers resulting in less credible or convincing outputs:

“Those logics of discovery can be informed by different epistemologies. They’ve all got their own distinctive characteristics, but you’ve got to see a logic of discovery and it’s got to be internally robust and transparent. So many people believe in variants of soft relativism these days in the management community that I just think we’re getting a lot of poor qualitative research” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

6.3.3. Rhetoric and audience performativity

Good quality qualitative research was perceived to be convincing to its audience and that this might be achieved through the deployment of rhetorical skills in arguing and presenting a picture of the research:

“like metaphors are a good example. For good or for bad you’re trying to sort of like one swipe or one kind of take if I may use the photographic analogy, to get this complexity many details are lost... but if you’re lucky... if your metaphor grasps it... if your picture sort of gets a good angle, the reader or the audience gets a much better picture than from this or at least believes to have a better understanding than those small dead fragments... added to one another” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The way in which qualitative research uses rhetorical devices to try and convince an audience of the claims being made was for some problematic:

“You have to interpret what they say in a particular way and that seems to me the point at which qualitative research becomes vulnerable because the interlocutor, the listener, has got to make the interpretation for him or herself” [Panel C: Doctoral]

The, ‘active’ and ‘subjective’ role of the researcher in doing social research has become much more prominently acknowledged particularly within qualitative research approaches, with the emphasis on reflexivity. Yet the role of the ‘audience’ and its performativity is still in its infancy:

“most of the knowledge that we transfer in journals is collaboration between the writer and the reader, so we should not pretend that any stupid reader can understand what’s in the pages. We should write in ways that puts claim to the reader, and that should be part of the criteria... [of] whether it’s convincing. I think... the idea of most researchers is that it’s not dependent on the reader, so the truth is in the text in itself, but you know and I know that the truth is between the text and the reader of course” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

And:

“Of course, if they get angry and say “I want something... I want something better. I want something which is more reliable,” then you realize you haven’t been able to convince them. Or maybe they are right. You can never be sure about that.” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

If for some, the subjectivity of the author and the audience is problematic, for others it was acknowledged as just part of the process of judging a piece of research:

“the author of the paper must convince me in her or his reasoning of the choice of methods made and then of course I join the process ... the process of sifting... I mean the sifting process by buying it or refusing it or having another opinion of that” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

6.4 Quality as Intuitive Decision Making or the Rational Application Of Criteria

Whether quality can be encapsulated in a set of criteria or even translated into words at all was to some extent called into question by our interviewees' claims that *“I know it when I see it”* and that *“you are using a fair amount of... instinctive and intuitive processes to ask yourself, ‘Does this seem right?’”* This is obviously somewhat at odds with the conventional notion that we make objective and rational decisions through the application of quality criteria to judge whether a piece is worthy or not:

“I think it is about creativity... you do have that instinctive reaction... you can unpack what's given you that reaction, but I think a lot of it is about sort of insight, creativity and a new way of thinking about something... So, you know, when you get that “Oooo, that's good!” feeling, then it's doing those sorts of things... but... turning that magic into words is a difficult thing really” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Criteria could be described as a hotch-potch, ad-hoc, post-hoc experience rather than a straight forward process of the application of criteria and rational decision-making. And that there was little evidence from our interviewees that criteria are used in a formalized way or regarded as useful in assessing their own or others qualitative work:

“you go to a text book including my own and they tell you about... construct validity, criterion related validity, convergent validity and all these other validities, but... we never see articles that link in to all these... You don't see people reporting their qualitative findings and saying... We did this so that's good, isn't it... in terms of credibility. We did this, so that's good in terms of transferability, isn't it? And so on” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Text book examples of criteria like validity, credibility, and reliability were thought of as *“too simple”*; or one interviewee did not *“think in terms of those concepts”*; or where there were criteria there was some question as to *“how much any of them [them being journal reviewers] take any notice”*.

Where criteria were referred to they were represented in the form of *“a policy, which I think all of our reviewers are aware of and certainly the editorial board are aware of”*; or *“a sheet of things to look out for basically”*; or *“some principles which are established, but we don't even publish what those principles are, but we'd be talking about, you know, consistency, triangulation*

and appropriate methods for research”. In other words interviewees did refer to using criteria but in the form of tacit knowledge gleaned from these different sources over a period of time. They were not used as a checklist to tick off as they read through a piece of work. For some this meant using a combination of judgement and reference back to documented criteria:

“What I usually do when I get a script, I sort of scan through it or browse it and I take a look at the purpose and the conclusion. I get some feeling whether this seems to be an interesting paper or not, but then when I read it in detail, I might change my mind, but... And I probably implicitly use a number of criteria and then I can do it... at the end I usually go through the list” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

For another it was based very much upon previous experience:

“If I’m honest, we probably haven’t been prescriptive enough... tacitly I can look at a paper now regardless of what method and more or less within reading the first, six or seven sentences, the abstract and the last few sentences and a quick flick through the middle... it takes me about half a minute. I can pretty well guess what the outcome is going to be... whether it’s going to be major revisions and then get nowhere, or it’s going to get more or less straight in, or it’s going to be a slow painful death” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

And for another it was more about making a conscious decision not to use others’ criteria but to be confident enough to rely on their own judgements and thought processes:

“some of us are using our minds to judge the piece” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

6.5 Quality and Peer Review

One of the major arenas where qualitative work is assessed is through the peer review process. The combined process of peer review and editorial role are explored here in relation to assessing the quality of qualitative research and getting qualitative work published. Whilst some interviewees regarded peer review as a rather imperfect process, reviewers were also acknowledged as “scarce resources” and the contribution they make in terms of their time and effort was recognised and appreciated by the editors interviewed.

Journal editors were seen to “use a little bit of judgement, but that’s the job and that’s how editors sway the field” and that in doing so “the editor is the major decision *shaper*, let’s say, not *maker*”. On the one hand the influence of journal editors in this decision shaping process could be seen as a bit of a “hit and miss” affair, and on the other as:

“a collective writing process. Author writes a piece, reviewers ask for changes, putting in their own ideas, their own preferences and the editors ask them to address the different concerns and then if they succeed through that, the piece they submitted

originally can look very different from the piece that you end up with. With a progress notion of the narrative, we say that that's an improvement, but under the notion of the coding discipline it's maybe not an improvement!" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

All interviewees did not share such an idealised view of the review process and it was suggested that, those researchers participating in the peer review process were also “*playing their own power games*” because:

“their own identity's at stake, their own work's at stake. They never review it dispassionately. The idea that there could be a consistent rule suggests that it's a rational process, and it isn't” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The peer review process was seen as far from perfect where disagreement between reviewers highlighted the “*idiosyncrasy*” and “*partial view that people have*”; that this “*blind review thing is a theoretical construct by bureaucrats*”; and that “*there are lots of ill trained people out there and many of them are often reviewers*”. The difference between good and bad reviewers was highlighted by one interviewee as:

“A bad reviewer is someone who's just looking for holes in the paper to shoot it down and say it's no good... there are some reviewers... whatever I send them will never get published because it will never be good enough. I think a good reviewer is someone who's on the ball, who knows enough about what constitutes a good high quality published paper to have a sense of whether or not this piece can be developed into that form” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Some of the problems with the review process identified by our interviewees could potentially be understood as paradigmatic ‘biases’ and training issues.

A number of examples were given where two or three reviews came back from the reviewers with completely differing opinions of the paper, although this was thought by one editor to be “*rare that you get outright conflict*”, and could be avoided primarily by careful “*choice of reviewer*”. The choice of reviewer (when they are a scarce resource anyway) might also be more difficult when “*on the qualitative side I have to reach out into sociology and education to get people who have that kind of expertise*” and where different paradigmatic influences come into play:

“If you are a skilled statistical researcher and a believer in finding the truth through hypothesis testing or through controlled experiment and think this is ... this is research, this is science, and you scorn everything else, everything else is second or third or fourth grade ... with that attitude you will never be able to read an article properly because you are blinded by your biases. And so you are not able to review the article, but you still do it because you think you're so smart. You don't have any self-criticism or anything” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The choice of reviewer is especially important in respect of qualitative pieces of research that do not conform to mainstream methodological approaches but are submitted to certain mainstream journals:

“it was a critical paper and it used qualitative methods and she was sent back... 7 sets of reviewers’ comments. They had sent this paper to 7 different reviewers and it was a nonsense in the end. It was extremely unhelpful. One reviewer saying ‘Where are your stats? Where’s your survey?’ and another reviewer saying, ‘We need more on your methodology because this is all so whacky and off the wall for us’. And there’s an argument that says, okay, she submitted it to the wrong journal, but there’s also an argument that says... that [that] journal needed to be more open to those sets of approaches that she’d used, and clearly it wasn’t” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

In this context this was clearly perceived to be a repetitious and tiring problem of having to defend and argue the case for the research approach taken: *“we social constructors, we have to spend an awful lot more time justifying”*.

The notion of training is important here. Although this is addressed in more detail in Chapter 7, at this juncture it is worth noting the role of training with regard to individuals being trained in a variety of epistemological paradigms, and also training with regard to the reviewing process. There is an argument that whilst you may not have adopted certain perspectives yourself you might at least show an awareness and understanding of them:

“if you just look at the journal, look at HRM and look at HRM teaching, they go on and on about rhetoric versus reality and my argument is how can you be a social scientist up to date in the social sciences and not realise that rhetoric separate from reality is a bit crass. You may not be a post structuralist, but you should have heard of it! The linguistic turn, you may not have turned with it, but you ought to be aware of [it]” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The ‘problem’ of understanding each other’s paradigmatic approaches was to some extent thought to relate to training of reviewers, and that:

“ British referees don’t really make much comment about methodology unless there’s some problem with the statistics. Americans are much, much more rigorous in looking at methodology, partly because their doctoral training’s more rigorous” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Differences between European and US training in reviewing were highlighted in terms of *“style and probably standard”* where:

“US reviewers on the whole are very well trained in both quantitative and qualitative analytical reviewing techniques. They’re very driven and UK, European rather less so” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Whilst there was recognition and acknowledgement of the different approaches or ‘biases’ and levels of training provided within North America and Europe, with an inference that this might be made more formal in the UK, there was also caution expressed, particularly in relation to qualitative research:

“So for UK management academics who do qualitative work, I really don’t think there has been a problem of publishing. Where the problem may now reside is in the extent to which North America is seen as somehow the model of what to do and how to go. And I think we are vulnerable because I mean my observation there would be that the standard of US refereeing, while much... more finicky and narrow in its orientation, it’s exceedingly irritating, is much more rigorous in its evaluation and I think this is partly because refereeing is seen to be an important and central activity for North American academics. At least that is my impression. I mean I cannot understand otherwise why whenever I send anything off to a North American journal, you know, I get several volumes of referees’ comments, whereas if you send something off to a UK journal, you might get a page. Now I mean as I say quantity is not necessarily quality and that is ... You know, North Americans are operating on a much narrower terrain of theory and so the comments are, you know, accordingly narrow and often not very well informed. But my god, they do read the stuff and they comment in detail on it!” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

6.6 Conclusion

Investigating the criteria used to assess the quality of qualitative research is a key objective of the research presented here. The way in which quality is assessed is closely related to the perceived status and credibility of the research (Chapter 4), and appears to be a complex and contested area. Normative criteria are therefore difficult to identify. We have, however, provided an idea of some broad areas the interviewees seemed to take into account when assessing quality. These have been summarized as the extent to which the research: makes a contribution; reflects some technical expertise; includes an element of reflexivity; and is well presented. Additionally, we have highlighted that in most cases the interviewees were not using standardized checklists of criteria to assess qualitative research. The assessment of quality is seen as intuitive decision-making, rather than as the outcome of any systematic application of criteria.

A key question regarding these criteria is how they can be transferred into the training process, thereby theoretically enabling qualitative researchers of the future to conduct and disseminate high quality qualitative research. These issues of training are addressed in the next chapter.

7.0 TRAINING AND SKILL REQUIREMENTS FOR QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

This is a key issue within the overall research and therefore specific questions were asked regarding what training interviewees' thought was available in the area of qualitative methods, and also what kind of training they felt should be available. These data are organized in four main categories:

- Comparing qualitative and quantitative training;
- The nature of the training currently available;
- Areas of training needs; and,
- PhD concerns.

In some of the areas, further more specific issues are identified as sub-categories.

7.1 *Comparing qualitative and quantitative training*

The divide between qualitative and quantitative research was raised as significant in setting the context of research training. Comparisons were made between the two on a number of issues.

7.1.1. Amounts of training

Comparisons were made by interviewees regarding the amount of training available for qualitative and quantitative techniques. These comparisons were particularly made with regard to doctoral programmes. From a North American perspective one interviewee suggested that:

“So, for example, every doctorate in management will include several courses in quantitative methods. Everywhere! That has to be. Whereas ... you will get a qualitative course only if there happens to be somebody in your particular institution who's really a champion of qualitative methods and wants to make sure that their students have a balance” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Within U.K. doctoral programmes, the views of interviewees varied, ranging from “a bit more on qualitative methods”, and “a fairly identifiable balance between the two approaches” to “biased to the quantitative”. The rationale behind the appropriate weighting given to the various approaches in doctoral training programmes was located within the methodological preferences of supervisors, an existing “interest [with]in the school” or the extent to which “there's provision outside the school” or “we've got people interested in it”, with one interviewee suggesting that their School had a “reputation” for a particular approach. Additionally, interviewees pointed to the impact that the ESRC's 1+3 initiative had had, with its emphasis that students' should have access to both qualitative and quantitative training. However there were some places where a bias manifested itself explicitly, for example:

“In the training programme you can see that we are very biased in software in that everybody learns SPSS, but everybody doesn’t learn qualitative data analysis software” [Panel C: Doctoral]

One Doctoral programme leader explained the more quantitative focus of their doctoral programme as something that fitted in with some students’ expectations:

“You know it’s difficult because you’re sort of stereotyping, but I guess that with the students we get coming from overseas and coming from Malaysia and Taiwan and places like that ... it’s maybe the students that I see, but they do tend to be the ones who are more numerate and expect to do something that’s quantitative. I don’t know what ... You know, it maybe that they’re not exposed to it [qualitative methods] overseas” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Another interviewee suggested that, unlike quantitative research, the existence of a historical body of knowledge in which to contextualize qualitative research did not achieve the same “*sort of recognition*”, which reflects the issues concerning credibility outlined in Chapter 4.

7.1.2. Different skills

Other comparisons focused on the different kinds of skills that were needed by qualitative researchers with the assertion that qualitative research was “*harder*” or indeed that the “*intellectual skills that are required for qualitative research are probably a little bit higher than the intellectual skills required for survey research*”. One qualitative researcher suggested that:

“The way we’ve sold qualitative and interpretative work makes it sound like the soft option and I believe it’s anything but. The soft option, easy one, which I recommend to all sorts of people to do, is find a nice little model and go and test it” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Another interviewee extended this assumption that students can misjudge the complexities associated with conducting qualitative research:

“I think there is a very real danger that students take a qualitative approach because ... perhaps for the wrong reasons, where the reasons are to do with the fact that they’ve seen other people use it and they admire the way other people use it and perhaps under-estimate how difficult it can be. I think there’s a danger they underestimate. They think they understand it, when perhaps they don’t fully understand it” [Panel C: Doctoral]

There was an argument that qualitative research had to not only be able to hold its own ground but to be “*exemplary*”. Doing qualitative work was perceived as harder than doing quantitative work and that it took a kind of “*maturity*” and “*long apprenticeship*” to be able to do it with accomplishment. During this difficult process the qualitative researcher also has to “*bare their soul*” and in doing so becomes

“vulnerable”, competing in a technical world where technique can be used to hide some of the weaknesses of quantitative research:

“in a sense it’s so easy to find reasons to reject the qualitative study. If you have a quantitative study, which is complying with all the formats, even though it produces no exciting results, it’s hard to find an argument why it shouldn’t be published” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The qualitative researcher was also occasionally caricatured by interviewees as one who is ignorant or poorly trained and is unable to carry out the research to a sufficiently high standard because of the lack of a broad enough palette of tools, skills and theoretical awareness. This manifests itself in a lack of consistency in how the data collection, analysis and discussion are presented and makes it easy for qualitative research to be criticized as lacking methodological rigour. There are therefore contrasting perceptions voiced here. On the one hand qualitative researchers can be characterised as lazy and sloppy without the skills or experience to do the work, and on the other that to do qualitative work well takes a huge effort of will, skill and creativity as well as methodological training and experience.

7.1.3. The need for training in both qualitative and quantitative methods

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative was seen by some interviewees as a hindrance for further training in qualitative techniques: “*hugely disabling*”. The reasons given for this were that this encouraged a division into separate courses for the different kind of techniques, rather than presenting an integrated approach to research training. Some argued that there was a need for methods training to be based on “*both quantitative and qualitative irrespective of whether the researcher wants to do quantitative or qualitative*” because researchers needed a full range of techniques in their repertoire. Additionally there was the notion that one needed to understand quantitative approaches in order to fully contextualize qualitative approaches. This was particularly pertinent for those on the doctoral panel where interviewees suggested that candidates needed to have an understanding of both to ‘justify’ their own methodological approach. Members of other panels also articulated this:

“If you want to be a good qualitative researcher you’ve really got to know what quantitative work does. You have to know what the choices are in terms of methods in order to make an informed choice yourself. Nothing makes me angrier than an opening line that says “I’m studying X process in an organization and the only way to study this is by qualitative in-depth research”. That is the biggest load of rubbish I’ve ever read. The only reason you say that is because you’re a qualitative researcher who only thinks the world is about qualitative research and you’ve rejected everything else. You don’t know, however, what you’re rejecting” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

It is interesting to reflect upon the assumptions that might be underlying this view. Clearly there is an argument that researchers should be aware of the variety of approaches available to them so that they have more options. But bearing in mind the earlier findings regarding the status and credibility of qualitative research

(Chapter 4), could it be that training in quantitative methods is seen to provide a rigorous approach that the student of qualitative methods may not necessarily learn elsewhere?

7.2 The Nature of Training Currently Available

Interviewees identified a number of issues with the type and standard of training in qualitative management research currently available.

7.2.1. The quality of training available

Training was seen as important yet “*patchy*” or not widespread. For some this was a concern:

“I’m really concerned about the quality of training that occurs in a lot of universities because I don’t think it’s good enough. I don’t think that the people necessarily training them have the breadth of understanding in methods to really, really impart the importance of it. So I think it does ... And if you get that building block wrong, you’re already on catch up or correction, and it is correction sometimes.. but I think it is throughout particularly the early years of researchers’ lives, post-doc. Too many get thrown in without any proper training or supervision. They’re working as researchers supporting people on projects, but aren’t getting the training and supervision that would help them develop as researchers.” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The point here is that there are training issues throughout the academic career and that not enough attention is currently paid to them, particularly at the early stage. One of the interviewees located problems with the current state of training in an overall analysis of the career structure for researchers:

“I don’t think that universities provide a very good career development structure to researchers, particularly in the early years, so people who don’t get the breaks, I think quite often end up leaving. Or maybe even the good people are not really getting proper in-depth research training because they’re sort of hobbling from one short-term contract to the next... I think there needs to be better research training at all levels of government.... And in academia. I think there needs to be better funding for research in academia so there is more of a decent career structure. I think there needs to be better funding of research generally so that research salaries are higher” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers].

In addition to this comments were also made specifically about training within PhD programmes. Although this training was seen as more systematized as a result of the ESRC 1+3 initiative, the whole current institutional context of PhD training was questioned, with the comment made that there are pressures on institutions to increase student numbers:

“Like with the MBAs, like with undergraduates, we’re under pressure to get numbers. And when I say we, I mean we as a country... And I think what’s

happening is fewer and fewer researchers who are coming through have got the depth of training at the undergraduate level that they once would have had” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

In this context, the general pressures that are faced by staff in Business and Management Schools with regard to enhancing student numbers are seen to impact upon the extent to which research methodology training is actually included in undergraduate programmes. Thus it was suggested that students did not have the “*philosophical foundations*” when they entered PhD programmes. Another perceived problem was that “*they don’t have the time*” to do things in depth on PhD programmes, or that sometimes “*resources aren’t available*”. This concern about lack of training did not just apply to the academic environment; indeed research training for government researchers was described by one interviewee as “*pretty abysmal*”.

Within the U.K., the introduction of the 1+3 framework for social sciences postgraduate training has sought to address some of these issues. By ensuring that potential PhD candidates do the equivalent of a Masters in research training within the first year of their PhD studies, the aim has been to both systematise and enhance the quality of research training as part of the overall PhD process. However, the interviewees in this research felt that issues surrounding the institutional context within which the training took place were also important.

7.2.2. The shortage of good trainers

One North American interviewee suggested that one problem was finding those sufficiently qualified to train researchers in the management field, particularly in relation to qualitative research:

“Right now that’s a major problem is hiring people in research methods .. Some of these people I’m bringing in are from different disciplines. Some come in from education, sociology, but I don’t know who’s training business research methods people that are qualitative” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Another U.K. based interviewee suggested that it was a struggle to find people to teach all kinds of approaches. In her more qualitative-focused department: “*We can’t find an academic who’s willing to advocate positivism, so we have to get someone to pretend!*”

7.2.3. How do we learn qualitative skills?

This leads on to an interesting question in that if there is little training available in qualitative research, then how do qualitative researchers actually learn how to do qualitative research? Comments from interviewees on the practitioner panel implied that some people just had the appropriate skills: “*they would be appointed on the assumption that they’ve got the skills to be able to go out and interview people and sort of understand what the issues are*”, and “*I know people who can just do qualitative and they don’t seem to have much training*”. Others pointed out that they themselves had never been trained: “*I sort of taught myself or learnt as I went along*” and “*you sort of learnt how to do qualitative research and you picked it up*”. This perception is supported by the ‘qualitative as common

sense' discourse that places qualitative research into a non-scientific and less technical domain in which anyone can go out and do a few interviews. This discourse makes it easier for qualitative research to be criticized as producing merely anecdotal material or journalistic reports and entitles anyone to criticize it as just another nice story:

"I think in qualitative research there's more of a sense that it's really just the application of basic intelligence, common sense and social skills really and that as long as you've got a bit of all of those, you can actually head off and do some perfectly good qualitative research work, or you certainly feel entitled to comment on somebody else's qualitative research design" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

There seems to be an important issue here that qualitative research is seen as easy, indeed anyone can do it. This ties in with concerns surrounding the status and credibility of qualitative research (Chapter 4), as well as perceptions of quality (Chapter 6). Although one interviewee suggested that some people *"don't really see it as a skill you need to have"*, others were more aware of their own development needs: *"I could really do with a refresher type level and we just don't offer it in this country"*. A final comment here reflects a different view that other forms of information are seen as more significant than training: *"There's nothing quite so valuable as feedback and the feedback we get from our clients about what works and what doesn't work"*.

The issue of where people learn to do qualitative methods and how they can gain continuous professional development was raised by academics too:

"We have faculty interviewees who are on committees that may not have the expertise, and may not know they need the expertise... Where would they have gotten qualitative research training unless they have a very recent PhD?" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Another assumption was that methodologically people would stick with what they knew and what they felt comfortable with:

"For a lot of people their approach to research methods is going to be what they learned in graduate school, even if it was 30 or 40 years ago" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

A contradictory view comes from a qualitative researcher who argues that at the Masters level it may be that the depth and detail associated with qualitative methods training may not be relevant for all:

"You get 50 people on a qualitative research methods course. How many of those have even got the aspiration to become academics? Some will have, some definitely won't have, and there'll be some in the middle who might have. So many of them will really be wanting to concentrate perhaps on just the kind of techniques, the tips and the tricks and the so on and so forth because they can think "Well, you know, if I'm going to pursue a research career ... in academia then yeah, those things are going to be probably useful for me". And the more sophisticated stuff in a sense is only relevant

to perhaps a minority of people” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

7.3 Areas of Training Need

One of the key aims of this research is to identify the perceived skill deficits in this area and to highlight what is needed to improve the situation. Interviewees identified a number of potential areas for training, which are outlined in this section.

7.3.1. Technical skills

At a basic level there was the view that researchers needed awareness of “*the technical skill involved in doing good research*”, “*how to present the material*”, and “*actually knowing the technique we’re going to be using*”. Additionally there were a number of comments made about the need for researchers to have more understanding of the data analytic process:

“I think the thing that still is missing is the training in relation to analysis because I think a lot of textbooks are particularly ... you know, they tell you how to set up your project, thinking about the design and different approaches and different theoretical backgrounds and different sorts of qualitative research, and, if you’re lucky, it might then help you to think about how you’d actually do an interview or a focus group or whatever and then, when it comes down to analysis, they’ll be nothing. People are pretty much left to their own devices” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Comments about analysis didn’t just refer to the details of the analytic process itself but also the skills of “*how you interpret qualitative data*” and the various “*choices*” available for the analytic process. The notion of choice was one which emerged in relation to a number of different stages in the research process:

“I think a lot of younger management researchers really need to have their eyes opened a bit to a fuller range of, you know, like you were saying, of what constitutes qualitative research instruments because there’s a huge variety” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

“It is harder in qualitative research because you actually have more choices and some of them are not as well tried and tested as others, or you might want to try something in a new context, but you’re not quite sure what that’s going to mean, you know, what that’s going to add. Is it going to look a bit quirky or is it actually going to be the best decision you ever made?” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

There are two separate issues here: that of being aware of the range of different methods available, and that of how to make the ‘right’ choice. Both of these issues link back to questions of status and credibility as outlined in Chapter 4. Individuals may both have less exposure to qualitative as part of research methodology training and perceive these techniques as less credible. Therefore choosing qualitative research may be perceived as more risky, both because of lack of expertise and

because of doubts about its perceived credibility.

7.3.2. Writing up qualitative research

Another key issue was being able to write up qualitative research in an appropriate manner. For example:

“I do think the writing bit is so important... One can collect fabulous data and interview people and they give you material that really has tremendous potential, but I think it’s actually very difficult to write good qualitative research, particularly if it’s of an interpretivist perspective because I think it’s a very long apprenticeship to be able to do that” [Panel C: Doctoral]

In line with previous themes identified, running through this category was an expression that analysing, writing and presenting qualitative research was a long and difficult process needing experience, flair and skills. Long in the sense of actually carrying out the work but also in the apprenticeship of being a qualitative researcher and gaining the skills, experience and knowledge, which can only be acquired or learnt over a period of time, doing the job. For example:

“If you go back to the old system where the master had an apprentice you know before education started ... the master took in an apprentice, who followed the master for say 10 years, and then learning all the tricks of the trade and after that he could be admitted as a carpenter or mason or something, but he had to learn from doing it or watching it. Then we started to teach classes where we conceptualized and described and turned things into models to speed up the learning process. We have been somewhat successful, but we have missed a lot also because a lot of things you have to learn by doing them... And Barney Glaser for instance, when he taught grounded theory, he never gave any lectures on grounded theory... he says that the only way to learn grounded theory properly is to have a mentor and do it” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

This raises issues about what can actually be delivered through training programmes and what can be learned through the research process. The view was that clearly training was useful and important but the complex skills required by the qualitative researcher also needed to come through experience.

7.2.3. Philosophy and epistemology

Another focus of training was to do with philosophy and epistemology, where the technical skills of qualitative research needed to be seen in context:

“There’s a real skill and history and theory attached to serious qualitative research that they should at least be aware of” [Panel B: Practitioners]

In this context interviewees talked about the value of “an epistemological, contextual, conceptual framework” and how “you can’t have method without philosophy”. It was argued

that any training regarding techniques needed to be located within the appropriate context.

An alternative view came from a PhD Programme Leader who argued that PhD students were spending far too much time discussing issues of philosophy in relation to qualitative methods:

“There’ll be an enormous amount of time given over to Wittgenstein and so on and I ask them ‘Well, what are you actually going to do by way of, you know, research?’ They say ‘Well we’re going to interview 3 people at a plastics factory on Friday morning’. And this sounds like something out of Monty Python, you know, because when do you ask what is the impact of Wittgenstein on plastics manufacture in Brussels? So the first thing they need to learn is perhaps that they ought to devote more time to thinking about the questions they’re going to ask and less time thinking about the contributions of, you know, the great central European philosophers. So they need to get the balance right. I’m struck by their apparent failure to do that” [Panel C: Doctoral]

So there may be a range of views about the extent to which epistemological and philosophical issues should form the basis of training courses.

7.2.4 Reviewing qualitative research

Occasionally, interviewees singled out a specific group who in their eyes particularly needed training. Apart from a comment that *“the skill levels of people who commission and use qualitative research need to be enhanced”*, these comments all referred to reviewers and came from the Journal Editors in Panel A. The comments here build on those about the peer review process in the previous chapter. As one suggested:

“One of the things that stands out to me as an Editor is that many older academics, like myself, were not trained to review articles. We simply were assumed by some level of seniority that suddenly we were able to do this, and yes, we might have a reputation in a particular field, but that doesn’t necessarily correlate with me that these people are good reviewers” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Different editors argued that reviewers, and indeed editors, needed to be exposed to *“multiple interpretations”*, *“what’s going on out there [ie; the business, organizations and social policy world]*, and should be taught *“how to do a review, what to look for”*. This discussion about the training of reviewers has already been raised in Chapter 5 where the focus was on the dissemination of qualitative research. In this context it was interesting that interviewees also raised the issue of differences between the training of reviewers in the UK and in the United States. One editor suggested that *“US reviewers on the whole are very well trained in both quantitative and qualitative analytical reviewing techniques”* and another argued:

“I think there is a divide and it’s just we’re not as well-trained as the Americans. That’s the problem, and if we’re going to cut it, whether we do qualitative or quantitative work, it’s got to be at the same standard in its own terms” [Panel A:

Academic Disseminators]

7.2.5 Other recommended content of training courses

Within this section we outline a number of miscellaneous issues that interviewees suggested needed to be included within qualitative methods training. For example there was “*just being open-minded*”, “*sensitivity*”, “*contextual awareness*” and “*judgement*”. It was uncertain as to how training could precisely address these skills. Others felt that researchers needed to know more about quality criteria and how to evaluate their own work. For example:

“I think probably clients and consultants and researchers alike need to have probably a better kind of shared, mutual understanding of what adds up to quality and standards sort of thing ... potential users of the research can maybe have better criteria for themselves for judging whether something is to be taken seriously or not in terms of the rigour with which it was designed and carried out and analysed and so on” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Although quality criteria and their uses were discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, in this context they were seen as a useful element to include in a training course. Another suggestion is that in this context “*a checklist of things to go through*” would be useful, almost as a “*manager’s guide to qualitative research*”. Other aspects of the research process highlighted as a potential focus for training were: “*research management*”, “*managing clients*”, and “*keeping up to date*”.

7.4 PhD Issues

When thinking about training in qualitative methods it is important to consider the case of PhD programmes, because this is where most academic researchers experience some form of training. One of the interview panels in the research specifically consisted of PhD programme leaders, though interviewees of panels A and D were also keen to comment on the current state of PhD training in relation to qualitative methods. It is worth commenting that the interviewees talked about issues to do with PhD programmes with considerable enthusiasm, and as one interviewee suggested there was a considerable “*joy in seeing people develop*” through the PhD process.

7.4.1 Tensions in research training

A PhD was seen as “*an apprenticeship*” where the “*contribution to knowledge*” could be assessed externally. For one American interviewee, getting the PhD right was crucial because “*if you can get into the AMJ then your career is made for life*”, so the methodology and coherence of the argument within the thesis needs to be “*absolutely perfect*”. Again the debate about the importance of having an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of management research emerged in relation to the PhD. Two different views are presented below:

“I think what’s happening is more and more people are going from straight undergraduate degrees in business and management onto PhD programmes, or even worse from MBA programmes onto PhD programmes, and they don’t have the philosophical foundation in the social sciences and therefore they’ll all at sea when it comes to making a contribution. So what they’re doing is they’re typically seizing on a very practical problem. Ecommerce is a good one. Flavour of the month” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

“I think there is, you know, a tendency to actually over complicate it, as you say, and make it dense and use lots of long words like epistemology and ontology. I think qualitative does tend to develop that kind of approach. It may be that that switches them off” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Whereas the first interviewee feels that it is important for management researchers to have some kind of philosophical underpinnings in their work, the second feels that philosophy just makes things too complicated. This is therefore clearly an area of debate.

A number of other tensions in the research training process were identified. One emerged from the amount of time that students were expected to spend in research methodology training. The ESRC 1+3 model was seen as important in this context. One Programme Leader suggested that the phrase *“They’re not getting a PhD in research methodology”* was a favourite phrase used by supervisors in his department that reflected the view that there was too much research methodology training expected:

“There’s always a tension there between often students wanting more, supervisors wanting them to complete on time and so trying to reduce the amount of time” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

A further tension regarding research training is that in some places departments may feel they have little control over what is actually taught. The need to have a certain number of students to run particular courses means that research training may be more generally focussed at a social sciences faculty level rather than always being hosted within management departments.

7.4.2. Why choose qualitative work?

One issue that emerged was what influenced students to choose to do qualitative work within their PhDs. Clearly a key influence was the supervisor, and interviewees suggested that supervisors needed to be *“sympathetic”* to, and *“familiar”* with, qualitative techniques. Other influences were *“what other researchers have done”* with one interviewee suggesting that *“there is a big temptation to just reproduce the sorts of methods that others have used”*. Supervisors were seen as *“brave”* if they were willing to take the risk to do something quite different. There were also some comments made about how students could be put off doing qualitative research by academics telling them it was *“inappropriate”*. Another commented that they had been present when a professor had advised that *“I warn students about this methodology: you know this may not get you a PhD”*. One interviewee also suggested a way of trying to encourage students to use

qualitative methods more:

“Maybe if we got people to think critically a bit earlier, then it would be more of a question of, well you know, you can use some methods for some questions, and other methods for others and it would revalidate some of the qualitative research that tends to get quite a bad press” [Panel C: Doctoral]

A further issue about what encourages people to do qualitative work was related to the DBA. Because of the nature of the DBA, with its emphasis on the production of empirical case studies, it was argued that it was more likely that in that context students would undertake qualitative work:

“It’s almost entirely qualitative in a way because they’re insider researchers which, you know, means that they’ve got that perspective. They’re often doing action mode 2 type work, which again ... it doesn’t mean that they have to be qualitative but it kind of pushes them down that road” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

7.4.3. Examination

The interviewees raised the issue of the PhD examination process. There were some horror stories of examinations where PhDs had been examined by those with a different methodological preference to that of the student. The implications in one case were that *“the student had massive re-writes in a way which was highly perverse and that’s what puts people off”*. Interviewees pointed to the necessity of ensuring that *“you choose people that are sympathetic methodologically”*. Finally, one interviewee suggested that examiners with a qualitative bent may be more demanding with regard to how the methodology is presented in the thesis:

“A qualitative examiner, I think, would want to see some evidence that the student has critically reflected on the methods and the methodologies that they’ve adopted. So in a way they’re more rigorous than a quantitative examiner, who is probably going to be more interested in the type of statistical tests that have been carried out and what is being claimed on the basis of them ... whereas I think the qualitative examiner is going to look more at the justification for the approach, why you’ve chosen particular methods, whether they were appropriate to the research questions you were suggesting, what the weaknesses of the approach may have been, how you handled those weaknesses, what you’ve learnt from the process of doing it, a much more in-depth consideration of the methodological implications of the research. And maybe that’s partly a defensive thing, you need to make sure the qualitative researcher has done his job properly and has done it well. So they probably have to actually jump more hurdles than quantitative researchers do” [Panel C: Doctoral]

7.5 Conclusion

When considering these findings it would seem that there are contradictory views being presented. On the one hand, there is the concern that training in this area

needs to be improved, and that there is an amount of poor qualitative research out there, but on the other hand there is the notion that it is possible to do qualitative research without any training, that is, you just teach yourself. That view of qualitative research is quite undermining, and therefore it is not surprising that there are credibility issues with regard to the publication of qualitative research (see chapter 4). A further (related) view is that learning how to do qualitative work is what you do on the job.

Of particular interest here are the underlying assumptions about the career of the management researcher and the stages they go through with regard to training. The notion of the PhD as an apprenticeship implies that at that career stage it is crucial for the student to have a rigorous training in all aspects of research methodology and techniques. However once one graduates the assumption is that one is now 'trained' and therefore there is no need for any further training or development in the area of research methods. However the interviewees seem to suggest that there is a need for both academic and practitioner researchers to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) in this area. In particular there are concerns about the lack of appropriately trained reviewers and where the future trainers of students will come from. This situation is exacerbated by the institutional pressures to accept large numbers of PhD students who may be less aware of the complex nature of social science research than they have been in the past. On completing their PhDs these academics then become the trainers of others. In a situation where there is little emphasis on their own CPD in the research methodology area, and an environment where qualitative research may be under valued, a vicious circle of under-trained researchers is a potential danger.

Our conclusion from the views expressed by our interviewees is that training in qualitative management research is vital and in fairly short supply. In terms of content, such training probably has to include some experiential learning ('learning through doing'). Thus, any training materials should both outline 'theory' and relate this closely to practice through using worked examples based on the participants' own research experience. Given the potential lack of general expertise in the area, such training materials also ought to be accessible to 'trainers' who do not have a breadth and depth of experience of qualitative research. In addition, the needs of researchers in this area varies widely, and so each element of the training material should be relatively independent (i.e. can be taught separately from the other elements). The specific training needs derived from this research (and that informed our design of training workshops) are presented at the end of the report.

8.0 PROFESSIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

This theme concerns the current context of academic work. It picks up on the objective of exploring the current profile of qualitative research within the management field, and provides some context for the specific issues already discussed. In many ways, the ideas discussed here provide some explanation for the perceptions and problems raised elsewhere in the report. Many of the issues relate to the research process in general, however, they may be particularly significant when it comes to qualitative research specifically.

Categories identified here and described below are:

- Output driven research;
- Difficulties in publishing qualitative work;
- Publish or perish;
- Difficulties in obtaining funding;
- Career needs of researchers; and,
- Institutionalization processes.

8.1 *Output Driven Research*

Interviewees discussed a general contemporary model of university research, which is described as the pursuance of grants, and contrasted to the pursuance of scholarship:

“part of the expectation of the institution is that research will be done and I think research equals some sort of empirical work. So it’s quite interesting, I think, how research has become defined in those terms and the notion of scholarship has kind of, I think, been slightly displaced by the idea of research that is about grants” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

In a competitive environment, such as that created by the U.K. Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) with a focus on outputs and products, it was argued by some that researchers are encouraged to pursue fashionable topics and trivial projects, to “*salami slice*” publications (producing only minimally distinctive papers from the same data set) and to publish for its own sake (rather than having anything important to say). This “*constipated world of research*” does not encourage innovation and may result in the “*cloning*” of researchers. The importance of grant-holding may mean that researchers are always searching for the next project, without being able to properly reflect on the processes and outputs of the previous project. As academics progress in their careers, they become grant-holders rather than active researchers, with insufficient time to conduct their own research.

It was suggested that this general model of research is accentuated in the US, where a

market-model may prevail, such that there is “*relentless pressure*” to produce and academics are in the business of promoting themselves, as they “*struggle for attention*” amongst the vast number of universities, of contenders for academic appointments, and of possible publications in a very small set of important journals. This model may also be particularly emphasized within business schools, who may have a management orientation, focusing on quick fix interventions rather than critical reflection.

This US model of research was described, outside the US, as like a “*machine*” and contrasted with a (mainland) European model of research as “*craft*”. Comments on the effects of the RAE in the UK, suggest that the UK model of research may be something in between the two. However, the US model may be gaining an international influence through globalization:

“But I think it’s like a plague going over the world now that you have to comply with what American journal editors want and don’t think for yourself. Just follow the statistical routine” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Both the US and UK models of research may be particularly constraining of qualitative research. Where the search is always for the next grant, there may not be the opportunity to make proper account of the extent and depth of qualitative data collected:

“... quantitative work, there’s a sense in which, you know, you get your material, you publish a couple of pieces out of it and that’s the end of the story. That’s all it will allow you to squeeze from it. With qualitative work I think, you know, it’s actually valuable to have an extended period for reflection, to go back to it and so on and so forth, although there are reasons to choose questions that move you on to go and get another grant and, you know, you just produce another pile of qualitative material that hasn’t really been squeezed, hardly touched, and then you’re onto the next darn thing”. [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

This interviewee goes on to argue that applying for additional money to re-analyse previously collected data would not be encouraged:

“you get the money to do something new and ‘why should we give you money for stuff you’ve already done, especially when we’ve already paid for some of this stuff” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Some interviewees suggested that certain kinds of research may be discouraged (e.g. ethnography) because it takes longer or is insufficiently academic (i.e. practitioner-oriented work):

“This publication pressure, I think, and the expectation that you should write a paper every month or so is against the interest of the qualitative researcher. I think it takes more time to develop these ideas” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Writing good quality qualitative research may take a “*maturity*” that researchers do not

have time to develop properly in this model of output-driven research practice. Qualitative research is consequently a “*high risk strategy*”. But such a model may also elicit “*high quality mediocrity*”:

“... these control systems to my mind what they elicit is high quality mediocrity. They push towards standardization. They push towards low risk work. They push towards particular formula. I mean it’s just the same as hamburgers, that’s what the effect of the RAE has on papers” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

The important point to note here is that high quality quantitative research may also take a long time to conduct, however, it was suggested that it may be easier to publish mediocre quantitative research than mediocre qualitative research. Publication, as outlined in the next category, is a very important consideration within this model of research.

8.2 Difficulties in publishing qualitative work

This section presents some of the issues that are perceived to mitigate specifically against the publication of qualitative work. Getting qualitative research published per se was not seen as a problem for many of the established qualitative interviewees, but getting published within certain journals or disciplinary circles was:

“I see a lot of bad signs. I hear this all the time that you have to be quantitative or you don’t get it published, which I don’t think is true. I have ... I know certain journals where I would never try to publish anything because they would just send it back and say I have to do hypothesis testing and things. So I don’t do it. But I found also some response in America where you talk to editors and I’m on some 10 editorial boards and we have some dialogue on this, that they are open to letting in more qualitative research, but most of the reviewers, especially if they’re American professors, they sort of fall back into the need to do it quantitatively, which scares people because, you know, increasingly, and especially so I think in the UK, you are measured by a lot of committees to get your grants and whatever” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The perceived cultural and paradigmatic differences between the US and European approaches to research may act to delineate a possible barrier to qualitative research of a non-positivist perspective. Therefore for academics to ‘compete’ or participate in this environment they need to be aware of the cultural differences and act tactically to avoid them:

“For example, I was on the doctoral dissertation committee of a [European] woman... And she said, ‘Oh, my paper didn’t get accepted at the Academy of Management’ so she wasn’t coming. I said, ‘Oh, you know, where did you send it?’ because I know her work because I was on the dissertation committee and she sent it to [XXX] Division. Well, I know these guys. They’re the most narrow positivists that you could possibly imagine. They’re stereotypes of an extreme case. And so I know the kind of work she does and I said I know you shouldn’t have sent it there.

They did have [XXX] in it, but you should never have sent it to that division. You should have sent it to... And I gave her a name of maybe a couple of other divisions, which I thought would be very open to her approach, which was more qualitative and narrative. But she didn't know and again she doesn't have people around her she could easily ask because they don't know all the sort of insider stuff. [Our] students from the beginning when they ask us, we tell them well there's this and there's that. They won't even look at them... and I often know their biases..." [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Such influences may also be reflected in the editorial boards of journals, which would suggest that qualitative researchers would be most sensible to send their work only to journals with 'sympathetic' aims to their particular methodological approach. The tradition of doing and publishing qualitative research in European journals is well known, but with the changing nature of the academic world the pressure in the UK at least is to get a higher research ranking as assessed by RAE. In effect this means that you need "people with sprinklings in the American journals and that's when you come up against... the kind of quants issue". And whilst many would like to argue that exemplary work will always get published in the top journals there is a feeling that:

"if you look at some of them they'll say in their editorials that they've no bias against qualitative research. AMJ editorial was it last year?... says, you know, 'Yeah, fine. What we're about is publishing good quality research. It can be qualitative and it can be quantitative'. It just so happens we've only published two qualitative pieces in the last 10 years, you know!" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

This tension between the different cultural approaches was regarded as:

"a very, very serious issue facing us in this country [UK] with interpretive or, if you like, qualitative research... is with the pressure to meet global criteria... the American criteria of what is good research, is what counts... well even case study stuff now they tell me it just gets sent back if it isn't big survey. So a whole lot of the American journals are operating in that way and people are being pressured" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The length of journal articles and how to present these within the confines of journal space was identified as problematic for publishing qualitative work. Barriers were identified such as: how to "condense it down to 25 sides" without reducing the "richness"; how to present the "labour process" of doing the research itself "when editors really want that to be cut down to the bone"; and that there is a trade off between quality and quantity where "I would not be averse to taking a paper that was twice the length if it really was exemplary". This 'trade off' was illustrated in terms of the number of slots a journal might have as opposed to the quality or importance of a longer piece:

"I've talked to the editor of [a top American] journal... and he says the biggest problem with the qualitative work is the length. But he has published some very long ones because they have to spend more time describing what they do and he said that just because... you're given a fixed number of pages, it essentially means you have to take [fewer] articles altogether. It increases your rejection rate... And the question is:

Is this as important as two other papers? If it's taking as much space as two papers, then he has to ask is this as important as two papers because it's essentially kicking somebody else out" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Such constrictions, of writing qualitative pieces for journal articles, meant that the opportunities to write in a less restrictive environment were much more appreciated:

"I really, really enjoyed the chapter that I wrote for the international qualitative management book, because there was a story to be told and it wasn't a story I could tell very readily in the sort of squashed up methods bit at the beginning of a chapter where I'm really principally talking about findings" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Clearly there are problematic issues related to publishing qualitative work, however a key theme addressed by the interviewees was the significance of publishing to establish an academic career.

8.3 Publish or Perish

In this section we link the publishing issue to the broader institutional context of management research. Getting published is an important goal of contemporary academic life. While books may allow the depth of analysis important for qualitative research (see above), it was suggested that publishers may favour textbooks (rather than research monographs) and that books are not regarded as appropriate in terms of assessment requirements (e.g. in the RAE):

"The Giant took Andrew Pettigrew 10 years. It was the culmination of 10 years work and as he said..... "Now I couldn't do that. It'd be like, where the hell are your papers?" [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

In general, then, there are more incentives for academics to publish in academic outlets than engage in broader dissemination. The nature and role of academic journals are therefore crucial.

The effects of the pressure to publish may produce an overwhelming task for editors (encouraging them to adopt a "machine-like" processing attitude). There may be simply too much being published, much of which, it was argued, may not even be read:

"... people are writing things that they don't even count on anybody ... anybody's reading. I mean probably the reviewers and the editor are the only audience they are ever going to get, but it doesn't matter because when it gets published they will get promotion and this is what matters" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

This pressure may then lead to a lack of innovation and enthusiasm in research:

"in a sense we're so badgered by the requirements of research assessment exercises.

You know, the old saying that, you know, publish or perish and some people make the wrong decision and in my view there's far too much published. There's the salami slicing that I've referred to, but also people often write papers when they haven't really anything new to say and we do it because it's part of the job, you have to do it, and that does take..., when it's sort of conveyor belt paper manufacture it does take the enthusiasm out". [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Furthermore such pressure to publish may encourage a quantitative orientation in research because it allows "*publish and publish fast*".

While journal editors [from Panel A] and qualitative researchers [from Panel D] both deplored the triviality of some research currently published, editors emphasized the (external) pressures on them to maintain the status of their journals (which longer, qualitative pieces may jeopardize) and to publish good material. Qualitative researchers on the other hand, sometimes assigned editors more of a political role in maintaining certain kinds of research and described the power relations of editors and reviewers. US journal editors were picked out by the qualitative researchers as being particularly influential. Editors are of course both gatekeepers and themselves institutionalized:

"It seems that what's the use of writing these different kind of stuff if the editors are accepting only other kinds of stuff. But one day one editor accepts a different kind of stuff and another day three editors accept ... you know, and this is how it goes, so I think insistence is a very good strategy in that sense and that editors decide "Yes"... they 'decide', but the editors are themselves product of fashion and institution as it were" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

Interestingly, while qualitative researchers may argue that editors are not publishing their work, editors may argue that while they encourage the submission of qualitative work, they do not receive it because there are no (career) incentives for academics to conduct and submit such work. This seems to be something of a 'Catch-22' situation.

All these constraints may explicitly or implicitly point to difficulties in getting qualitative research published. However an alternative view also proffered was that the idea that qualitative research is not published is a "*mythology that's very dangerous that's spreading like wildfire*". Such an assumption could well become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

8.4 Difficulties in Obtaining Funding

The importance of obtaining funding for research (grants) has already been noted – external funding may give credibility to the research project. The role of funding bodies themselves is consequently of importance in this area. The materials and assumptions of such bodies may work against qualitative research. It was suggested that guidance notes for completing application forms may suggest quantitative research, the validity of qualitative research may be questioned, time consuming research (such as discourse analysis) and re-analysis of data may not be funded. The expertise of reviewers is crucial here:

“I don’t know how much of what research is funded by the big bods like the ESRC ... how much when they’re looking for reviewers how much they actually consider who they’re sending the proposal to and, you know, are these people familiar with qualitative research. Because it would be very easy if a quantitative researcher looked at a qualitative proposal and wasn’t familiar with the debates and the issues and how they’ve been resolved or considered, it would be very easy to write it off and say, “No, this isn’t a worthwhile piece of research.” So that means that less and less or not enough qualitative research is done” [Panel C: Doctoral]

While funding bodies generally look for practical outcomes, it was suggested by one interviewee that applications from management researchers specifically may be unsophisticated in conception and design:

“I think the fact that they don’t fund an awful lot of management and business research is partly the fault of the proposals that go in and it’d be interesting actually ... in the new universities, the old polytechnics, the criteria for appointment in those institutions was heavily biased towards people that had had experience as managers or within business ... those skills were seen to be very valuable at the time.... But they had had no experience or knowledge or training in research methods, so when they put research proposals together, they were appalling! So in a way it’s not surprising that proposals that were going to the ESRC, there weren’t many getting through for management and business because they were probably not very good proposals in the first place because they weren’t well informed and if they were being sent out to academics that had had research training, had done methodology courses, that knew something about it, they would be able to tear holes in them whether they were quantitative or qualitative” [Panel C: Doctoral]

Therefore the difficulties in securing funding may apply to both qualitative and quantitative researchers within the management field.

8.5 Career Needs of Researchers

As suggested in the previous categories, publishing in specific outlets and getting grants is important for achieving tenure (in the US) or being promoted – there is a lack of incentives for other activities (e.g. engaging a management audience). It was suggested that these goals may be more achievable through quantitative research than other means:

“It takes time to go and observe and understand reality and then to be able to present it in a sort of form that is much more literate in a sense. It takes more maturity so you will end up producing less items and therefore you will not pursue a fast track career. I see the pressure on our PhDs at the moment that is ‘get out publications fast’. And if you want fast publications, you will not go and collect ethnographic data. You will take some kind of easy questionnaire, get some correlations out and then write it up as a technical report and get it published somewhere” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Researchers' adaptation to these pressures may be understandable because of external responsibilities (such as financial commitments). However, it tends to lead to researchers behaving in (politically) strategic ways, such as only pursuing certain kinds of research ("*mediocre quantitative research*") and publishing strategically (e.g. taking into account editorial preferences). On the other hand, qualitative researchers may set this situation up as an ethical one and regard it as a "*personal betrayal*" to engage in such activity:

"From a personal point of view, I just ... the kind of work I want to do, the kinds of things I want to engage with and find out more about aren't open to those sorts of approaches and techniques and that mixture of methods doesn't sit comfortable for me as an individual and therefore I don't want to play that game, even if it would get me some quick publications. It would feel like a sort of personal betrayal" [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

In the UK, it was argued that recruitment to academic departments is driven by the requirements of the RAE such that only those with sufficient publications are considered. In management research specifically, it was suggested that Business Schools are recruiting US academics because they have the US publications considered most important. In the US itself, the "market model" of research, some suggested, is specifically and deliberately taught to PhD students, who are coached from the early days of their studentship in how and where to publish if they want to achieve tenure:

"If I go to the Academy of Management, to some of those junior faculty workshops, development workshops before the conference, I think some of them were quite scary because some of the things that they were telling the young researchers ... you know, "Don't do qualitative! Don't publish in the trade press because that seems a waste of time and it'll hurt you. It'll hurt your chances to get tenure! Get 7 articles in 10 years in, you know, ASQ, ASJ, the Academy journals, that's it! Don't bother about anything more specialized! Don't worry about those European journals!" [Panel B: Practitioners]

The process of achieving tenure in the US involves those outside the applicant's discipline, who may be more susceptible to a 'scientific' approach (as opposed to qualitative research). Sponsorship of those seeking tenure may therefore be harder where the applicant is a qualitative researcher, and also where they are in a business school, with its connotations of "*dirty commerce*" (i.e. not engaged in academic or 'pure' research).

8.6 Institutionalization Processes

The context and specific processes outlined above suggest that quantitative research may have become institutionalized within management research – part of the established, self-maintaining order of things. Several specific processes of institutionalization can be identified from the foregoing analysis i.e.:

- The creation of top tier journals;

- Editors and PhD supervisors acting as gatekeepers (protecting the identity boundaries of what it means to be an academic);
- New researchers being trained in the established order (explicitly so in the US).

These kinds of processes may be under-pinned by disciplinary assumptions as to favoured methods, where scientific methods may be viewed as a necessary grounding. For example, work and organizational psychology may favour a positivist basis:

“quantitative stuff is actually kind of ingrained in psychologists; so that’s the way we’re taught and we have all these statistical methodology things, you know, and you’ve got all the computer programmes with statistical packages on there and you’re taught how to do all the different types of scales of questionnaires” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Within Business and Management Schools, there may be a managerial orientation towards research, which subdues the critical edge one might have had from the application of different disciplines to the study of organizational life:

“Industrial organizational psychology would be my original training and you can count on one hand the number of PhD programmes in this country in industrial organizational psychology now. They don’t exist. They’ve all migrated to Business Schools. So that, I think, is a serious issue. Very serious issue because then it distorts because it’s just proximity. It’s not even intention. You’re teaching managers every day or people who want to be managers ... you focus on their problems” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Researchers, journal editors and grant funders have much invested in the status quo and challenging this may be difficult. Thus one interviewee argued that such institutional processes act as a safeguard to researcher identities:

And probably I quite like the gatekeepers being there now that I’m established because I don’t want to think any old Tom, Dick and Harry can come along saying, “I can do this” because again my identity’s at stake. What does it mean for me if it can be done by anyone? You can’t ever extricate yourself from those processes. [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

The effect of institutionalization is that it can become internalised and self-perpetuating. Internalised, in the sense that the situation is accepted as fact and unquestioned. Thus one reaction to this institutionalization may be to make qualitative research fit quantitative expectations:

“Sometimes it’s valued and sometimes it’s not, but I think, like I said, with the fact that it’s getting more systematic over recent years, I think helps people to value it more” [Panel B: Practitioners]

Institutionalisation may be self-perpetuating in the sense that the complex network of relationships between different aspects of the process support each other. However institutions can never be completely determining and there may be a challenge to the accepted practice of quantitative research coming from qualitative researchers. Within the interview transcripts, we saw references to the forming of enclaves of qualitative researchers in particular university departments:

“Well, we’ve got, or we have had and still have to some extent, a number of post modernists here, who will then select or suggest other external examiners who are of the same ilk until ... we’re slowly going to build up a supply of new lecturers or academics that are coming from a very different tradition and it becomes the norm. I mean in this group, in the OB group, it is the norm nobody does surveys, nobody does quantitative research”. [Panel C: Doctoral]

There were also references to networking amongst qualitative researchers; the forming of (qualitative) methodological specialisms; and the development of a distinct European perspective on research (to challenge the US institutions of research). Such processes may act to institutionalise qualitative research in the same way as quantitative.

A cycle of conflict between quantitative and qualitative research may act to keep them both in their established places. Consequently, another way forward may be to try to challenge the institutionalization processes in place and it is clear that the ‘gatekeepers’ of academia have an important role to play in this:

“there are still a lot of people that are on the qualitative camp, but just can’t break out, plus the quantitative people that can’t break out of that particularly narrow, negative view of qualitative research. Now certainly I do think there’s evidence that more and more are valuing diverse methodologies in terms of the beliefs of the intellectual leaders, who are running the academy and running the academy journals...” [Panel A: Academic Disseminators]

Other challenges to institutionalization may come from: internationalization - particularly in the US which may be becoming more amenable to a ‘European’ view (although this may still be regarded as “*alternative*”); the appointment of younger or “*more eccentric*” (again, rather alternative) journal editors; and, the influence of established ‘elder statesmen’ of management research.

One interviewee argued that we should perceive the current situation as a gradual change in perspectives:

“Whereby what I mean is I don’t think that there are phases of stabilization or destabilization. I think it constantly one goes into another, so what I mean is that even when things look very stable ... that’s what I mean with deceptive stability, actually there’s a lot sort of bubbling under the surface. When and if these bubbles become a stream and then a main stream, that’s another matter, but it usually happens before we know it. When we know it it’s already a fact. And once it is a mainstream there will be something bubbling under its surface as well” [Panel D: Qualitative Researchers]

It is perhaps a matter of debate whether we view change in this area as happening through some ‘natural’ process or as a more political endeavour.

8.7 Conclusion

Researchers in particular describe a situation where their own control over the academic labour process has been to some extent lost through auditing practices and promotion requirements. Researchers have to be seen to be performing in an overt (countable) way – their work must be visible in order to be audited. A model of research as obtaining grants and producing journal articles is contrasted with ‘scholarship’, reflection, innovation, maturity of thought, reading, and authoring books. The external pressures are seen to result in ‘*high quality mediocrity*’ in research. Researchers cannot take risks in their research, which must be published in particular journals, which themselves have the citation seal of approval (further auditing practices). They cannot dwell on particular topics or revisit data but must create more data (creating data being a sign of production). This pressure to be overtly productive may lead to “*salami slicing*” of research outputs.

While issues such as the nature of contemporary academic work and the institutionalization of research practices may not be limited to qualitative management research, they may have particular implications for it. The material above explores some of the complex relationships between established research practice, career needs of researchers and the conduct of qualitative management research. Thus the pressure to publish frequently and in particular journals may discourage qualitative research. Editors’ needs to maintain journal status may discourage acceptance of qualitative articles (because of credibility issues). The pressure to obtain grants may encourage submission of more credible quantitative research and leaves insufficient time for high quality qualitative research. In general, as described here, the current model of research practice may discourage risk, and qualitative research may be perceived as risky.

The implications of this analysis for our objective of enhancing good practice in qualitative management research are profound. What we perceive as ‘good practice’ is called into question. Within the current context of research work, good practice might be conforming more closely to ‘accepted’ practice (e.g. particular kinds of research proposals, particular kinds of research goals etc). In this sense, qualitative research is currently simply ‘not good enough’. This implies that the ‘fault’ lies with the researchers themselves, rather than the context in which they find themselves. Failing to succeed in this context, it was argued by some of our interviewees that they were inappropriately attributing this to anti-qualitative research bias when it is simply impersonal market forces. There are many researchers out there but only so many grants, journals and tenured posts and in the competition, they have simply failed. This may be “*brutal*” and a “*painful*” process for individuals but it is simply an outcome of ‘capitalist’ forces.

On the other hand, if good practice in qualitative research is seen as something separate and distinctive from accepted practice then the current context works against achieving our objective. In this case, enhancing good practice may entail rejecting current accepted practice and creating a ‘separate’ enclave of qualitative

research, in which the ideals of qualitative research can be pursued within a community that values and has expertise in this area. It may entail setting up specific journals (and we can see evidence of this happening) so that examples of good quality qualitative research can be disseminated. It may entail seeking to influence funding bodies in a more overtly political way and challenging current assessment practices more explicitly. In this sense, qualitative research can be positioned as resistance to the current academic labour process.

A third view is that rather than viewing qualitative research as squeezed out by the institutionalisation of quantitative research, we anticipate that qualitative research may become the mainstream approach of the future. Indeed, one interviewee argued that management research as a discipline is largely based on 'qualitative' studies (such as ethnographies and detailed case studies). If we are going through a period that does not favour qualitative research, this may be temporary. Alternative approaches (e.g. postmodernism) may be becoming more acceptable and even desirable e.g. one interviewee argued that research councils may choose to fund discourse analysis in the future because it allows a critical account of management. Certainly there are arguments within the transcripts that this is happening (e.g. that US journals are becoming more accepting of qualitative research), yet at the same time, the overall picture is one of a myriad of (political) forces maintaining the status quo. Thus, while it is argued that editors may be more likely now to accept qualitative research, it is also suggested that these editors are 'eccentric' (i.e. abnormal). It would be interesting to explore this alternative view further, for example, in seeking to understand what might have prompted such a change (if there is one): is it a 'natural' balancing or has something in particular prompted the change?

Overall, this analysis of the context of research raises some very important issues which provide some possible explanations for the conclusions reached in other chapters with respect to credibility, assessment and training deficits. These conclusions are brought together and further discussed in the following final chapter.

9.0 DISCUSSION

In this chapter we review some of the implications of the analysis presented here in terms of the key objectives of the report, as outlined on page 6.

9.1 *Defining qualitative management research*

The way in which individuals define qualitative research is important in that it influences their perceptions about who does it; what it should look like; and, ultimately, how it is judged. From this research, it is clear that there are a variety of definitions in use, and that there is no general consensus about the nature of qualitative management research. The different ways of categorising qualitative management research make our discussions of quality problematic in that interviewees may be referring to different processes and outcomes when making their assessment. Clearly the criteria we use to assess quality in this context need to be contingent on the definition of qualitative research in use. An alternative interpretation however, would be that the variety of definitions in use is a credit to the rich diversity of research that can be included under the banner 'qualitative management research'. Rather than being a restrictive, or indeed exclusionary term, there is room for a variety of perspectives and interpretations which could encourage innovation in the area. Our conclusion here is that there is no one correct definition, but when assessing qualitative research, we need to take varieties of definitions into account.

9.2 *Current perceptions of qualitative management research*

One of our objectives was to conduct a systematic investigation into current perceptions of qualitative management research, and potential barriers to its use. Our analysis here focused on the current perceived credibility of qualitative management research, and its current standing within the wider arena of academic research. From the interview data, credibility was presented as both an intrinsic aspect of the research process, and an achieved status. Judgements of credibility were also seen to be influenced by particular (political) contexts – such that what constitutes credible research may change from period to period. On the whole, definitions of credibility were seen to disadvantage qualitative research.

Assessments of credibility are integral to every area of the analysis presented here. The credibility of a particular research approach is linked to what is seen as good practice and the criteria by which a piece of research is evaluated. It also has an impact on the extent to which training may be provided or valued (Chapter 7). Additionally, in Chapter 8, we suggested that notions of research credibility have important implications for academic careers. Of key significance here is the opportunity to publish and more generally disseminate qualitative research. The difficulties in disseminating qualitative research raise problems for enhancing

qualitative management research because there are few studies in prestigious journals which may act as exemplars and encourage further work in that vein. This may be tackled by increasing the quality of such work (although it is not clear that this would address any 'bias' in the process) but also needs some intervention in the editorial and review process.

It is evident that some of the difficulties around credibility in relation to qualitative research may dissuade researchers from conducting qualitative research. The implication of some of the interviewees' comments is that qualitative research is harder to execute well and requires complex skills. In addition, the opportunities for publication are restricted. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that new researchers in the management field may be somewhat discouraged from conducting qualitative research.

9.3 Good practice in the conduct of qualitative management research

One of the objectives of this research is to identify perceptions of good practice within qualitative management research. It is interesting, however, that interviewees sometimes found it easier to identify bad practice in qualitative research, than highlight aspects of good practice.

The issue of research design emerged as being something that researchers needed to get 'right'. However, there was considerable debate about what 'right' looked like, ranging from those who argued that technical justifications of research design were significant, to those who argued that qualitative research should be more flexible. Rather than focusing on technical constraints, describing and reflecting upon research design was seen as a key part of good practice. What was considered good practice in terms of analysis and interpretation also varied, here apparently in terms of the underlying epistemology of the research. This therefore ranged from demonstrating a systematic, highly procedural approach to emphasising narrative and reflexivity. Indeed, reflexivity was also quite separately viewed as an important aspect of good practice in qualitative management research, although requiring a balance between self-indulgence and critical appraisal. Good practice in relation to the presentation of the research involved an ability to engage the reader, to be persuasive (rhetorically-skilled) and to be believable (acknowledging the limitations of the research).

In highlighting areas of good practice we feel some responsibility to attach a 'health warning'. Given the varying definitions of qualitative management research we outline in chapter 3, and the varied criteria for its assessment as outlined in chapter 6, it would seem that any guidelines for good practice need to be evaluated and applied in the light of the specific objectives of a piece of research and its underlying epistemological assumptions. The very diversity of qualitative research makes universal guidelines for good practice problematic.

9.4 Assessing qualitative management research

One of the key aims of the research was to investigate how qualitative management

research is currently assessed. Chapter 6 draws attention to the fact that, while some broad areas of consideration can be identified, the interviewees are not consistently applying a specific and invariable set of criteria to assess qualitative research (in contrast to the criteria of validity and reliability in use in quantitative research). Rather, the assessment of quality is seen as intuitive decision-making, 'you know it when you see it'. Even within the broad areas identified, there are diverse interpretations. Thus, for example, the same research may be quite differently evaluated by different individuals in terms of the extent to which it 'makes a contribution' (one person's interesting observation is another's tedious and insignificant detail). The fact that assessment criteria are problematic, however, does not render them inoperative or of little use. Rather it serves to remind us of the care that is needed in ensuring that we are explicit about the kind of criteria we are using to assess a piece of research. We would argue that when evaluating a piece of research it is important to be explicit about the criteria in use, and the underlying assumptions in choosing those criteria.

That researchers do not refer to quality criteria for qualitative research within the field is interesting given the existence of numerous published works providing advice in this direction (references). It may be that as a reviewer becomes very experienced, they develop their own list of criteria, which although not formally written down, are used as a heuristic device in a more systematic sense. However, it would seem that for a number of the interviewees a standardized checklist of criteria is not only of little use, but to be avoided. The question becomes do we actually need sets of criteria at all? And if we did have them, could consensus regarding their content ever be achieved? These are issues we raise for further debate at this point. However, in our own work we have developed a contingent set of criteria (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon, 2005) which seek to provide different quality indicators for research conducted within different epistemologies. In Appendix A, we provide a summary table from this paper which outlines this contingent criteriology.

9.5 Key skill deficits and training requirements in the area

The training requirements we have identified in Chapter 7 are derived from the interviewees' comments about the quality and status of qualitative research, and discussions of training more generally. We have identified a number of training needs under the headings of technical skills; philosophical issues; and more general training issues (explored further below). These are needs that will be addressed in the workshops that are one of the outcomes of this research project. In considering training needs, of particular interest is the underlying assumptions about the career of the management researcher and the life stages they go through with regard to training. The notion of the PhD as an apprenticeship was present in the interviewees' accounts, however there was less certainty about what research methodology training was available, or indeed pursued, once the PhD had been achieved. Interviewees suggested however that there is a need for both academic and practitioner researchers to engage in continuous professional development in this area. In particular there are concerns about the lack of appropriately trained reviewers and concern about where the future trainers of students in this area will come from. It is interesting to speculate about the impact that any training within this area may have.

Given the political context, and the consequent issues outlined in chapter 8, although training may go some way to enhance the quality of qualitative research, these type of interventions on their own, may not be able to go far enough.

The training needs identified from the research can be divided into three areas: technical skills, philosophical issues, and more general training issues. With regard to technical skills, writing up skills were seen as important, for example demonstrating how the research makes a contribution; integrating the literature with empirical data; and the importance of reflexivity in accounting for the research processes and products. Techniques of analysis were also important, including being aware of the range of analytic techniques available. It was also seen as crucial that there was awareness of the complex technical skills that qualitative researchers required. This was seen as important in addressing the mistaken view that qualitative research was an easy option. And with regard to philosophical issues, training should focus on the range of philosophical approaches available to the qualitative researcher, plus the **impact of different philosophical approaches on assessment criteria**. With regard to general training issues, the issues covered above highlight the need for more training of PhD students in a variety of specific areas. More generally it was also asserted that there is a need for more resources in order to carry out this training.

As stated in the introduction to this report, one of the key objectives of the research project is to ‘develop material and training workshops to encourage informed and reflexive practice in qualitative management research. To this end, we have designed a series of workshops to address the training needs identified. Appendix B provides a list of the workshops devised, including objectives and a brief summary of content for each. The workshops have been designed to be independent from each other in most cases, however, could be taught consecutively as a full course on qualitative management research (e.g. on a postgraduate programme). Each workshop is supported by facilitator’s notes (including ideas for pre-reading and further sources of information) and contains two or three exercises for the participants, which usually draw on the participants’ own extant research work to simulate experiential learning. Full details of the workshops, plus a facilitator’s guide is located on the project website at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/bgpinqmr/>

10.0 COMMENTARY

At the beginning of the report we set out the views of the research team in conducting this research. We acknowledged that our overall aim is to enhance the quality and profile of qualitative research within the management field, something to which we all feel strongly committed, as qualitative researchers and advocates of qualitative research. This viewpoint will clearly have influenced our overall interpretations of the data, and it is important for us to acknowledge that at this stage. It is also significant that we have all spent all our research careers based in the U.K. A number of the comments made by the interviewees relate to different international contexts within which qualitative research is conducted. In assessing our interpretations of the findings that should be taken into account. When discussing dissemination for example, our focus is exclusively upon dissemination through the English language, which restricts our analysis somewhat.

As part of conducting this research we have learned a number of things. At the beginning of the project, and indeed as we outlined in the project proposal, we were keen to identify sets of quality criteria in use when evaluating qualitative research. In doing so we had the specific aim of attempting to design a set of quality criteria along which qualitative research could be 'benchmarked'. After conducting, analysing, interpreting and reflecting on these interviews, producing a set of quality criteria now seems far more problematic than it did at the beginning. Indeed it would seem that such a set of criteria would never be able to address or give full credit to the rich variety that comes under the label of 'qualitative management research'. Additionally it seems that other issues may have far more significance in how qualitative research is evaluated, which are beyond the scope of this project. These issues concern status and credibility, and professional and institutional factors which we have explored fully in chapters 4 and 8. The key point here is that through the team's reflexive processes we have learned a lot about the complexity of the criteria issue and general problems with assessing the quality of qualitative research. This in itself will impact upon our own practice, and how we present our own work, and influence that of our students.

We have had many discussions within the team about the potential implications of presenting our findings and how they could be used. If we are arguing, for example, that qualitative research still has little status in the field of management research, and that there is still little of it published in the top management journals, does this mean that we are indirectly discouraging qualitative researchers from submitting their work to the top journals? Could it be that we are then guilty of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy about the lack of qualitative research in this context? Given the career implications we outline in chapter 8, should we not be arguing that it is preferable for researchers only to pursue quantitative research as they may have a more successful, or even less complicated, career if they do? Clearly this is not our intention. Rather we hope that our findings will help stimulate debate about how the quality of qualitative management research is assessed. Additionally our explicit intention has

been to raise the profile of qualitative methods, and the design of the workshops outlined in the previous section is one way of seeking to pursue this aim.

11.0 REFERENCES

Bishop, V. (2004)

Dey, I. (2003)

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APPENDIX B

THE TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Workshop Title	Training Requirement	Objective	Content
Skills of the qualitative researcher	Derived from comments about skills of qualitative researcher generally underestimated and new researchers thinking it's an easy option when they are lacking stats confidence.	Gives fledgling researchers and those who judge qualitative research the idea that qualitative research more complex than assumed	Identification of skills and how they can be achieved.
Philosophies that Inform Qualitative Research	Derived from comments about need for awareness of different approaches and their impact on methodology	Helps to increase understanding of the differences between methods and their underlying epistemological and ontological commitments. Related to assessment criteria	Overview of underlying philosophies.
Reflexivity	Derived from comments about need to reflect on own practice and research in general.	Encourage critical appraisal of own research practices and more thoughtful research design and	Different aspects of reflexivity Practical methods eg research diaries, action

		analysis.	learning groups.
Range of Methods	Derived from comments about qualitative researchers staying with the methods they know best and seemingly unaware of other approaches.	Give researchers a better idea of the variety of methods available and insights possible. May lead to more diverse ways of addressing contemporary theoretical and practical issues.	Overview of range of methods.
Analysis (inc software)	Derived from comments that this seems least developed of all qualitative research skills and under reported in literature	Provide some indication of how qualitative data analysis may be conducted and different assumptions and approaches possible.	Overview of range of analysis techniques. Demonstrated through different approaches to analysis of same text. Introduction to available software packages.
Writing Up and Publishing	Derived from comments about importance of engaging readers in the writing-up and also difficulties of writing up qualitative research. Also reaction to dearth of qualitative research currently published in some areas.	Encourage the publication of qualitative research. Highlight the difficulties faced and how these might be overcome.	Good practice in writing up qualitative research.
Assessment Criteria	Derived from comments about the application of inappropriate criteria	To demonstrate that different assessment criteria appropriate for different kinds of	Outline of contingent criteriology.

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	and concerns about how to assess qualitative research.	research. Provide criteria to enable contingent assessments.	
Reviewing Qualitative Papers and Research Grants	Derived from comments about the application of inappropriate criteria and concerns about how to assess qualitative research.	Encourage the publication of qualitative research through changing editors and reviewers' perceptions of the value of qualitative work. Applying the contingent assessment criteria to a specific and tangible issue.	Outline of purposes of review: critique and development. Review of existing assessment tools for articles and grant applications. Good practice in reviewing. Reminder of contingent criteriology and how these might be applied.
Supervision for Qualitative Research	Derived from perception that insufficient expertise amongst potential supervisors in this area.	Improve the supervision of qualitative PhD students and overcome potential feelings of isolation (students and supervisors).	Particular difficulties that may face qualitative PhD students and how these might be overcome. Networking. Advice on resources and discussion groups.

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