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QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES IN ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Volume II: Methods and Possibilities

Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies

Malgorzata Ciesielska • Dariusz Jemielniak
Editors

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palgrave
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ISBN 978-3-319-65441-6 ISBN 978-3-319-65442-3 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017960769

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

With love, this book is dedicated to my son,
Max Ciesielski-Lattimer
With love, to my daughter Alicja Jemielniak-Banasik and wife Natalia
Banasik-Jemielniak

Foreword

Qualitative research has a long and rich history in organization studies. Ultimately, understanding the nature and beauty of qualitative approaches to organizations comes mainly with practice. This volume presents an inspiring combination of fresh perspectives on methods traditionally used in organization studies and insights into contemporary debates around methodological developments, philosophy, ethics, the role of emotions and making research accessible to a wide range of participants. This innovative selection of chapters aims at opening up the space for qualitative research into new arenas, and its development in new directions. The list of contributors to this edited collection—including David Boje, Barbara Czarniawska, Yiannis Gabriel, Davydd Greenwood, Nigel King, Slawomir Magala, Mustafa Özbilgin and Tony Watson—promises engaging, informative and thought-provoking treatment of the topics addressed. All of the authors contributing to this volume are practicing qualitative researchers drawing from their own experience to offer a wide range of examples and hands-on advice. As such, this collection will be of interest to both established and early-career researchers, who would like to understand the variety, benefits and practicalities of using specific qualitative methods approaches in organization studies.

Colchester, United Kingdom — Martyna Śliwa

Preface

The book is designed with organization studies researchers, including PhDs and students of Doctorate in Business Management who would like to understand the current state of art of qualitative research in organization studies. The book is structured to discuss not only the key methods but also broader research design considerations and cutting-edge approaches. All chapters are based on robust and holistic literature reviews and are prepared by active researchers specializing in the methods they are discussing, which also enables for more practical considerations.

In the presented volume, we provide a review of solid, research-based and tested methods and views on the topic together with some more innovative take on the traditional data gathering and analysis techniques. In Chap. 1, Marta Strumińska-Kutra and Izabela Koładkiewicz present a comprehensive practical guide to conducting case study research. In Chap. 2, Malgorzata Ciesielska, Katarzyna Wolanik Boström and Magnus Öhlander focus on the wide variety or observation techniques and observer's roles. This is continued in Chap. 3, where Barbara Czarniawska discuses shadowing as an example of non-participant observation technique. In Chap. 4, Svetlana Gudkova presents the key methods of qualitative data collection employed in the social sciences, the interview, while in Chap. 5 Katarzyna Gawlik explores its popular technique, the focused group interview. In Chap. 6 Dorota Bourne and Devi Jankowicz discuss

the Repertory Grid Technique derived from Personal Construct Psychology. Mustafa Özbilgin and Joana Vassilopoulou examine the essentials of ontology and epistemology of relational methods in Chap. 7. Chapter 8, written by Nigel King, Joanna Brooks and Saloomeh Tabari, presents a particular style of thematic analysis that has been widely used in organizational and management research as well as in many other disciplines—namely, a template analysis. Discourse analysis and the role of 'text' in everyday life is discussed by Aylin Kunter in Chap. 9. The final part of the book is dedicated to a variety of issues and problems encountered during qualitative research. In Chap. 10 Agata Stasik and Adam Gendźwiłł advise on how to design a qualitative research project. The book ends with Beata Glinka and Przemysław Hensel exploring typical mistakes made in qualitative research projects and discussing how to avoid possible pitfalls (in Chap. 11).

Middlesbrough, UK — Malgorzata Ciesielska

Warsaw, Poland — Dariusz Jemielniak

Contents

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Nigel King is Professor in Applied Psychology and Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Huddersfield, UK. He has a long-standing interest in the use of qualitative methods in 'real-world' research, especially in community health and social care settings. His research interests include professional identities and interprofessional relations in community palliative care, psychological aspects of contact with nature and ethics in qualitative research. Nigel is well-known for his work on Template Analysis and, more recently, the development of a visual interview technique known as 'Pictor'. He is author (with Jo Brooks) of *Template Analysis for Business and Management Students* (2017), *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (2010) with Christine Horrocks and *Managing Innovation and Change: A Critical Guide for Organizations* (2002) with Neil Anderson.

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Case Study

Marta Strumińska-Kutra and Izabela Koładkiewicz

1.1 Introduction

The main aim of the chapter is to discuss the case study method. We shall begin by confronting its definition. It is quite a challenge, as researchers representing various paradigms embark on this type of research project. These paradigms define the way we perceive the explored reality, our chances of understanding/cognizing it, and the acceptable research methods. As a consequence, not only is the case study subject to various definitions, but it is also employed to achieve manifold goals (Hassard and Kelemen 2010). Despite these differences, we can point out a number of characteristics that distinguish case study method; they shall be the focus

Author's Note: This chapter is substantially revised version of a chapter published in Jemielniak, D. ed. (2012) Badania jakościowe, PWN: Warszawa.

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_1

of our discussion. As much as possible, we shall take into account the variety of perspectives in case study-based research, or recommend to readers the sources where they can find more detailed information on a particular issue. In this chapter, the presentation of premises and types of case studies will be followed by a manual, guiding readers in their endeavor to design their own research using the method discussed. For greater clarity, the manual is organized into sections, each providing answers to the following questions:

- Step one: What do we want to find out?
- Step two: Where shall we look for data sources?
- Step three: How is data collected and selected?
- Step four: How should empirical data be analyzed?
- Step five: How are research conclusions formulated and how should we approach writing a research report?

Each of these steps is illustrated by an example from case study-based research in business and management.

1.2 Specific Character of the Case Study as Compared to Other Research Methods

The case study strategy[1] requires an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of a case within its context. A group, an individual, an organization, a processes, or social relationships can all be considered "cases" and, as such, be subject to research. It is advisable to begin by imagining the case as an example of a social or a theoretical phenomenon. A detailed description, together with a thorough analysis, should contribute to understanding the case and formulating several theoretical conclusions.

When emphasizing the **comprehensive** approach to analysis, some authors go as far as claiming that it is not owing to methodological reasons that researchers have recourse to the case study method, but rather because of their interest in a particular case and the desire to thoroughly examine and comprehend it (Stake 2005). The method allowing them to attain this goal is secondary. Therefore, the selection of techniques and sources is purely pragmatic. The defining feature of the case study strategy is, therefore, a

wide range of research techniques combined with various types of data used (Creswell 2007; Gerring 2007; Stake 2005; Yin 2003a).

This variety of tools and data types can hardly be considered typical of the case study strategy, as nearly all qualitative studies combine different techniques, such as interviews, observations, content analysis, and various sources, that is, individuals (both as interviewees and as objects of observation), documents, films, and photographs. The same is true for research questions regarded as typical of case studies, that is, **why** and **how** a particular thing happens (Yin 2003b). We ask them when we are interested in processes, interactions, and dynamics (Miles and Huberman 1994; Hijmans and Wester 2010) rather than in "snapshots of social life" (Kostera 2008). Undoubtedly, taking the former (i.e. processes, interactions, and dynamics) into account is one of the advantages of case study, although yet again, it is not uncommon for qualitative methods. Another feature that is characteristic but not specific of the case study is the observation of events in their **natural environment and context** (Gerring 2007; Yin 2003b; Hijmans and Wester 2010).

Given how difficult it is to discern the features that distinguish the case study from other qualitative approaches, the task is sometimes referred to as the "definitional morass" (Gerring 2007, p. 17). We shall, nevertheless, attempt to identify such characteristic features.

It seems that the difference that defines the case study can be grasped through reference to the **aim** set by researchers who adopt other approaches to research. For it is the aim that dictates which techniques and data sources should be used and where to put emphasis in the research process. In the ethnographic method, emphasis is on the reconstruction of the cultural context within which the examined group functions; all tool design and data collection procedures are subordinated to this aim. The grounded theory method seeks to create a theory that "fits" the observed reality. In the case study method, the primary aim is a comprehensive description and understanding of the case and of its context. Then, **depending on the researcher's paradigmatic affiliations**, the following alternative options are possible:

- using the obtained results to create abstract (theoretical) general concepts that can be used to describe and explain the examined phenomenon (Stake 2005; Creswell 2007);

- developing theories that expound social reality within a delimited area (Mills et al. 2010; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007);
- modifying or supplementing existing theories (Burawoy 1998; Mills et al. 2010; Wadham and Warren 2014; Yin 2003a);
- referring to a wider class of similar phenomena (Seawright and Gerring 2008; Stake 2005);
- providing practical solutions to specific types of problems, for example, organizational issues or problems with the evaluation of various social interventions (Hassard and Kelemen 2010).

Another distinguishing feature of the case study method is the **way in which units of analysis are treated**. The case and its context are often described as a system or a bounded phenomenon (Stake 2005; Creswell 2007; Gerring 2004), which is to emphasize that the investigated unit of analysis (organization, person, process) is defined together with its numerous aspects and within a broad network of social, political, institutional, ethical, and aesthetic phenomena and meanings (Creswell 2007; Mills et al. 2010; Stake 2005).

By now, it should be clear how difficult it is to formulate an adequate definition of the case study research method. Let us quote the definition suggested by John W. Creswell, as it appears to comprise all important elements mentioned thus far, yet remains general enough not to exclude the numerous variants of relationships between theory and research that are typical of the method in question. Creswell (2007, p. 73) defines the case study as:

> a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.

Nothing should prevent an investigator from having recourse to quantitative techniques in the case study methodology if it is deemed justified and advantageous for the research question (Creswell 2007; Mills et al. 2010). It is important, however, to ensure consistency with the adopted

theoretical (and methodological) approach and to properly select research patterns. As mentioned above, the case study method is, after all, described and applied by representatives of various paradigmatic traditions.

1.3 Premises of the Case Study Strategy

Despite divergences in understanding the case study method, a number of basic traits distinguish it from other methods. They relate to several key issues, such as the understanding of the concept of "case", priority attributed to the description of a single case, the importance of theory and generalization, the way in which reality is understood and expounded. The above are approached in various manners, depending on the research tradition within which the case study is defined. We shall now attempt to illustrate and explain this diversity.

Case as a "System" As mentioned above, by applying the case study method, we choose to understand the case as a system within its broadly defined contextual framework, which often poses the problem of case boundaries. If we study an organization in the context of its relationships with the cultural, social, and institutional environment, we may wonder where the organization ends and its surroundings start. As researchers, however, we are obliged to trace case boundaries at an early stage of the research project. This implies the need to make fundamental decisions about the object of our research endeavors. We should specify the timeframe and the extent of the phenomena we intend to research within the case.

Focus on the Specific Character of a Given Case Case study method is founded on the principle that each case should be regarded as a complete and unique phenomenon if we are to understand its internal dynamics. Regardless of the number of cases analyzed, any study based on this method requires a thorough knowledge of each case (Stake 2005). This has implications for analytical procedures: if we examine several cases, we need to prepare a separate report for each of them, and then carry out a comparative analysis. As Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 207) write:

> It is crucial to have understood the dynamics of each particular case before proceeding to cross-case explanations. Without that, superficiality sets.

The above authors point out that cases do not form fully comparable data sets: each of them is governed by its own rules and has its own narrative, and therefore it would be a mistake to dismiss the context and content oneself with an inventory of similarities and differences between individual cases. They recommend "marrying" the variable-oriented approach with the case-oriented approach. Case-oriented analysis is "an analysis that aims to understand a particular case or several cases by looking closely at the all the details of each", while the variable-oriented analysis means "an analysis that describes and/or explains a particular variable" (Babbie 2016, p. 383).

The Place of Theory in Case Studies Divergences in understanding the role of theory in case study research are an excellent example of the impact that the individual author's philosophical outlook has on his/her research assumption. Many post-positivist authors (i.e. those looking for mechanisms governing social behavior, Sharma 2010) use case studies to achieve two goals at the same time. The first is to describe and explain a given phenomenon within the framework of a specific theoretical perspective. The second is to fill in any gaps in a specific theory or to modify it. The latter can be attained through a flexible approach to categories set within the theory and the researcher's openness to empirical data. This approach is adopted, for example, by Michael Burawoy and Robert Yin (Burawoy refers to it as the extended case method, see Burawoy 1998). Somewhat in line with this approach is Miles and Huberman's suggestion that case study method, when compared to ethnography, is more dependent on specific theoretical models both in the initial phase of research and during the analysis of the collected empirical material. As these authors point out, in the case study strategy the emphasis is placed on the unification of data collection procedures and on a more systematic approach to the selection and use of analytical tools (Miles and Huberman 1994; Hijmans and Wester 2010).

Proponents of qualitative research that represent the interpretative tradition criticize this approach and argue that through imposing explicit theoretical frameworks or resulting hypotheses, researchers become less sensitive to signals from the field. They suggest that researchers should specify the general theoretical perspective they adopt in the study (e.g. critical or feminist theory). It is referred to as the "abstract dimension" or the "working theory" (Stake 2005) and provides certain sensitizing concepts (Charmaz 2005). Examples of these abstract dimensions include criminology, conflict resolution, resources, hegemony, or domination. It is also possible to have recourse to theory during the final stage of the research, when results need to be interpreted (Creswell 2007; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Numerous authors highlight the usefulness of case studies in exploratory research that results in generating hypotheses and—at a later stage—developing theories (Eisenhardt 1991; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Flyvbjerg 2006; Gerring 2007; Silverman 2005; Stake 2005; Hijmans and Wester 2010). In this situation, the first case provides initial concepts and hypotheses whose pertinence is subsequently verified through the analysis of subsequent cases selected with a view to verifying the generated interdependences (Aaltio and Heilmann 2010).

Another option is to relinquish theoretical references or references to broader phenomena of a particular type. This means focusing only on the description of a given case and explaining it within its own categories identified in an analytical process (Creswell 2007; Stake 2005). Students who decide to apply this approach should be aware that this type of case study may raise objections, as it does not involve attempts at drawing theoretical and/or practical conclusions. As David Silverman (2005, p. 127) writes: "If all you aim to do is simply to 'describe a case', you may rightly get the response: 'so what?'". However, a number of authors, for example, Robert Stake (2005) and Bent Flyvbjerg (2006), argue in favor of this strategy (see also "Generalization Based on Cases").

In practical terms, the diversity of paradigmatic affiliations of researchers using and describing the case study method requires a certain level of alertness when literature sources are selected. For example, when planning an interpretive research, one should not choose Robert Yin's work relaying on realist and objectivist presuppositions (Haverland and Yanow 2012, p. 403).

Idiographic Bases of Understanding and Explaining The etymology of the adjective "idiographic" indicates the nature of this explanation: *idio* (*Gr.* special, separate) indicates that the explanatory procedure rests on a comprehensive description that facilitates the understanding of a given phenomenon. A case study provides a detailed and "pure" description with references to the case's history, or a chronology of events (Stake 2005). The case is only systematically analyzed in the subsequent step. Some authors argue that the analysis ought to be based on references to the concurrence, sequentiality, and contextuality of events, claiming that social reality is unique and random (Stake 2005). Other authors underline the potential of qualitative research—and of the case study in particular—in reconstructing causal relationships understood as causal mechanisms (Gerring 2007; Miles and Huberman 1994). They claim that the potential of qualitative analyses stems from the fact that they are embedded in the local reality and take into account the diversity of social phenomena, their sequential and processual nature. In addition, they propose different analytical procedures in order to detect these interdependences (see Step Four: How Should Empirical Data Be Analyzed?).

Generalizations Based on Cases Case study researchers do not have the same approach to generalization. Again, the paradigmatic approach is a distinguishing factor in this respect. We shall discuss different generalization possibilities afforded by research based on case study methods: first, those related mainly to the realist perspective, and subsequently those representing the anti-realist approach. In research based on case studies, Robert Yin represents the first group, while Robert Stake is associated with the second (Moriceau 2010).

As highlighted at the beginning, cases may be selected for research to exemplify broader phenomena or theoretical constructs. Consequently, any conclusions drawn from case observation are based on the knowledge of these phenomena or theories. In light of the above, Burawoy posits that case studies ought to be used to modify and supplement theories. Conclusions drawn from a case study can be theoretical in the sense that they can serve the purpose of developing a typology or enriching theo-

retical knowledge of a specific kind of phenomena. Such generalizations are called analytical (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Yin 2003a). This is why particular attention is paid to the selection of cases.[2] The selected cases should enable us to observe the mechanisms or phenomena of our interest. Very often, cases are selected for research precisely because they are atypical and unique, or they call into question generally accepted theories and stereotypes. The value of this kind of analysis goes beyond its capacity to satisfy our curiosity that difference naturally arouses. Contrary to conventional wisdom, exceptions do not confirm the rule, but enable us to discern it.

Case studies often focus on "natural experiments" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992), that is, events that test a particular theory and the interdependences it suggests. Selecting cases that are significant from the theoretical point of view and lend themselves to analytical generalization is called theoretical sampling (Silverman 2005). More generally, we can refer to this kind of sampling as strategic (Flyvbjerg 2006), because the categories governing the selection are not always theoretical: they may relate, for instance, to our expectations about the case's informative content.

Many researchers wish to juxtapose their research findings with abstract interdependences, but also to give them a certain prognostic value in relation to other cases within a specific population type. The following strategies may be applied for this purpose (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992; Silverman 2005):

- assessing the typicality of the case (obtaining information, for example, statistical data about relevant aspects of the population of cases and comparing our case to them),
- combining in-depth case analysis with survey research on a random sample of cases,
- coordinating several qualitative studies,
- gathering a relatively large number of similar cases (relatively rare but we may ensure that the sampling covers the entire population, for example, all companies operating within a given industry),
- referring to the analytic model, according to which each case lends itself to generalization (e.g. a study of language use within the field of sociolinguistics or conversation analysis).

The last generalization option is different from those mentioned above. It is not a formal generalization (does not refer neither to theory not to population), but hermeneutical (based on interpretation). An investigator who presents a case in a detailed and naturalistic manner provides the readers with a vicarious experience. When faced with a fine case study, readers have the impression of a firsthand observation of the events described, they can make generalizations when encountering a similar case and, subsequently, confirm or modify any conclusions drawn from it. Stake and Trumbull (1982) term this process "naturalistic generalization", while Lincoln and Guba (1985) relinquish any generalization and suggest replacing it with the terms "transferability" and "fittingness" (where a hypothesis developed in one context "fits" or can be transferred in another). This method of generalizing concerns first and foremost—but not exclusively—intrinsic case studies (devoid of direct references to theories or wider phenomena).

1.4 Types of Case Studies

Depending on the needs of researchers and on research aims, different types of case studies can be distinguished. Bent Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 230) proposes a typology of cases on the basis of the criterion of case suitability from the point of view of its information content. The typology of case studies developed by Flyvbjerg is presented in Table 1.1.

Flyvbjerg claims that the choice of the case does not necessarily mean that only one particular type among the above is possible. A case study can be extreme, critical, and paradigmatic at the same time (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 233). However, maximum variation cases and critical cases tend to be favored by post-positivist researchers, as they imply a certain regularity of social reality that lends itself to theoretical explanations with varying degrees of generality. In turn, Robert Yin founded his typology of cases on the criterion of research aims. A detailed description of selected case study types identified by Yin is presented in Table 1.2.

Yin proposes yet another manner of differentiating case study strategies, based on the number of cases. Depending on the number of cases examined, he distinguishes between single case studies and multiple case studies (Yin 2003a).

Table 1.1 Flyvbjerg's typology of cases

Extreme/deviant cases	They are a source of information on unusual/atypical cases. It is assumed that they often provide more information, because they involve more actors and more basic mechanisms within the examined case. An example could be research on a public dispute, aimed at understanding how a public administration agency "learns" new patterns of participatory governance. Characteristic features of a dispute, such as the involvement of multiple and diverse stakeholders, or references to public interest issues, make it an area where the process of learning new patterns of governing can be empirically observed (Rządca and Strumińska-Kutra 2016)
Maximum variation cases	They provide information about the importance of different conditions for a given process/phenomenon and its outcome (e.g. three or four cases are strongly differentiated from the point of view of a single dimension: organization's size, type/form, location, budget). A good example of this selection strategy is Martin and Eisenhardt's study of communication between business units (see Example 8.2)
Critical cases	They provide information conducive to the following logical deduction: "if this is/is not relevant for this case, it may/may not apply to all cases". Researchers look for cases in which theoretical tenets will be most and least likely confirmed. As an example of the "least likely" case, Flyvbjerg cites Robert Michels's (1915) classic study of the processes of oligarchization within organizations. By choosing an organization with a horizontal structure, which has evolved from the bottom up, he was able to test the universality of his "iron law of oligarchy". This type of testing is based on the following assumption: "If this organization also turns out to be oligarchic, then it can be assumed that the majority of organizations are"
Paradigmatic cases	They develop a metaphor or establish a school for the domain they refer to: these are cases that highlight more general characteristics of the examined community. As an example, Flyvbjerg refers to Michel Foucault's (1979) study of European prisons and its conclusions that were juxtaposed with mechanisms present in the European culture

Source: Authors' own adapted from Flyvbjerg (2006)

Table 1.2 Yin's typology of cases

Exploratory case	Research results in formulating questions and hypotheses for future research, or evaluating the feasibility of future research procedures
Descriptive case	The case study describes the phenomenon in question in a comprehensive manner, taking into account its context
Explanatory case	It focuses on analyzing causes and effects of the observed correlations

Source: Authors' own adapted from Yin (2003a, b)

Multiple case studies have the logic of an experiment that produces either similar or contrasting results, depending on the value of the independent variable. The criterion for the selection of cases is the presence of certain determinants, and the purpose of the study is to ascertain whether their occurrence actually produces the predicted effects (Yin 2003a). This approach to the case study reflects the logic behind maximum variation cases in Flyvbjerg's typology and is representative of the post-positivist approach, where experimental logic is considered the main form of scientific reasoning.

Yin (2003a, pp. 40–42) argues in favor of a single case study when the case in question is:

- a critical case study—that is, serves to test an existing theory; when all assumptions of a given theory are satisfied by a single case, this case provides a sufficient test for the theory's validity;
- an example of rare or unique circumstances—the study is carried out with a view to obtaining new information on existing mechanisms when they concur with an unusual situation that may reveal an aspect that has yet to be explored. An atypical situation may also provide the foundation for creating a new typology (e.g. description of a new, unknown disease);
- a typical case—when the study serves to examine typical conditions or common situations in order to refer research findings to other cases that belong to a given group (e.g. exploring a single, "typical" firm representing an industry in order to draw conclusions pertaining to other companies from the same sector);
- a novel case—when it is possible to explore phenomena that have been out of the researchers' reach or their area of interest;

- a long-term case study—when it is possible to examine a case over different periods, that is, two or more points in time.

1.5 How to Use Case Study Method in Practice: A Step-by-Step Guide

At the beginning of our discussion on the case study, we noted that it is used in various ways, depending on the researcher's paradigmatic beliefs. However, if we are to develop a practical guide on designing research, it is necessary to opt for a specific approach, that is, an approach embedded in a particular paradigm. Our focus here is on the search for processes and structures providing both description and causal explanation of events (Miles and Huberman 1994)—hence the emphasis on the importance of theoretical analysis of the subject matter. Given the above features, the present guide represents primarily the post-positivist trend, recognizing nevertheless the complexity of human behavior, the social nature of reality, and problems in distinguishing cause-effect relationships (Sharma 2010). Wherever we considered it possible, we point to solutions typical of the case study method that are adopted in other paradigms.

1.5.1 Designing Research as Creating a Chain of Evidence

Now, we shall present the subsequent steps of the research procedure. They are logically linked and form a coherent sequence of decisions, initiated with the researcher's decision to study a particular phenomenon from a given conceptual/theoretical perspective and with asking specific research questions. If we decide to study a particular phenomenon, we must choose an appropriate case to examine and, within this case, look for events, attitudes, and ideas pertaining to the explored subject. Therefore, we need to select the tools and decide where we will look for particular aspects of the phenomenon we explore.

Once we have gathered all relevant data (i.e. related to the subject of our interest), we need to organize and analyze it in order to answer the research question. As the case study is either inductive or partially induc-

tive and partially deductive, the analysis may be interwoven with data collection. Qualitative research is flexible. The data collection phase may lead to the modification of the research question or to supplementing it with new questions that better reflect the observed phenomena.

Then, on the basis of the organized and analyzed data, we should be able to draw definite conclusions in response to the research question and in reference to its theoretical framework. Individual steps form a closely linked sequence of events that Robert Yin calls the "**chain of evidence**": from research questions to final conclusions. The coherence of these steps is also called methodological congruence (Morse and Richards 2002; Creswell 2007) (Fig. 1.1).

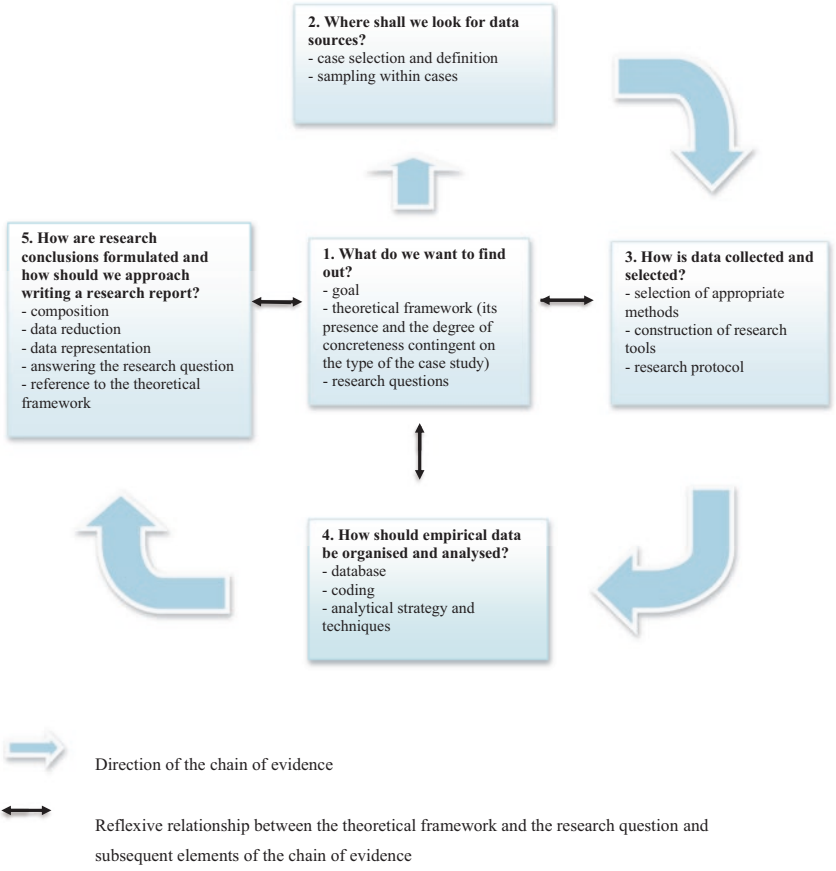

Fig. 1.1 Designing research as a process of creating a chain of evidence
Source: authors' own

At each of these stages, we shall encounter problems compelling us to make ethical decisions. Qualitative research is carried out "close to people" and it involves research that interferes—to a greater or lesser extent—with their world. Negotiating access to a particular community, involving its members in the research process, and gathering data that is often personal or emotional, or related to individual or group interests, are among particularly sensitive tasks. When conducting research and analyzing its results, and in particular when planning their publication, we must consider whether our decisions will not adversely affect those who take part in our project (more on this subject, see, e.g. Creswell 2007; Silverman 2001).

Step One: What Do We Want to Find Out? When planning research, we already have a general idea about the kind of phenomenon we intend to explore. In the first step, we should structure our research plans. The process of structuring research process begins with asserting the problem that shall be analyzed, and with expounding the reasons for undertaking research within the chosen area. Potential reasons include the author's willingness to fill gaps in the extant literature, to acquire knowledge about unexplored or insufficiently explored areas of social life, or to grasp the social significance of the problem; there may be practical reasons, such as the researcher's wish to address a particular problem, for instance, an organizational issue. To properly ground our intentions, we review the extant literature and other research on the topic, searching for suitable theoretical approaches, discussing the aim of our research project with the supervisor, project participants, or students.

At this point in time, we can answer the following question: what exactly do we want to find out? What kind of explanatory factors will we seek? At this stage of research process, the degree to which we refine the theory providing us with a framework for problem analysis may vary depending on the type of case study that we choose to perform.

If the selected topic has yet to be explored, we will probably opt for the exploratory case study. We may also simply be intrigued by a particular case and treat theoretical interest as secondary—in this situation a single case study design will be our choice. Nevertheless, even

then we have to build our research on a certain theoretical concept or concepts (more on this subject, see Silverman 2001, 2005). The conceptual or theoretical perspective may be a general outlook that affects our perception of a phenomenon (e.g. critical theory, feminist theory, organizational culture metaphor), or a more specific theoretical system, such as new institutionalism or resource dependency theory. If our goal is to develop a middle range theory on a given subject ("nested" in a wider theoretical system), we are more likely to choose a multiple case study design. If the goal is to test or modify an existing theory, we will rather opt for a critical case study, or for extended case method.

Even if it is going to change at the later stage of the inquiry, the object and the purpose of the study must be precisely defined, which requires a certain theoretical effort. Example 1.1 illustrates how theoretical interests

Example 1.1 Linking Theoretical Interests with Research Method and Object. Source: Gawer and Philipps (2013)

In the research of a computer industry and particularly of Intel Corporation, authors were guided by a theoretical aim—to better understand the link between institutional logics and institutional work. They have asked following research questions: What kinds of institutional work do organizations perform as they attempt to influence the institutional logic that characterizes their field; and what kinds of institutional work do organizations perform in response to the resulting logic shift?"

A single case study was chosen as a method because "the links between institutional work and institutional logics are not well understood; because we are interested in the worldviews of organizational members; and because our study is exploratory and aimed at theory building" (2013, p. 1040).

Intel Corporation situated in the computer industry became a case. Authors focused on a specific timeframe (between 1980 and 2000) as, during this period, the computer industry underwent a profound transformation underpinned by a shift in institutional logics. Similarly, to other organizations in the industry, Intel Corporation had to adapt to this changing logic. But additionally, during this time Intel became an influential actor that played a central role in the changes that occurred in the industry. Hence, as authors of the research argue, "This case therefore offers a unique opportunity to examine the institutional work performed by an organization within a field as the field undergoes a shift in institutional logic" (p. 1040).

can be linked with the choice of both research method and research object, together with its context.

Step Two: Where Shall We Look for Data Sources? The next step is to answer the following question: how do we want to find out everything that we need in order to answer the research question? If we are interested in a particular phenomenon, we should ask ourselves: where should I look for data that will allow me to answer the research question? In the case study strategy, the answer to the latter question is, in a way, two-level. The first level refers to the selection of the case as an example of a problem that we wish to explore. The second level requires sampling within the examined case.

Cases are selected through purposive sampling. We can do it through adopting such criteria as uniqueness or atypicality of the case, or, on the contrary, select "ordinary" cases (Creswell 2007). It is worth remembering that uniqueness or typicality are assessed against other phenomena or against a theoretical background. For instance, the case of a trade union that does not follow oligarchization trends is unique in the context of other trade unions (Lipset et al. 1956) and against the background of theories that explain the oligarchization process. This fact points to the relevance of theory for the selection of cases; we therefore argue that purposive sampling equals, essentially, theoretical sampling (Silverman 2005). Theory points to important variables that differentiate social phenomena or issues playing a significant role in social processes and predicts the course of events. Consequently, theory guides us towards those places where we will be most likely to find problems of interest to us. At this point, we should also decide whether we will explore a single case or several cases and provide a clear definition of the case in our research. Definition indicates the unit of analysis, that is, what or who will be explored: organization, process, relation, or person. Then, we have to consider what exactly will be researched as a case. The process of defining case, its boundaries, and the unit of analysis is facilitated by the exploration of the research question (i.e. reflection on what it is exactly that we wish to learn from the study) and the theoretical perspective (What kinds of relationships are of interest to us? What are our key concepts?). Example 1.2 illustrates the interplay between choosing core theoretical

Example 1.2 Defining Cases and Units of Analysis. Source: Martin and Eisenhardt (2010)

In their theory building research, Martin and Eisenhardt used so-called embedded case studies, involving more than one unit of analysis; in this kind of research, subunits are also taken into consideration (Yin 2003b). Here, the analysis involved the firm (unit) and the cross-business-unit collaboration (subunit).

Authors justify their theoretical goals flowingly: "Given limited theory about how executives create high-performing cross-BU [Business Units] collaborations, we relied on inductive theory building using embedded, multiple cases. Multiple cases are likely to yield more generalizable, robust, parsimonious theory than single cases" (p. 268). Further they explain choosing of the software industry as a proper research setting. First, software industry is knowledge-based industry for which it is typical to have many opportunities for cross-BU collaboration. Second in the case of software industry, this kind of collaboration is strategic and widespread. Hence, new cross-BU collaborations are likely to be frequent.

Six publicly held software firms were selected for the research, each of them with multiple BUs. The selection was diversified according to industry segments (consumer, enterprise, and infrastructure), age (founding dates extending from 1967 to 1995). The combination was aimed at improving the robustness and generalizability of the results.

Based on the literature and informants' perceptions, researchers used several criteria to define a business unit. "First, a BU was defined as a distinct and separable organizational entity with authority over key BU-level strategic decisions, including resource allocations. Second, it sold distinct products that customers could purchase independently of those offered by other BUs in the same firm. Third, it was managed by a GM with an executive team. Fourth, its firm evaluated it using profit measures such as return on investment (ROI) and return on sales (ROS)" (p. 269).

Polar sampling was used for selecting recent cross-business-unit collaborations in each firm (i.e. one collaboration was high-performing and one, low-performing). This kind of sampling was used as it is a particularly effective theoretical sampling approach, "making the emergent constructs and theoretical relationships 'transparently observable'" (p. 269).

concepts (collaboration between business units), choosing research design (multiple cases), and defining cases and units of analysis (organization as a unit and collaboration as a subunit of analysis).

The second level, where we select sources from which empirical data is obtained, is the sampling within the examined case. In qualitative case studies, it usually involves purposive sampling based on the criterion of

"suitability" of the source as the subject/object, which is to provide the data used in order to answer the research question. Therefore, the sampling method depends on the research question and on the adopted theoretical perspective.

Although sampling within the case is determined by the nature of the research question, it is important to note three general categories that will likely be relevant to the explored phenomenon and should, therefore, be included in the sampling. These are **time** and its impact on behavior, such as the beginning and the end of the working day; **people** and their perspective—contingent on the position occupied within a community; and the **context** that influences behavior, for example, employees' behavior during office hours *versus* a corporate team building trip (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992, pp. 56–63). It is important to take these differences into account in the process of sampling.

Step Three: How Is Data Collected and Selected? Suppose we have already developed a preliminary theoretical perspective, we have selected a number of cases, and that we know who or what[3] we intend to explore. Now, we have to answer the following question: how can we collect and select relevant data? We decide on the type of research tool we will use and we work on its design. The specific design of the research tool allows us to select information, that is, decide which among the great variety of data available in the study will help us answer the research question.

Let us first discuss the choice of techniques. It requires plenty of information: what kind of data is best acquired through interviews and which types of information lend themselves best to observation? Once we have chosen the type of tool that we need, we have to think about its design. If we decide to conduct interviews, what ought to be included in their scenarios? If we opt for document analysis, what should be its angle? We must consider which elements of reality are important from the point of view of the research problem and then include them in our research tools (in the interview scenario, observation plan, or content analysis plan). This is a tool that will help us "capture" relevant empirical data from the explored reality. We can look for signs and expressions of these important issues in empirical data—both induced (e.g. interviews) and existing

independently from researchers' intervention (e.g. documents). Example 1.3 illustrates the way in which issues significant for research are detected and subsequently included in the research tool.

The case study method is characterized by the multiplicity of data sources used and research techniques applied. Triangulation, which means combining various techniques (methodological triangulation) and data sources (data triangulation) within a complex research process, allows for a more complete description and comprehensive understanding of the case, thus increasing the relevance of findings. When designing a study, we should take several research tools into consideration.

It is important to remain open to data coming from the field. The process of designing a qualitative case study combines inductive and deductive strategies, which means adopting at the very outset a particular

Example 1.3 Choosing Research Tools and Data Sources. Source: Belz and Binder (2017)

In their paper based on a multiple case study, Belz and Binder (2017) attempted to explore sustainable entrepreneurial processes (SEP) understood as recognition, development, and exploitation of an entrepreneurial opportunity with a view to balancing social, environmental, and economic goals. They used the following data collection procedures. First, face-to-face interviews with the (co-)founders. Semi-structured, open interviews were a major source of information allowing for an in-depth understanding of decision-making processes and for gaining relevant background information from key informants. The interview scenario consisted of three sections: (1) personal background of the (co-)founder; (2) entrepreneurial process from the first idea to the market entry (including contextual influences of political, economic, and social nature); and (3) weighting of economic, social, and ecological goals. The questions evolved around activities, events, and outcomes, rather than hearsay—a measure reducing the potential for retrospective bias. Before and after the face-to-face interviews with the (co-)founders, archival data from internal and external sources were gathered (e.g. the websites of the sustainable enterprises, blogs of the (co-) founders, and press releases, social and print media dealing with the SEP). The latter kind of data was real-time archival data, which allowed a triangulation with the personal account of the sustainable entrepreneurial journey as told by the (co-)founders in the interviews. Using this measure authors increased the internal validity of the study and reduced the potential for retrospective bias. To enhance the external validity of the study they asked the co-founders to review drafts of the case study report.

theoretical framework, which will subsequently be modified or supplemented. The openness of the qualitative research method allows us to observe phenomena that we have not foreseen in the initial approach (*serendipity,* Glaser and Strauss 1967); they allow us to formulate a new hypothesis, modify and supplement the initial theoretical approach with new, empirically observed elements. In the course of the research, it may transpire that the research problem evolves (Stake 2005), and that the research question itself requires modification, because its original version fails to address the most important phenomena shaping the situation. If this is the case, then we must modify our approach; the modification ought to be documented and justified in the research report. After all, discovering that reality is different from what we have anticipated is one of our research findings (see the next subsection.)

The research protocol and the database (Yin 2003a, 2010; Davis 2010) form part of the phase described in this subsection and are, at the same time, typical of the case study strategy. Both tools increase the reliability and credibility of the study. The protocol is a collection of research instructions and is built on a case-by-case basis. It includes questions that the researcher should answer on the basis of the collected data, the likely sources of information, reminders pertaining to data collection procedures (e.g. interview scenarios, observation plans) and organizational information such as the timeframe, credentials, information that can be given to a person interested in the project (e.g. aims and auspices). Tips on writing a case study report may be an additional element (for an example of a report plan, see Stake 2005). The database, in turn, contains structured empirical data, for example, interviews, observation notes, and documents used in the analysis (for more information on registering data, see Creswell 2007, p. 138).

Step Four: How Should Empirical Data Be Analyzed? The next step in the evidence chain—from the research question to the answer—is data analysis. If we have opted for an exploratory case study, that is, one whose aim is to describe the phenomenon, or one that is to generate hypotheses and develop theories, then analytic categories will emerge primarily during the analysis of the collected empirical material (Creswell 2007). The concepts that we used at the beginning of the project as "sensitizing concepts"

should be at this stage formulated as a problem, which means that we need to bestow them with meaning in the experience of the group subject to research and in their understanding, while avoiding textbook definitions (Charmaz 2005). In the course of the research we ascertain, inter alia, "if, when, how, to what extent, and under which conditions these concepts become relevant to the study" (Charmaz 2005, p. 512).

This type of analysis is primarily based on comparisons (in terms of differences and similarities) and on a shift from specific to increasingly abstract categories, which takes place through the reduction of the number of codes. The process is called open coding and it is rooted in grounded theory and is followed by axial coding (relating codes to each other). If the purpose of our research is to establish certain explanatory mechanisms or theories, we could use such strategies as analytic induction, which is aimed at systematically developing causal explanations, search among elements that overturn these explanations, adjust explanations to make sure they take into account any observed exceptions until explanations match the observed phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992). The analytical induction strategy comprises two basic techniques: the constant comparative method and the deviant-case[4] analysis (Silverman 2001). Excellent descriptions of coding and data analysis in inductive research can be found in ethnographic studies (Hammersley and Atkinson 1992, pp. 210–244; Silverman 2001) and studies of the grounded theory method in its both interpretive and post-positivist versions (Charmaz 2005, 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

If, on the other hand, we rely on an existing theoretical framework, for instance, to carry out a critical case study, or when we use an extended case method, the way in which we organize the data largely depends on the research question and on the adopted theoretical perspective. This means that they must be referred to in the process of designing analytical codes (i.e. categories according to which we organize data). Coding is, in such cases, prefigured to a certain extent, which means they need to correspond to the adopted theoretical framework (Creswell 2007; Wadham and Warren 2014). When analyzing the collected evidence, we should pay close attention to the data that does not match our codes. Such unclassified data will serve as the basis for the creation of open codes,

based on the analysis of data that does not match the scheme. The data and its interpretation form a background for rebuilding and enriching the original theory. In order to stay faithful to the data (Maxwell 1996), we may be forced to reorganize the research perspective, which often entails modifying the research question, or even the aim of the study. Such incidents are quite typical of case study researchers, who often admit that "their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts, and hypotheses were wrong and that the case material compelled them to revise their hypotheses on essential points" (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 235).

Both during and in parallel to the coding process, we can apply a variety of analytical techniques (Yin 2003a).[5] First, we can resort to pattern matching; it involves the matching of patterns based on empirical data to those foreseen in the preceding theoretical analysis. If we are looking for cause-effect explanations, we must remember that the mere conformity of observations with theoretical predictions—even if it confirms the internal validity of the analysis—does not yet guarantee the existence of a cause-effect relationship. We should verify whether the observed conformity is not due to factors different from those identified in the theoretical perspective. The verification technique is based on testing alternative explanations. Criteria for assessing an idiographic explanation (valid for the case study research) comprise, first, the logic, that is, establishing how credible it is and, second, the demonstration that alternative explanations have been seriously considered and found wanting.

The problem of cause-effect relationship or causal mechanisms (Gerring 2007) is also solved by another analytical technique called explanation building (Yin 2003a), which involves distinguishing a pattern of cause-effect relationships. In the case of multiple case studies, the aim is to build a general explanation that fits each individual case, even if certain details differ. Building such an explanation is based on the same logic that applies to pattern matching, yet in this case any comparisons with the theory are only the beginning of the process. This technique consists in performing a series of repetitions: comparisons of observed phenomena with theoretical predictions, their potential revision, and further comparisons with case data. It often compels the researcher to return to the field in order to gather additional data. This is adequately reflected in the aforementioned statement that the case study method is partially inductive and partially deductive.

Time series analysis or time-ordered display is another technique that can be applied (Miles and Huberman 1994; Denis et al. 2001; Yin 2003a). The chronological organization of events does not need to be merely a descriptive tool. It may have an analytical purpose, which is to establish cause-effect relationships, as causes and effects may not be reversed in time (see Example 1.4).

Another technique is cross-case synthesis, which consists in organizing data from different cases according to the same pattern (e.g. according to the same code categories). The purpose is not only to analyze individual characteristics but also any similarities and differences between cases, which may result in building a typology or increase the accuracy of predictions about the existence of causal links.

Finally, it is important to emphasize one very important thing: during the analysis, special attention should be paid to any observed exceptions, phenomena that deviate from patterns and do not suit the formulated explanations. Exceptions have a particular potential for improving and

Example 1.4 Time Series Analysis as an Analytical Tool. Source: Denis et al. (2001)

Denis et al. (2001) used time series analysis to develop a process theory of strategic change in pluralistic settings characterized by diffuse power and divergent objectives. They draw on five case studies in health care organizations. The analysis involved decomposing the chronological data for each case into successive discrete time periods. The periods (or phases) became comparative units of analysis. Phases were defined so that "there is continuity in the context and actions being pursued within them, but discontinuities at their frontiers" (p. 815). Here, the boundaries of the periods were designed either by changes in the key people involved (the leadership constellation) or by a major change in the environment.

Following techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) researchers conducted the comparative analysis of periods within and between cases. The three most important categories for the analysis within each period included "(1) the characteristics of the leadership constellation during that period (who the important members were, what roles they played, what their degree of complementarity was), (2) the actions of the leadership group (what was done, what kinds of tactics were used, and (3) the effects of these actions and tactics (symbolic, substantive, and political)" (p. 815). With the advancement of the analysis authors developed new theoretical ideas and refined categories for analysis.

modifying accepted explanations or descriptions. Even if we fail to incorporate them into the constructed models, principles governing research oblige us to record them.

Step Five: How Are Research Conclusions Formulated and How Should We Approach Writing a Research Report? The last step in the chain of evidence is the writing of research conclusions. They are an extended version of answers to the research question and refer to specific (cases) and general issues (theories) contained in it. We should therefore describe and explain the phenomena observed in the case under consideration and juxtapose them with the a priori adopted theoretical framework or present findings through the lens of a theory emerging from the empirical data. Research-based conclusions will form part of the final report, whose remaining sections are devoted to literature and methodology. In the literature part, research conducted thus far and relevant theories are discussed; in the latter, we describe the adopted research strategy (type of case study, case selection and sampling, research tools used, analysis of the collected empirical data). It is important to prepare drafts of these parts in advance, as it constrains us to consciously plan subsequent research stages, while providing a sense of support and a reference point for further steps, including the writing of research conclusions. Usually, when we prepare a journal paper, a monograph, or a thesis, both literature and methodological part are (repeatedly) rewritten in order to embrace the changing conclusions from iterative moving between data gathering, analysis, and theory.

The core of what will be included first in the case study report and later in research conclusions is determined by the research question formulated both at the beginning of the project and possibly also, it its modified version, in the course of the research. It provides us with categories that serve as a basis on which we decide whether a given thread should be included in final research conclusions. Ignoring the research question at the stage of writing the study report and the final report results in inconsistency and chaos in the study, which is, after all, the final outcome of the research.

The form in which research findings are presented is another important issue that must be addressed. Research conducted using the qualitative

case study method must take the form of extensive, descriptive reports. Compiling results is worth additional effort, as it allows us to communicate them more effectively and helps readers and authors alike to understand them better. Matrices, graphs, diagrams, and network diagrams (representations, Miles and Huberman 1994) are tools that can be used for this purpose, highlighting the most important factors and relationships between them. At the same time, they are the fruit of an analytical process, during which the collected empirical data is organized. In this sense, working on the representation forms part of the analytical process: not only is it a way of presenting results but also of generating them. Another formal aspect concerns the composition of the final report as a whole. It largely depends on the decisions we made at the stage of research design. For example, if we choose a strategy based on the design of rival explanations (Yin 2003a), that is, if we apply rival theories in order to analyze a selected case or cases, the structure of our report ought to be comparative. Therefore, each case must be presented several times, always using a different description or explanation scheme. This allows us to ascertain which explanations best suit the data collected during the research procedure.

If we opt for a strategy based on theoretical assumptions, our report will likely follow a classical linear-analytical structure. It begins with a review of the extant literature, which is followed by a methodological section and the presentation of results obtained on the basis of the collected data. We may begin by presenting case descriptions, and then move on to a comparative analysis, or begin with a comparative analysis and include case descriptions in an annex. Empirical and theoretical and possibly also practical conclusions form the final part of the study. This pattern is typical of scientific studies, such as theses or academic papers (see Example 1.5). Description of other proposals for the formulation of case-based research reports can be found in Yin (2003a) or Hammersley and Atkinson (1992).

In addition to structure, when writing a report, we must also consider the question of style and rhetoric. As stated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1992, p. 192), language is an analytical tool, not a transparent medium of communication (see also Miles and Huberman 1994). Hence the choice of style should be deliberate, as it is also an interpretative tool. This

Example 1.5 Communicating Results: Strategy Based on Theoretical Assumptions. Source: Rządca and Strumińska-Kutra (2016)

In our paper on local governance learning, we used the extended case method, that is, we built on a preexisting theory with a view to modifying it on the basis of empirical research). The structure of the paper is linear-analytical.

We started with two theoretical approaches: organizational learning and institutional theory. The first enabled us to conceptualize the phenomenon of learning new patterns of rule connected to the concept and practice of governance. The latter was used to analyze conditions influencing the process of governance learning.

In the second step, we provided a case study of local governance practices undertaken by a public agency (city administration) in the process of public dispute resolution. Case description and analysis was preceded by a methodological note explaining why the extended case method had been chosen and how data collection and analysis had been conducted.

In the third step, the case study was used to develop an initial conceptualization of the governance learning phenomenon into a richer, empirically informed framework. As a result, our analysis contributed to advancing the knowledge of governance learning through (1) specifying different types of governance learning, which are linked to the structure of learning and not to its motivation, (2) linking the micro level of local governance practices with the mezzo level of organizational structures and with the institutions regulating governance at the macro level, and (3) explicating the difference between learning and institutional change. Based on our research, we have introduced a new theoretical category of astonishment, which we treat as a prerequisite for governance learning. It is defined as a cognitive state caused by a disruption of institutionalized patterns of thinking and behavior deployed by a (public) organization to deal with a specific (social) problem.

In the final part, "Discussion and further research", we referred to the limitations of our approach and proposed further research that might advance the field of governance learning.

argument refers in particular to the so-called traditional writing of research reports, which create the impression that an objective connection between the analysis and the field exists. As Denzin and Lincoln note (2005, p. 3), "Experimental, reflective ways of writing first-person ethnographic texts are now commonplace".

1.6 Conclusions

The so-called didactic case study is used for teaching purposes in numerous fields (such as management, law, medicine), as it allows for the simulation of participation in specific situations, and thus helps students understand certain issues and their relevance for the aspects of reality that they study. At the epistemological level, the case study used in research fulfills the same function; it enables contextual, embedded in real life, observations of the phenomena that are the subject of our interest. Knowledge gained through analyzing specific cases allows us to understand social processes and the role of factors considered important in many theories (Gerring 2007).

Understanding the specificity and diversity of social life in its various aspects would not be possible without the exploration of specific cases. Bent Flyvbjerg argues that a researcher having recourse to the case study method gains specific experience and context-dependent knowledge that supplements rule-based knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2006). The proximity of the examined reality and its careful observation make us aware of the multifaceted nature of relations within the social world and compel us to constantly revise our knowledge and beliefs. The mere knowledge of theoretical interdependences is not enough to fulfill any social role, in particular the role of a scientist, expert, or researcher. Although the case study, as evidenced in this chapter, can be used to build or modify theoretical knowledge, its uniqueness lies in its ability to provide in-depth descriptions that accurately represent the explored phenomenon.

Notes

1. The concept of strategy, as referred to by Robert Yin (2003a, b), Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2005), means research process design. Here, we shall use it interchangeably with two other terms: approach (Creswell 2007) and method. The latter is understood broadly as a set of directives and rules based on ontological and epistemological assumptions, indicating certain ways of conducting research. "Strategy" and "method" are also referred to as synonyms of the case study methodology (Mills et al. 2010).

2. Even if the starting point of our research is interest in a particular case, we need to bolster our case with a theoretical framework, which will serve as a point of reference for research results.
3. We must remember that sampling should also involve documents, articles, posts on Internet fora, place and time of observation, and so on.
4. Here, "case" refers rather to a happening, an expression, or a statement that does not match the emerging pattern, and not to "case" understood as a bounded system/phenomenon.
5. In fact, the analysis is far less structured and multistage. It comprises abundant feedback and requires the researcher to revert to theoretical reflection; there are periods of "creative impotence" and the process is affected by the other publications read by researchers during the process.

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2

Observation Methods

Malgorzata Ciesielska, Katarzyna W. Boström, and Magnus Öhlander

2.1 Introduction

Observation is one of the most important research methods in social sciences and at the same time one of the most diverse. The term includes several types, techniques, and approaches, which may be difficult to compare in terms of enactment and anticipated results; the choice must be adapted to the research problem and the scientific context. As a matter of fact, observation may be regarded as the basis of everyday social life for most people; we are diligent observers of behaviors and of the material surroundings. We watch, evaluate, draw conclusions, and make comments on interactions and relations. However, observation raised to the rank of

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_2

a *scientific method* should be carried out systematically, purposefully, and on scientific grounds—even if curiosity and fascination may still be its very important components.

In this chapter, we discuss the main characteristics of three types of observation that can be used in different ways and to some degree even combined. In *participant observation*, the researcher strives towards an "immersion" in a specific culture, preferably for a longer period of time, in order to acquire an insider understanding of this culture either as a (marginal) member or as a visitor. In *non-participant observation*, the researcher tries to understand the world, relationships, and interactions in a new way, without prevalent categorizations and evaluations. In *indirect observation*, the researcher relies on observations done by others (e.g. other researchers), on various types of documentation, recordings, or on auto-observation.

In the first part of this chapter, we discuss common features of different observation techniques and some essential elements in the design of a study based on observation methods. We also consider some possible roles an observer may take and be ascribed and how to document the observations in the form of notes. In the second part, we discuss different approaches to direct and indirect observation. Chapter 3, by Barbara Czarniawska, is dedicated to direct non-participant observation, often referred to as *shadowing*.

2.2 Observational Research Design

2.2.1 Research Aims

The choice of method must always be adapted to the initial research problem and the scientific context of the study. Observation can be either the main method in a project or one of several complementary qualitative methods. At the outset of a research project, it may give an inspiration for interesting scientific topics. Impressions and experiences from a long-term observation may help to revise a research problem, which in turn can create a need for additional methods and theoretical perspectives in order to better explore it. For example, starting a project with

direct non-participant observation, a researcher might discover that some aspects of a certain subculture—for example, that of boxers, nurses, or musicians—can only be fully understood by an active involvement in their reality, experiencing firsthand their daily lives and sharing their joys, concerns, and successes.

2.2.2 Access to the Field

It is an extremely important task to identify and define a specific "field" for observation. In ethnology and anthropology, the prevailing tradition was that the area of research is an equivalent of a physical place—for example, a tribal village or a town quarter. Correspondingly, in organizational research and economics, it could be a company, a bank, or any other institution. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) remind us, settings (e.g. the office) should not be confused with cases. Within any setting there may be several different contexts (e.g. frontstage and backstage) requiring different kinds of behavior as well as several interesting cases for research. In today's global, mobile, and multimedia-transformed realities, it gets even more complicated. The inhabitants of a village or employees of a company may have extensive contacts with the "outside" world; Internet communities often do not have any connection with any physical place. In order to understand, for instance, the players in online games, a researcher may try to combine participant and indirect observation: auto-observation of game playing, observation of other players, asking them for explanations and comments, becoming a member of the game subculture, and so on. Naturally, if it is methodologically justified, the main area of observation may be a specific locality where interesting events and interactions usually occur, but often the research problem requires a "multilocal" or "translocal" fieldwork where a researcher can follow people, objects, a specific symbol, a metaphor, a story, or biography (Marcus 1995).

After defining the field, the next step is getting access. It is not only an initial problem of "breaking the ice" but often has to be constantly renegotiated throughout the study, especially if the observation involves the researcher's prolonged physical presence. Even when a formal

permission from the management of an institution has been obtained, a researcher can still encounter informal *gatekeepers* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), who may obstruct the study or try to steer and supervise the research process in order to ensure that the institution in question will be shown in a positive light. Some employees may refuse to cooperate or even to participate in a study at all—a wish that must be respected. On the other hand, a researcher may also encounter informal *sponsors* (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), showing a kind interest in the project. Those might prove invaluable for securing a continuous access to the field, facilitating the researcher's work, sharing their local knowledge, using their social contacts, and offering a symbolic recommendation. There is, however, a potential risk that this generous assistance might imply some expectations, for example, of their overseeing the research process or a researcher's loyalty.

2.2.3 Sampling: What? Who? Where? and When?

Compared to other qualitative methods observation is characterized by a relatively low level of control over the field of study. The researcher adapts to the context and interaction and tries not to influence the course of events and to exert minimal influence on the environment, thus often facing unforeseen situations. In the beginning of the observation, before trying to narrow the focus according to the selected research problem, it is good to learn as much as possible about the field. James P. Spradley recommended in his now classic book, *Participant Observation* (1980, p. 78), that especially in the initial period, we should take into account many dimensions of any social situation. Researcher should pay attention to the physical place, the actors present and connected with the situation, their activities and goals, the acts, the events, the physical objects, the sequencing over time, and emotions felt and expressed. Patty Sotirin (1999, p. 18), when sending her students on an assignment to investigate what is considered to be a "good" communication in the workplace, proposed they observe: (1) territory, (2) stuff, (3) people, and (4) talk. Inspired by those authors, as well as Arvastson and Ehn (2009), we propose a list of aspects that might be useful for choosing what to observe in a typical organization study:

1. The Management of Time and Space How is time organized? Who makes decisions regarding this, who supervises that the decisions are followed? What is the rate of various kinds of activities and events? How is the space organized (e.g. city planning, a building's architecture, the layout of the supermarket, the interior design)? What is the design of different zones, and are there any zones available only for the privileged? What types of activities are promoted at different times of the day and in different places? As institutions, groups, and individuals tend to mark and protect a space they regard as their own: who gets less/more and how are territories and borders marked? Are there any tension and conflicts due to time and space management, and do they take form of disobediences, transgressions, subversive actions?

2. Objects What are the physical objects present—for example, tools, machines, furniture, food, decorations, signs, images, telephones, computers? What is used and how? How do things look, sound, smell, and taste? What might different objects indicate and symbolize? What is private and what is common/shared? Who controls access to objects and their use?

3. Social Actors How do people look like and behave in a given space and time? What is the status of different people? What social categories seem to emerge and what are the relations between the categories and the movements between them or within, for example, a specific professional group? Is there a variety or rather a homogeneity of appearances and behaviors?

4. Interactions What do people do, and how? What nonverbal behavior may be observed? What do they say (also on the phone or by e-mail), formally and informally, and how (e.g. the vocabulary used, the emotional charge of it)? What topics are talked about, in what tone, in different contexts? What emotions are expressed, in different contexts? Are there any technical or colloquial words and phrases characteristic for the group? Who communicates with whom, how, when, and where? How are differences in power expressed, reproduced, negotiated, or

challenged? Observation of one's own feelings and reactions—not as sources of truth, but as sources of knowledge and reflection—has an additional analytical dimension. A researcher should ask him/herself: Why did I consider it appropriate to behave in this way? What was my spontaneous reaction to what I heard or saw, what could be the cause of this, and how could my reaction have affected the further development of the situation?

5. Routines, Rituals, Episodes What are routine chores? What are more rare, unusual, or unexpected ones? What kind of ritual behaviors, both officially recognized and informal, can be observed? During observation of a specific episode: what happens? In what context? How do people behave, what do they do, say, how do they express emotions? Does it seem to change or confirm the relationships and hierarchies within the group? How is an episode commented upon, discussed, evaluated? How do these comments and discussions vary in different constellations, or over time?

As we cannot be in several places nor observe around the clock, a recurrent dilemma is the choice of situations that will enhance our understanding of the case without missing any vital material. This seemingly trivial issue is often a source of immense frustration in the field. Even a careful and attending observer has access to only one situation at a time and may miss something interesting in a different location. Besides, we all need to rest and relax; both the researcher and the people in the field might want some peace and quiet. Inevitably, this results in a continuous choice of who, what, where, when, and how to observe? It is important to narrow the field of observation based on criteria that correspond to our research problem. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) propose a selection in relation to the dimensions of time, people, and context.

Time An observation is a process that may take several weeks to several years, depending on what we study. During time, things happen. Economy goes up and down, people revise their attitudes, the dynamics of human relationships change. It might be worthwhile to strategically select some observation periods, for example, to decipher what times of

the day or days of the week stand out as particularly rich in information. At a hospital, it may be rounds or changing shifts. At school, specific lessons or events. In a company, meetings, events, but even coffee breaks. Periods of "delving" in the field should be interposed with working on documentation (notes, photos, relevant documents), analytical reflection, and writing.

People Another dimension is the diversity of the community. In order to create a detailed and fair picture of the life of, for example, an institution, we should observe interactions of people of different ages, genders, positions, and scopes of responsibility and at various levels of both the formal and informal hierarchy.

Context As mentioned before, a context does not necessarily coincide with the physical locale; in a firm, some negotiations and decisions might occur at different places than in the office. It might be also an idea to observe both the "frontstage" and the more informal "backstage" of a community or institution. For example, teachers generally have different standards of behavior and speech in relation to students in the classroom, to the parents, to other teachers at a formal meeting or having coffee during a break. To observe the behavioral repertoire in all its richness, it is vital to have access to contexts where there are different standards of behavior.

2.2.4 The Observer

Each observation presents different challenges. Even very experienced researchers may have problems with upholding a balance between being "inside" the community and analyzing it from the "outside", from a distance. Drawing on Fangen (2001) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), we distinguish three main types of the observer.

Completely Participating observer tries to blend into the studied environment and to appropriate the group's lifestyle, customs, and even the way they perceive reality. Such immersion may be extremely helpful to understand a particular group, but may also result in loss of

analytical attitude. Anthropologists talk about the famous risk of "going native", with total acculturation, when the researcher begins to identify with, for example, a certain political, religious, or ethnic community. However, sometimes the research problem requires taking this kind of risk, for example, in order to gain access to tacit, embodied knowledge. As noted by Katrine Fangen (2001), the ideal is not complete participation, but the degree of participation that gives the best possible data.

Partially Participating observer is one of the most popular roles. One takes part in the interactions, but not in the type of activity that is specific to the studied environment—for example, production of equipment or patient care. The ideal is to learn the norms, values, and rules of behavior, without being a burden for the group.

Non-participant observer observes without any involvement into human interaction in the field. This role may not seem to give a full understanding of the social reality, but, as we mentioned earlier, the researchers adjust their roles depending on requirements of the specific case. There are times when the role of non-participant observer has strong advantages, such as at rallies, concerts, shopping centers, and airports.

An observer may choose to take on different positions in the field: try to remain neutral, be engaged, or take sides. For many decades, a "neutral" attitude towards the observed groups and organizations was perceived as a self-evident norm in the social sciences. It was not only about showing respect for the community's standards of dress and interaction patterns, but also about a more profound political and ideological "neutrality". On the wave of criticism of positivist ideals, especially in the postmodern approach to the social sciences, there has been a still ongoing discussion whether the researcher can ever be "neutral" in the sense of indifference to the studied people and observed situations. Researchers are thinking and feeling human beings, engaging in relationships with others, nurturing more or less crystallized political and religious views and preferences and thus always "situated" in their research and their production of knowledge. If the studied community is in conflict with other groups or if there are strong conflicts within the group, the researcher may be forced to take a stand for one of the parties.

2.2.5 Notes Taking

The most important principle of taking notes is to realize the fact that this is a selective endeavor (Emerson et al. 1995, 2001), for example, when a multisensory experience of a specific event is reduced to a written record, in which only some of the situation's features may be put forward. Moreover, each description already contains an element of interpretation of what is important. Is it crucial for our results what we choose to emphasize, downplay, or ignore in our records? There is no perfect way to create notes from the field, but here are a few guidelines:

- It is not possible to observe everything at once, so try to decide what the main goal of your observation is.
- Make notes on a regular basis to avoid subsequent reinterpretation of what happened.
- Note the details: the initial impressions of appearances, reactions and behaviors, sounds, smells, and so on.
- It may be easier to focus on your own feelings instead of reactions of the observed people; however, the latter should be the center of your attention.
- Try to understand what the event means for the observed individuals and communities, but making your notes, do *not* ascribe motifs to the observed behavior (e.g. to someone's display of emotions).
- Describe rather than make judgments. Avoid quick and unjustified generalizations and stereotype typifications.
- It is preferable to record and transcribe speech than simply summarize the topics of conversation.
- Your notes should address your research topic. The selection of the material depends on both the research problem and the views of the researcher of what may be important and interesting.

2.3 Observation Techniques

Observation may be *direct* or *indirect*. Direct observation is when observer is looking at the events happening in front of his/her eyes in the moment of them occurring. Indirect observation is remote, relying on

observations of others or recordings of past events in the form of documentation, videos, and so on. Depending on the active or passive role of the observer, direct observation may be *participant* or *non-participant*. The summary and comparison of those four types of observation can be found in Table 2.1, although they rarely occur in their pure form. Therefore, in the following sections we discuss them in more detail and provide examples of participant direct observation, direct non-participant observation and indirect observation.

2.3.1 Direct Participant Observation

Direct participant observation is a classical research method and still highly appreciated in ethnography and other qualitative studies. It is used to gather data about a wide variety of cultural backgrounds—from tribal groups to international business.

Direct participant observation is a time-consuming method, often tiring and stressful, but incomparably useful in studying behaviors in situ. This type of observation gives a researcher the ability to collect data about social practices—what and how people are doing—in a context that is natural to them. By participating in the life of the community, the researcher simultaneously observes and documents his/her interactions while being part of the community life, often taking on local customs, language or slang, idiosyncratic behaviors, and preferences. Direct participant observation can provide invaluable information on the topics which subjects are reluctant to talk about during the interviews, because they perceive them as difficult, too sensitive, controversial, or perhaps considered as obvious (Pripps and Öhlander 2011). Observation can also indicate the similarities and the differences between what is explicitly presented or spoken and the actual practice, giving access to tacit knowledge (D'Eredita and Barreto 2006). This method was used by Bowden and Ciesielska (2016) to study a Flodden Ecomuseum project. During this study, one of the authors was professionally involved in the project, which allowed for full participant observation of the seven Steering Group meetings during which detailed field notes were written up. However, as a full

Table 2.1 Comparison of the four main types of observations

Type	Participant	Direct	Indirect	Non-participant
How?	Observing from an insider perspective, as an active participant of a group or organization. It requires full cultural immersion (although only temporarily) while sustaining analytical mindset	Active observing of events unfolding in front of our eyes to record behavior in the environment where it naturally occurs. Usually requires some immersion in the field of study but not necessarily in the culture itself	Research through collecting information, for instance, in the form of videos or written descriptions of events. Also, self-ethnography, remembering events and environments in order to analyze them	Observation from an outsider perspective without interacting with subjects of an observation. The researcher may take the position of an "alien" from a different planet or reality in order to achieve a distance from the well-known
When?	Useful when insider's point of view is important and to gain access to tacit knowledge	In-depth understanding of a social group or an organization but from an external/ independent point of view	Useful when direct observation wasn't possible when the events naturally occurred	Useful when observing a well-known reality, for example, a public place, and there is a need for regarding it from a totally new perspective

Source: Adapted from Ciesielska et al. (2012, p. 51)

participant, it was difficult to differentiate between the role of the researcher and the role of the professional as sometimes those roles had to be performed at the same time.

For ethical, methodological, and practical reasons, participant observation is rarely used in disguise, as it requires the observer to pretend to be a regular member of the group and thus to record data in secret (Kostera 2007). In academic research, it is maintained that people have the right to know that their behavior is watched and analyzed and that they have a right to object or opt out. It is also considered that if a researcher tries to acquire socially significant knowledge, the disclosure of the truth will not radically change the behavior of respondents. But hiding the dual role of participant observer is not only ethically questionable but also can be dangerous in certain environments (e.g. criminal ones) or in a situation of heightened conflict (e.g. ethnic or religious).

2.3.2 Direct Non-participant Observation

This type of observation is particularly popular in organizational studies. By applying a direct non-participating observation, a researcher has opportunity to get closer to the field of research while retaining the position of an outsider or a guest (Kostera 2007). This separation clearly defines researcher's identity and role but leaves plenty of possibilities to implement the role. Some researchers prefer to stay in the background and minimize the interference, allowing people to almost forget about them and let the organizational life to have its established rhythm, thus designing good conditions for standing aside and taking notes. Others prefer to act as a nosy but friendly cousin from abroad, a role that allows you to ask questions, even about things that are obvious to participants. This approach facilitates gathering narratives and gossips about a group or organization and facilitates access to otherwise silent knowledge.

It is worth remembering that even when skillfully "blending into the background", the researcher continues to participate in the everyday life of the community, becoming part of their context as a person of a certain age, gender, social position, and with a particular political or research agenda. Even if the researcher only wants to observe, he or she may be caught up in the morning's coffee brake conversation, asked to help with a malicious photocopier, or invited to a corporate dinner party. In fact, we can influence other people simply by our own presence.

It is paramount to establish a trusting relation to help the people to feel comfortable and get on with their daily routines. Keeping distance at all costs rarely helps in gathering material and it is important to tune in to the social situation in order to better understand nuances of interactions. Just like participant observation, this method requires self-reflection on the researcher's own behavior, reactions, thoughts, feelings, and how their presence could influence any given situation.

Example 2.1 Mobile Everyday Ethnography, Based on Wolanik Boström and Öhlander (2015)

In the beginning of 2000, Sweden experience a severe shortage of physicians and hundreds of Polish doctors and dentists were recruited to different places in Sweden. In 2012, we (Katarzyna and Magnus) did a week's fieldwork in one of the recruiting companies in Poland, on their intensive course preparing the doctors for the move. During the course, the doctors lived for almost six months (Monday to Friday) in a guarded complex of modern buildings in a little town in Poland; it was a kind of dormitory of recently redecorated, comfortable flats with an option of being served all the meals, to save time for studying for the final tests. There were common rooms for lunch and coffee and a computer room where tourist posters of beautiful Swedish spots decorated the walls. We got an opportunity to stay on the premises, to participate in both lessons and small talk during lunches and coffee breaks. We also got plenty of opportunities to talk to the staff about the organization and teaching, and to the individual doctors about their motifs to move and their expectations on life in Sweden. We experienced the setting's atmosphere as one of intense and purposeful learning. The doctors were trained in Swedish medical vocabulary, legal framework, administrative procedures, and so on but also in sociological and ethnological analyses of the Swedish society, culture, and mentality. For example, the little library in the coffee room harbored some Swedish classics, several well-known Swedish criminal novels, and some ethnographic pieces. One of these books, *The Rat in a Pizza* (Kilintberg 1986), about urban myths in Sweden, was actually used during a lesson we were attending, and as ethnologists and folklorists, we were asked to comment on the topic. The fieldwork was thus a blend of non-participant observation as visitors and participant observation in the ascribed and rather unexpected role of tutors and "experts" on Swedish culture. The impressions from this short observation study put us on an important track for the need of a deeper investigation of how the Polish doctors who were already established to Sweden were using the concepts of culture and mentality, and resulted in our article on "mobile everyday ethnography" (2015).

2.3.3 Indirect Observation

Indirect observation in a narrow sense means the use of a one-sided mirror, a hidden camera or voice recorder to record or observe events in which the researcher does not participate. In the broader sense, indirect observation is also a set of methods that allow you to get information about past or present situations that you did not have direct access to. Equally rich sources of information about the life of a community or organization can be material evidence, video recordings, or written materials. In the following sections, we give examples of the use of various techniques in indirect observation.

Physical Trace Evidence and Field Visits Bernard (2000, p. 408) describes indirect observation as looking for "archaeological residue of human behavior", but this method can be used not only to study remains of artifacts from the past but also to assess current social behavior. According to Eugene J. Webb et al. (1966), neither interviews nor questionnaires, nor direct observation of participants, nor even a combination of different techniques can provide such data that would allow for an adequate description, analysis, and understanding of how social systems work especially if sensitive problem is in focus. For example, rubbish bins speak a lot about our culture and behavior. Primarily because rubbish bins do not hide or try to show itself in a better light as it often happens in face-to-face interactions (Rathje and Murphy 1992; Rathje 2001). Rathje is known for his "Garbage Project" conducted at the University of Arizona which included large samples of household waste (Hunt 1985). The rubbish bins contents allowed interesting observations on real trends, as it was noted that what people report verbally about their consumption in not always confirmed by their household waste. One of such cases was the consumption and depletion of beef during a shortage in 1973. Because of the crisis, researchers expected to see much less meat dumped in the trash. It turned out that, for a number of reasons, it was completely opposite. Firstly, people used to buy larger quantity of inferior quality meat when it was available, but often they did not know how to properly store it and more of it ended in the bin. Secondly, poor quality meat had more fat, which was trimmed and disposed (Bernard 2006).

Audio and Video Recordings Covert recordings are primarily associated with social work, psychology, and criminology research. One of the most commonly used methods is continuous monitoring, used to assess workplace conditions, interaction between employees and employer, teachers and students, police and civilians, or career and patients in hospitals. It is worth mentioning that audio and video recordings are also used in ethnology in the study of animal behavior (Bernard 2006). There are, however, serious ethical concerns relating to this method, because often participants are not informed about the research being conducted nor have the opportunity to express consent or objection. In addition, this method produces vast amount of data that is difficult to analyze and especially for continuous monitoring it is necessary to sample the watched or listened material.

Auto-observation Tom D. Wilson (2002) identifies indirect observation with self-observation of the subjects. The auto-observation can be facilitated by the researcher during an interview, or via a completed questionnaire or diary. Interview is probably the most commonly used indirect observation technique and one which gives the most flexibility in understanding human behavior and circumstances (Nelson 2008). Although it usually requires a face-to-face meeting or even a telephone conversation, the topic of interviews usually includes descriptions and opinions about past or current events in which the researcher did not participate directly and would like to know about. The questionnaire can be considered a special case of self-conducted, structured interview. For example, Malgorzata Ciesielska (2008) uses retrospective tales of interviews with Polish entrepreneurs to confront the content and style of their statements with the American ethos "from beggar to millionaire". Since the period from 1989 to the present has been studied, the best sources of data were the entrepreneurs themselves, openly talking about their approach to business, experience, trial and error, dreams, and failures. More about interviews in Chaps. 4 and 5.

Documentation Analysis It is also called archival studies and relies on the use of various types of texts and documents. There are many research approaches to text analysis; the most classic are content analysis and

narrative approach. Content analysis focuses on themes, keywords, and codes in texts. Narrative analysis, apart from a systematic explanation of what the text says (e.g. the prevalent themes), also covers the form and style in which stories and events are narrated.

Netnography It is also referred to as virtual ethnography (Hine 2000; Kozinets 2015) and has much in common with archival research. It involves tracking and analyzing the material on the Internet. A particularly important area of application of this method concerns online communities and groups working together through the network. One of the precursors of netnography is Robert Kozinets, who defined it as a written description of cyberculture web, grounded in methods typically used in cultural anthropology. A similar method was used by Ciesielska (2010) and Ciesielska and Westenholz (2016), exploring communities of open source software developers working on GNOME and Maemo.org projects. In both cases, we were dealing with geographically and demographically dispersed groups where most of the work and discussion took place on the Internet fora and IRC channels. Therefore, a large proportion of the material came from rich network resources treated as any other source of data that allows for a dense description and in-depth analysis of the surveyed social groups.

2.4 New Directions of Observational Research: Sensory Ethnography

The word "observation" is in many ways misleading. During an observation session the researcher does more than just simply observe. Observation is not only intellectual activity but also highly physical and sensual. The concept brings to mind primarily the sense of sight and hearing—looking, watching, listening (sometimes including eavesdropping)—but it may also involve taste, smell, and touch. One technique can be a systematic exploration of a given environment with different senses by asking: What odors are characteristic at different times, what is their intensity? Does the smell of freshly brewed coffee, for example, signal a work break, relaxation, and some gossip? What is the temperature of the rooms and

outside? Is it dry, or does it feel damp? What is the structure, surface, temperature of different objects?

In recent years, the whole idea of doing ethnographic fieldwork has been subject to innovative ideas, experiments, and insights into how the researcher interacts with the field and is both affecting it and affected by it. One example of this is "sensory ethnography". The concept is used in several different ways (Nakamura 2013), but perhaps the most well-known is the one by Sara Pink (2009/2015). Pink challenged the traditional fieldwork methods by suggesting a broader understanding of how to collect data. To fully comprehend experiences and the ways humans gear into everyday life, the observer has to use a wider set of senses, in the same way as the studied subjects do. Observation should thus include smell, touch, and taste in addition to the more common techniques hearing and vision.

Sensory ethnography makes it possible to recognize that each object of study as well as each fieldwork has profoundly unique aspects. To be able to grasp the specificities of a field, the researcher has to use several methods for collecting data, ideally mixing and changing methods depending on empirical findings of the ongoing study. In one way, sensory ethnography could be seen as a way of improvising in the field in order to be able to fully understand a specific empirical phenomenon. One example of this can be found in a recent study by Maryam Adjam (2017), analyzing memory work of refugees who escaped from Estonia to Sweden during World War II. Adjam notes that the memories take many different forms or modes of existence, such as personal narratives, master narratives, photo collections, physical objects, art installations, museum exhibitions, memory walks, dialogs, strong or fuzzy feelings, and vague notions. Using a mix of methods, including observations, she shows that a reminiscence is constantly formed, rewritten, and diversified when it travels through all those different modes of existence.

Another aspect is how the researcher as a person is affected by the field. The concept of dirty ethnography (Silow Kallenberg 2015) or dirty anthropology (Jauregui 2013) describes researcher's feeling of dirtiness from exploiting persons in the field, observing them in vulnerable states or doing observations in circumstances where existential questions and deep emotions are put to a head. This is especially relevant in studies

about places such as care units or prisons (Drake and Harvey 2014; Silow Kallenberg 2016). More about emotions in qualitative research in volume 1, Chap. 10.

2.5 Conclusions

Observation is one of the most important research methods, used in a range or research strategies (case studies, ethnography, etc.). In this chapter, we discussed the main types of observations and observer's roles, as well as practicalities of conducting observation research. At the same time, we have shown that you do not necessarily have to personally observe or participate in the life of a community or organization in order to be able to conduct social research, including organizational research.

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3

Fieldwork Techniques for Our Times: Shadowing

Barbara Czarniawska

3.1 Introduction

Why traditional ethnography is rarely a thing to do? A great many social scientists want to write an ethnography. No, wrong: Many of them want *to do* ethnography, not realizing that ethnography is something one writes, not something one does (from Greek *ethnos*, folk, people, nation and *grapho*, I write). But let us assume that they simply want to do fieldwork that would lead to writing an ethnography, even if that "folk, people, nation" were merely a community of practice, a profession, or some other grouping.

When learning how to do it, those apprentices usually accept the assumptions of traditional anthropology, under which a necessary condition for writing a good ethnography requires them to conduct a long participant observation in the field. This assumption is fraught with difficulties in the case of a social scientist who wants to study new phenomena in contemporary societies. I discuss those difficulties in what follows.

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_3

Moreover, I believe that organizing is a phenomenon central to contemporary societies, and that it is being performed in connection with many other social processes. As a result, organizing and organizations are being studied by representatives of all the social sciences—whether it is their main goal or not. (See, e.g. my text on Bruno Latour as an accidental organization scholar, Czarniawska 2014c.) There is much experience to be shared.

So what are the difficulties faced by those scholars? There is a problem with participation, but also problems of time, space, and visibility. I discuss them here in turn, then present an alternative to participant observation. In the case of management and organization studies, participant observation implies that the researcher must organize or manage. Indeed, such studies exist. Melville Dalton (1959) was a manager when he wrote his dissertation about managers; Michael Burawoy (1979) operated a machine tool; John Van Maanen (1982) enrolled as an aspirant policeman; Robin Leidner (1993) worked at McDonald's and took courses at Combined Insurance. Karin Ho's work (2009) is an interesting in-between case. She claimed to be a participant observer of Wall Street, but her ethnography is that of the traders, whereas she was there as a consultant.

These examples show that participant observation requires either that the researcher possess the skills required for the job or that the necessary skills are easy to learn—otherwise, one can at best participate in the life of the organization as a student or a trainee. Sometimes I imagine I would be able to work in a managerial position in publishing, but I also know (from people who did try and gave up) that this job requires so much energy and effort that there would be no question of observation (Dalton's case is the exception, not the rule). For this reason, I do not do fieldwork on the organization of a university and university management—45 years of work in these institutions did not produce in me an attitude of "distanced involvement", which, according to Severyn Bruyn (1966), is ideal for an observer participating in the practices of foreign culture.[1]

Pushkala Prasad and Anshu Prasad (2002) argued that people in power do their best to defend themselves from undesired insights into their work by refusing access to ethnographically minded students. It could be so in some cases, but if it is, they forget that aspiring ethnographers rarely

have the skills that would permit them to engage seriously in the work of people high in the hierarchy. Participation in a ritual dance differs slightly from participation in a meeting of the supervisory board (unless one participates in it as a secretary, but such opportunities are rare).

I should add, however, that I take the term "participant observation" quite literally, not as a synonym for all types of observations, such as those conducted by Gideon Kunda (1992/2006) or Mitchel Abolafia (1996). It is certainly possible to conduct a direct, non-participating observation of organization and management, even for a long time. But it is not at all certain if—as some anthropologists claim—the ideal is the longer, the better.

Time is, in fact, another difficulty in the ethnographically inspired studies of management and organizing in contemporary societies. Consider, for example, the advice of Sharon Traweek, an experienced anthropologist of science, to her younger colleagues:

> Our first field work should last a minimum of a year, preferably two; subsequent trips can last as little as three months and as long as they occur at least every three or four years. The questions and theories change, but we study the same people, if they survive as a community, and maybe later on we also study some of their neighbors. (Traweek 1992, p. 438)

My study of city management in Warsaw lasted four months (Czarniawska 2002), but in that short time the city elected a new council, the result of which was that I lost half my contacts. Even "their neighbors" changed as a result of administrative reform. But it was not a problem for me, as I did not study a "tribe" or even "a community". I studied city management—an *action net*—collective actions connected to each other (Czarniawska 2014a).

Traweek studied the community of Japanese physicists for nearly 20 years before she knew enough about them to write an ethnography. A study of 20 years of managing Warsaw would be a fascinating historical study, mostly because it would reveal the constant changes it undergoes. City management has no "essence" or "true nature" that would reveal itself after years of research. Some people will retire, others will take their places, one party will win, others will lose. But the trams must continue

to move, and holes in the asphalt must be duly filled. It can happen that the trams are withdrawn and the asphalt replaced with something else; that means only that the action net that is city management will change its content and form. This does not mean, however, that historical comparisons are of no value;[2] their lack has, in fact, been cause for an early critique inside anthropology (Firth 1959).

Perhaps Japanese physicists seemed so stable because they remained in the same place: in Japan. But did they? Scientists nowadays change jobs, and they travel even more. Time and space are inextricably linked, even if various theories attempt to separate them. It makes them simpler, but does it make them more accurate? Such attempts were well known in traditional anthropology, which claimed that "the time of the Other" must be calculated in ways other than "our time", because "they" are not in the same place as "we" are (as pointed out by German-US anthropologist Johannes Fabian 1983). We do not have this problem in management and organization studies—after all, the economy has been global for a while now—but we have another problem, caused by a theoretical separation of time and space. In practice, they are inseparable: time in contemporary organizations is condensed and measured in many places, but not always in the same way. Time passes too quickly, and the practitioners whose work I described (recently they were journalists in news agencies, Czarniawska 2012) could not stop wondering why it took me such a long time to write my research report. After all, in a year everything will be obsolete and outdated!

German sociologist Hans-Georg Brose (2004) claimed that contemporary western societies are characterized by three interconnected phenomena. The first is an *acceleration* of social processes: shorter life of products, faster innovation, but also resistance, which is expressed in such movements as slow food. The second phenomenon, connected with the first and described in detail by Zygmunt Bauman (1995), is the *shortened horizon of expectations*, which makes both social structures and relationships between people less lasting. Acceleration and the shortened horizon of expectations both contribute to and are the effects of the third phenomenon: the *growing simultaneity of events*, within what Schütz and Luckmann (1973) called "the world at reach". The following comment

by Brose, referring to this phenomenon, fits perfectly here, especially if "we" equals "researchers of social phenomena":

> More and more rapidly varying events seem to appear on our different screens, overlapping and blurring the rhythms of our everyday life (e.g. work and leisure) and life-courses, breaking the gendered coupling of work and education. As the functioning of the ordering principles (first things first) and synchronizing mechanisms (calendars and clocks) cannot be taken for granted any more, are we deemed – like with television – to zap around? (Brose 2004, p. 7)

As the world at reach has become larger, it is more and more difficult to describe and interpret it. Zapping around is one possible solution, bird's-eye view (better known as "macro perspective") is another, but none of them will help the researcher in the field. How to study an object that is at the same time in different places?

The problem of simultaneity of events in space is usually solved by focusing on one *place*: An observer is sitting in the same room or standing in the same hallway, examining only one organizational unit at a time. But today's organizations comprise chains of many fragmented situations and many kaleidoscopic movements. This is why the observer always has the impression that the important things are happening elsewhere (Law 1994), and practitioners are always "already elsewhere", as Lars Strannegård discovered in his study of a high-tech company (Strannegård and Friberg 2001).

Worse yet, organizing does not always require the physical presence of organizers. Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger (2002), who described in detail the work of the stock exchange brokers (Bruegger was a participant observer!), differentiated between a bodily presence (which they called *embodied presence)* and a *response presence*. The latter occurs when people chat with each other or communicate via e-mail, from places that the observer cannot see. This *invisibility* is another difficulty that meets a traditional ethnographer in contemporary organizations. As noted by Barley and Kunda (2001, p. 85), the rules of traditional observation are completely unsuitable for doing research on work with computers. They recommend the use of new techniques and new technologies. In the same

vein Hine (2000) launched the idea of *virtual ethnographies*, Jemielniak and Kociatkiewicz (2008) reviewed techniques used by researchers studying high-tech organizations, and Kozinets (2009) recommended writing *netnographies*.

To cope with these four difficulties, it is necessary to proceed along the rules of what can be called a *mobile ethnology*—using fieldwork techniques that allow one to capture the ways of living and working of people who are quickly moving from one place to another and use the modern means of communication. One such technique is called shadowing.[3]

3.2 A History of Shadowing

I first met the term "shadowing" in the book of Italian sociologist Marianella Sclavi (1989), who followed like a shadow a teenager who went to school in the USA, and then repeated the process with a teenager in an Italian school. Sclavi came up with the idea of shadowing after having read the story by Truman Capote in the collection, *Music for Chameleons* (1975). In this story he told the readers how one day he followed like a shadow the work of a certain Mary Sanchez, a cleaning woman, who represented everything that Capote himself was not: a woman, a Mexican, tall, working class, heterosexual. Sclavi decided that it was a splendid example of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) postulated as the core of good novels and good sociology—exotopia (вненаходимость, another place). Exotopia should replace the sentimental (and impossible) empathy; novelists and social scientists alike should be aware that the "Others" are not "like us, and therefore perfectly understandable", but exactly different from "us", and therefore it is worth trying to establish a *dialogical relationship with them*. As Bakhtin said in an interview shortly before his death in 1975:

> In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot ever really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people,

> because they are located outside us in space, and because they are *others.* (Kelly 1993, p. 61)

What is compelling in this approach is the lack of ambition to present the "true thoughts and feelings of the natives"—an ambition that at a first glance appears extremely humanistic, but at second glance is really quite colonialist (for a further critique, see Prasad and Prasad 2002). The observer will never have better knowledge than the actors, the foreigner will never understand better the indigenous culture, but an observer and a foreigner may have a different and instructive view of how the culture operates than actors and the natives would have.[4] Bakhtin was not a supporter of the behaviorist idea that the actors and the observers must avoid contact, however, because he believed in dialogism—fictive in the text, but reflecting the possibility of an actual dialogue.

Locating research reports in exotopia means replacing the sentimental idealization with mutual respect between strangers. Instead of trying to "educate" the strangers or attempting to become like them, research should both expect differences and respect them. Respect is not necessarily the same as admiration and unconditional acceptance—a dialogical relationship in the study means that the researchers must present their findings to those they observed, but need to consider a possibility that the result will not be straightforward praise. Disagreements and differences in viewpoints are a valuable source of knowledge, of which more later. This attitude is not always easy to achieve, however, especially for management and organization scholars, who, like the imperialists of yesteryear, tend to believe that they "come to help", "to explain", "to advise", to decide what is "best practice", or "to emancipate the oppressed". Shadowing is not only a technique, but also an attitude of the investigator.

The technique Capote and Sclavi applied had been used in the social sciences long before them, albeit under different names. In management and organization studies, it was used by Giuseppe Bonazzi (1998), for example; he referred to Henry Mintzberg's (1973) study. Walker et al. (1956) used it in their study (for a detailed description see Robert H. Guest 1955). The name comes from an ethnologist at the University of Oregon, Harry F. Wolcott, who spent his days following a school principal between 1966 and 1968 (Wolcott 1973/2003). At the same

time, the radio was broadcasting a series called *The Shadow*, so the teachers began to call Wolcott a "shadow". He adopted it. It has been also used in studies of consumption (Miller 1998), and in apprenticeship, especially in medicine and nursing (see Roan and Rooney 2006; Lindberg and Czarniawska 2006).[5]

In the following section, I present in more details: three examples of the use of the shadowing technique.

3.3 The Principal's Shadow

Harry F. Wolcott wrote his doctoral thesis on the Kwakiutl tribe of British Columbia, but found a job in the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Oregon and began to think about what exactly school principals do all day long. Like Henry Mintzberg (1973), who investigated the company directors, Wolcott was of the opinion that diary writing as a fieldwork technique had many disadvantages.[6] He wanted to use his anthropological skills, but knew that categories such as "tribal affiliation" and "kinship" were of scant usefulness in research on schools (Wolcott 1973/2003).

He began by making a list of criteria to be met by a person who could be investigated—although he admitted that chance ultimately played a large role there (as usual, I must add). In any case, Wolcott was looking for a person who would meet the following conditions:

- a principal (director) of a school with a full-time job (i.e. a person who is not a teacher, nor treat this position as a temporary, on a career track);
- with a lot of experience;
- a man (because most principals were men, although women prevailed among teachers);
- who would be able to tolerate the presence of the researcher for two years.

This last criterion, mentioned earlier by no one, is, in practice, critical. Of course, it is difficult to predict how cooperation with a person one does not know will work out, especially as first impressions are often

misleading. Wolcott admitted that he made a negative decision in the case of one principal, because that person wore white socks with a dark suit and talked disparagingly about his students.

Only after making contact with one principal, did Wolcott ask his bosses for permission to conduct a study. "By using this approach, I felt I could avoid the possibility of having an overzealous superintendent summarily assign some fair-haired principal to be my cooperating subject or an underzealous one reject the project because he doubted that any of 'the boys' would be interested" (1973/2003, p. 3). The authorization was necessary, if only because Wolcott had met the superintendent a couple of times during his stay at the Principal's school:

> The superintendent looked quizzically at me as he stopped to chat with the members of the committee just before it convened. "Say, you're not writing all this down, are you?" he asked. "I write everything down," I replied. I added that if he was interested in the study I would welcome the chance to talk to him about it in detail. He was and I did. (1973/2003, p. 3)

I well know the feeling of needing to write down everything. Who knows what will be useful in the analysis? Unknown to me was the boss's interest; after giving formal consent, bosses do not usually show any curiosity. One reason could be that I never shadowed anybody for such a long time, so the bosses forgot about me. For the same reason, I have never made personal friends with persons I shadowed, which Wolcott did. Such a close relationship certainly has advantages, but also disadvantages, as Wolcott observed. Close and friendly relations with a person shadowed can put other people on guard, and make them censor their observations and interactions.

Wolcott was allowed to follow everything he wanted to, and everything the Principal did. He wrote down everything that was said and done, participated in formal and informal meetings, conducted a series of interviews with the Principal and his coworkers, and read various notes, letters, and documents. Wolcott continued his shadowing even outside working hours, a step that in the case of management and organization scholars needs to be considered with care. (We have no mandate to study private lives, but organizational life often extends beyond working hours.) Wolcott summarized his experience of the fieldwork:

> It is tempting to report that after a brief "period of adjustment" the researcher blended perfectly into the school setting and everyone at school continued about his business totally oblivious to him. Although my presence at the school was not intended to require major adaptations by those being observed, it seems unrealistic to insist that things were just the same with or without me there. (Wolcott 1973/2003, p. 11)

British anthropologist Nigel Barley agreed completely with this opinion: "Much nonsense has been written, by people who should know better, about the anthropologist 'being accepted'" (1983, p. 56). The illusion is even stronger when the study object is not an exotic tribe, but a school or a company. Such an illusion is additionally supported by practitioners ("As a person from a business school you know very well that..." or "You teach such things already in the first year, right?"). But the illusion vanishes quickly—if at all—the feeling of strangeness increasing rather than decreasing over time.

But if Wolcott's presence made the difference, what was the difference? In his opinion, shadowing did not affect the Principal's manner of speech or action, but one can assume that the constant questions asked by the researcher influenced the way the Principal interpreted the ongoing events. What was once taken for granted could have become a subject of reflection, or even self-criticism. "The natural attitude", as Schütz called it, was replaced by interrogation and doubt; some changes were even made. Once Wolcott sent a simple questionnaire to all employees regarding their frequency of contact. It turned out that they felt that they met too rarely, and the Principal saw to it that that situation was changed. At the end of the study, the Principal declared that Wolcott's presence contributed to his personal development.

Wolcott did not romanticize his work in the field: long days, persistent doubts whether or not he was doing (or writing) the right thing, and hours of boredom. He noted that when he stopped taking notes, it was a signal that for one reason or another this observation was no longer fruitful. He even admitted that there might be such a thing as too long in the field. Furthermore, the Principal could doze off at boring meetings, a luxury that his shadow could not afford.

In his report, Wolcott presented the results by the growing level of abstraction: first the Principal as a person, then his actions, then the school, then the system of education, and at the end, the "Principal's position as a kind of human activity". According to Wolcott, school principals, often seen as agents of change, are actually "guardians of continuity". Although many elements of his analysis go beyond the interest and the moral mandate of organization researchers, the quality of his work was such that it became famous in circles much broader than education and anthropology.[7]

3.4 On a Shopping Spree

Daniel Miller (1998) did not call his technique "shadowing", but the following quote should well explain why I label it in that way:

> For a one-year period, 1994–1995, I attempted to conduct an ethnography of shopping on and around a street in North London. […]. I say "attempted" because, given the absence of community and the intensely private nature of London households, this could not be an ethnography in the conventional sense. Nevertheless through conversation, being present in the home and accompanying householders during their shopping, I tried to reach an understanding of the nature of shopping through greater or lesser exposure to seventy-six households. (1998, p. 9)

This, if anything, is a good explanation of why "ethnography in the conventional sense" does not fit present times. Like Miller, management and organization researchers will not be able to describe a "way of life of an ethnic group", only "different ways of doing" things. If there are communities, they are communities of practice, virtual communities, or temporary groupings—just like in big cities.

Miller shadowed, (or accompanied in shopping) a married middle-aged couple, Sheila and Bob. They devoted a great deal of the time confirming that they both adhered to traditional gender roles, which was reflected in their continuous teasing and jokes:

> A key element within this comic banter is her constant criticism of his lack of shopping skills (...) Taken in context, however, these criticisms are a mechanism she uses to affirm that as a man, although he may shop, he is not a natural shopper. He is thereby able to receive such "criticisms" as praise for his natural manliness, something which he recognizes. (Miller 1998, p. 25)

A critical commentator could point out, that this "comic banter" was an effect of Miller's presence, that it was a part of "impression management" (Goffman 1959/1990). But impression management is not caused by a methodological error, and neither it is caused by the presence of a researcher. Everybody uses impression management in the presence of other people; as Goffman pointed out, social life is a theater. In research, the question is not if the observed behavior constitutes impression management, but *what impression* are the observed people trying to create?

Nuances of impression management became even more visible when Miller went shopping with another couple: a young divorcée and her fiancé:

> At this stage the crucial factor in shopping was my [Miller's] presence. This was an occasion to learn about each other's taste and forge a relationship in terms of shopping compatibility. But there was also a question as to how they appeared as a couple to an outsider. The sheer effort that I felt they were putting into showing me how happy they were together should not be seen as thereby false. It reflected their own question as to whether, when revealed in the reflected gaze of the anthropologist, they would find themselves to be in love. (Miller 1998, p. 29)

Unlike Sheila and Bob, the young couple had not yet had an opportunity to practice being together in front of a public. One could claim that the presence of the anthropologist-shadow was beneficial to them, exactly because he supplied them with a test audience. Miller noted, however, that although both of them often declared gender equality to be a very important part of a relationship, the young woman diligently studied the tastes and preferences of her fiancé, and the last word always belonged to him. Miller hypothesized that the woman accepted this situation as long as she did not have to admit this—to herself and the others.

The study became the basis for Miller's "theory of shopping", which claims that shopping serves primarily to establish and strengthen relationships. People who are shopping are always thinking of others, even when they buy something for themselves. He also discovered that daily food purchases were not considered to be "shopping"—just a daily duty for women.

Miller was well aware that the people he shadowed did not share his theory; most of them believed that shopping is an expression of hedonism and materialism, of which one should be ashamed. He therefore devoted a great deal of attention to the challenge built into field research: how to reconcile the necessity of respect for the views of "natives" with a contrasting theory of the researcher? His solution was in tune with Bakhtin's (1981) postulate of a dialogical relationship: He set his own opinion (theory) side by side with those believed by the people he studied. For Miller, it was obvious that the various partners in the dialogue may have different views that they express in different ways. A dialogue is not a duet.

I also believe that his dialogical relationship and his theory, so different from the conventional theory of shopping, were facilitated by the fact that he followed another Bakhtinian recommendation—that of exotopia, of being from another place, even when sharing the same space. This does not equal a behavior emphasizing this distance, however. Quite the contrary:

> I assume it is my job to try and become the kind of person that other individual prefers to spend time with, if I want them to spend a considerable time with me, so I will shift from being young, old, male, female, comic, serious, etc. all the time. (…) I don't see this as manipulative, I see it as part of our responsibility to make the experience comfortable for the people who are giving us this time and information. (Miller, personal communication, March 4, 2007)

His views are consistent with the opinion of famous US anthropologist Rosalie Wax:

> Perhaps good fieldwork is more like play-acting than most of us are willing to admit. Respondents rarely resent a fieldworker's "acting like them" or

> "learning their ways" as long as the fieldworker makes it clear that he knows he is only playing a part and that his newly acquired skills do not entitle him to any privileges which they are not willing to offer him. (Wax 1971/1985, p. 197)

In my interpretation, both Wax and Miller say that regardless of whether the research is conducted in the area that is familiar or exotic, researchers should be respectful and friendly, and never pretend to know better or to be better their hosts. Common sense—for fieldwork, and for life in general.

3.5 Shadowing the Screens

I have studied news production in three news agencies: a national Swedish agency, TT; an Italian international agency, ANSA; and a global agency, Thompson Reuters (Czarniawska 2012). My first study was that of the Swedish agency, and my plan was to shadow people in key production roles. I was denied this opportunity, and had to rely on a diary-interview technique, in which the journalists told me what they did the day before, or, if the interview was conducted at the end of their shift, what they had done that day (not bad at all as a secondary technique). Somewhat to my surprise, and in contrast to my previous fieldwork in Italy (Czarniawska 2002), I had no problem achieving permission to shadow journalists at three ANSA units.

At the outset I was not quite sure how to shadow people who work primarily at, and through, their computers. In the past, I was mostly shadowing managers who used the computers sporadically. Even if Barley and Kunda (2001) had appealed to researchers to look for new ways of doing fieldwork, ways of studying people working with computers were not yet well developed a decade ago, apart from IT studies, which usually have a different purpose.

Much to my relief, it was my hosts at ANSA who solved my problems. First of all, they gave me a place at a computer with two screens, like the ones they were using. And although I could not do anything myself, I could see "the desk" (their work platform) and "the wire" (the products)

and follow the news through the production process. When a discussion started in the newsroom concerning any specific piece of news, I could trace it in the database and learn what they were talking about.

Not even my shadowing seemed to be a problem. In studying people who work with computers, shadowing consists mostly of watching over their shoulders as they work and receiving explanations. It turned out that the journalists in the newsroom were used to that activity. It was common for colleagues—invited or uninvited—to watch over each other's shoulders as they worked. It was also common for the person doing the work to explain what was being done and to invite comments and questions. Thus the journalists saw nothing peculiar about my wanting to observe their work at the computer. I also greatly appreciated the possibility of following both virtual and physical interactions, much as Kociatkiewicz (2004) did in his work.

The main difficulty was keeping up with the speed at which things were happening. (As a matter of fact, speed became one of my main analytical categories later on, Czarniawska 2014a.) Here are fragments of conversations that I recorded during breaks in an interview:

> The telephone rings: "Yes, ... A? ... Ah yes, I do know. C is working on it and sent me a message saying that she's preparing a piece. Talk to her for a while ... Yes, talk to her... talk to her for a second at any rate. OK? Ciao."
>
> "As you're here, you can tell me if the piece by X should be send to somebody else or straight to the wire?"
>
> "I'd put it on the Internet, and send it to Newsroom Y."
>
> "Gotcha."
>
> "Put it... put it on the net, give it give it".
>
> "Hello, M? Hi beautiful[8]. Certainly, certainly, whenever you want … even in ten minutes... Listen M, how many non-journalists work in ANSA? ... Then I got it right." (lifts another receiver) "S! Is the boss there?" ... (returns to the previous call) "Ah, M, there's the executive committee. When will it end? ... Ah, at three o'clock? But we start now, no? At quarter to three ... only recently?" (takes the other receiver) "Ciao S. Thanks." "M, we talk later then. Learn how it looks. See when it ends ... hem… cock your ears no? Eh, because now I'm … I'm running the risk of distraction because actually I'm in the middle of a long conversation … OK. Ciao".

My fieldwork at Reuters was similar to my work at ANSA: attending meetings, shadowing people at work, shadowing the news on the screen, and completing it with interviews. The journalists in all places were generous with their time (especially considering speed pressure) and seemed sympathetic to my purposes (though, as often happens, their interest in the results was limited).

3.6 Shadowing Compared to Other Field Techniques

At the end of this chapter, I wish to emphasize that it is practically impossible to separate one technique of fieldwork from another—either in the field or at the desk. Textbooks of methods often introduce such differentiation for pedagogical purposes. In practice, however, the difference between participant observation and shadowing technique, for example, is relatively vague. A participating observer may be invited to accompany someone, and a shadow may be asked to make coffee. Each technique is good if it matches the study purpose. All types of direct observation involve some kind of "participation". Thus, I contrast shadowing with other types of observation merely to help the researcher choose—and the choice is not merely a technical matter, but an ethical one as well.

So, direct and indirect observation first. Indirect observation (one-sided mirror, hidden camera) is used in social psychology and criminology, but it is considered unethical if the subjects do not know about it or if there is no overriding explanation (e.g. minors, incapacitated persons).

Direct observation (video-recording included, see, e.g. Jönsson 2005) can be divided into participant and non-participant. The meaning of the term "participation" has been the subject of a great deal of discussion, after it turned out that its inventor, Bronislaw Malinowski—"participated" in the sense of observing dances and rituals, and also talked to the natives when possible. (He was in exile for political reasons; see Malinowski 1967/1989.)

Non-participant observation includes shadowing and stationary observation. As far as I know, filming is still mainly stationary, but if Michael Moore gains more followers in management and organization studies, mobile filming will become popular, too. This will change dramatically, however; the position of the researcher as a camera operator attracts attention in a drastically different way than shadowing does.

Compared to participant observation, shadowing is much easier, because it does not require simultaneous action and observation or skills that the researcher may not have. It also helps in maintaining a distance and a sense of estrangement, whereas participant observers may be tempted to "go native". Shadowing and estrangement do not require that researchers disavow their feelings or negate them; on the contrary, emotions become a critical research instrument. Researchers must act as responsible adults who offer respect and sympathy (and not the patronizing "empathy"); they have no reason to act like a "fly on the wall". (What a strange metaphor: in the end we all know what happens to a fly on the wall when noticed.)

The main strength of shadowing is its mobility. This kind of mobility is not simply the fact of moving from place to place—even stationary observers need to move from one chair to another sometime. The advantage of shadowing is that the moves are double—the world and its events become available to the eyes and ears of both the observed and the observer. The observation is four-sided: The observer and the observed observe one another, and they both observe what is happening around them—as with a four-lens reflex camera.

As for the disadvantages, I have already written a great deal about the psychological discomfort and a helpful role it plays in gaining insights (Czarniawska 2007, 2014d). Of course, giving up one's professional identity and the role-playing required are sometimes costly, but it is a price worth paying. In the end, one can learn more, not only about what do the others do, but also about oneself. Shadowing involves many practical problems. Access is not guaranteed once and for all. In every new situation, someone may protest the presence of the researcher and people being shadowed can suddenly change their minds. This can happen with other types of observations, but less frequently, because people who do not want to be seen can hide from the eyes of a stationary observer.

Another difficulty is the need to merge into the background. Relations between the shadow and the shadowee (if I may coin this neologism) may differ, but a shadow should not attract attention. This requirement is somewhat in contrast to the requirement of maximizing differences (exotopia), but can be resolved in various manners. Male organization researchers usually "blend into the background" more easily, because men's dress code is simpler (McDowell 1998). Studying city management in Stockholm, I had no doubt how professional women dress: jacket and jeans. In Warsaw, I was uncertain: A fur? A dress? A dress suit? No such problems while studying news agencies, as journalists dress the same way as we do at university (some business schools excluded). There, the problem was my age: A young woman is obviously a trainee, but what is a woman older than the shadowee doing there?

Next practical problem is how to take notes on the move. Using a smart phone is not a good idea, because you will be suspected of texting your chums (even journalists go around with A-4 notebooks). Some solutions are to write down only when you sit; dictate when you are alone; and write as much as possible at the end of the working day—a difficult task, because shadowing is physically tiring.[9]

The last thing I wish to take up in connection with shadowing is the impact on the shadowee. Truman Capote ended his shadowing by smoking hash with Mary Sanchez at her workplace (definitely not recommended!), after which she was fired. The Principal shadowed by Wolcott claimed that it contributed to his personal development, but Wolcott commented that the Principal was known for his "positive thinking". (Nevertheless!) The young couple that shopped with Miller hopefully learned how it was to be a couple. The best I achieved was that my shadowing helped to maintain the reputation of a (highly competent) person whose position was threatened by a reform. But, if Latour (2005) is right, the results of our study should have made what we studied familiar not to those who we studied, but to everybody else.

Notes

1. He stressed, however, that is not the same as lack of viewpoint: Everyone has a point of view, which is also a source of information (Bruyn 2002).
2. My study of Warsaw was published in Polish exactly 20 years after I conducted it (Czarniawska 2014a, b, c). It was apparently too sensitive at the time to publish; time and distance were necessary to accept certain of its insights. The people studied rarely appreciate direct feedback: Either they know it already, or they do not like it. Or both. (On this issue see Latour 2005).
3. It could also be tracking a movement of the selected object (Czarniawska 2007, 2014d), but I do not describe it in this chapter.
4. Bakhtin's beliefs are consistent with the theory of Niklas Luhmann. (See Luhmann 1995; Seidl and Becker 2005).
5. A detailed description of the various uses of shadowing technique can be found in McDonald (2005).
6. Wolcott and Mintzberg did not know anything about each other, because in the 1970s nobody talked about management as a profession, and the idea that school principals and business were engaged in the same work would be considered eccentric.
7. Although, curiously enough, it took 30 years.
8. M was a man, as was the speaker. This is not a homosexual allusion, but the usual way of addressing people one likes in Italian.
9. I am still awaiting the gadget promised by the IT researchers a while ago (Czarniawska 2007): a camera plus a voice recorder plus a notepad.

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4

Interviewing in Qualitative Research

Svetlana Gudkova

4.1 Introduction

Interviewing constitutes a natural part of our lives. Every day, we observe full of emotions and vivid conversations of journalists with representatives of political world, we participate in commercial negotiations, we listen to our nearest and dearest who would like to confide their secrets to us, or we become an object of research during the doctor's appointment or a walk when an annoying interviewer approaches us and promises some gifts for a bunch of answers given in a hurry. Nowadays, we live in the 'interview society' as was emphasized by Paul Atkinson and David Silverman (1997) in one of their publications. Ideas about ourselves and the surrounding world are developed through social interactions. Since early childhood, we have been gaining our knowledge by asking questions and looking for their answers. However, despite the apparent simplicity, conducting a good interview is not an easy task. It requires knowledge, solid preparations, and skills of how to ask questions and

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_4

listen to others, as well as the tact which has been developed in the course of experience gained.

The interview is one of the basic methods of data collection employed in the social sciences. It is worth noting that this method is not restricted solely to the qualitative research. Interviews have been actively taken advantage of by representatives of various scientific traditions. Both the supporters of the positivist paradigm and the interpretivist one use the technique of the interview to collect data even though the expectations and assumptions of researchers as well as the process of preparing the interview and the conclusion sphere differ fundamentally. The metaphors of a *miner* and a *traveler* proposed by Steinar Kvale (2008) are an excellent illustration of these differences. The miner is searching for a valuable metal amid relatively worthless stones. Similarly, the researcher extracts objective information and facts from what his/her interlocutors say. The traveler, in his/her turn, when entering into new areas, admires the surrounding area, talks to people, is genuinely interested in listening to their stories, and even encourages people he/she encounters to share their thoughts. After coming back home, the traveler shares his/her experiences with the others. He describes the stories heard giving them his own interpretation and adding the missing elements, that is why they undergo the modification process in various extent. Moreover, the acquired experiences influence the traveler as well as his/her perception of himself/herself and the surrounding world.

The presented metaphors illustrate the fundamental differences in understanding and expectations of the researchers in terms of their interviews. In the first case, the interview is considered to be a tool to collect data, separated from the process of their interpretation (miner). It is assumed that the knowledge is hidden and that it is waiting to be discovered, and the researcher, when commencing his/her interview, has already precisely defined its structure. In the second case, however, the interview is seen as the process of creating knowledge that is inherent to the process of its interpretation and creating narration (traveler). The last metaphor is closer to the anthropological approach, that is, understanding of the reality as socially constructed (Kvale 2008).

Looking at the interview from the perspective of the miner and the traveler leads to understanding of the key importance of what expectations the researcher has and what epistemological assumption he has adopted which determine the process of conducting the interview, the way the empirical material is interpreted as well as the range and depth of the conclusions drawn.

Kvale (2008) defines the interview as 'a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee'. First of all, in contrast to the usual exchange of views, the interview has a specified purpose determined by the researcher. It is focused around the research questions or topic areas. Depending on the type of the interview, the interviewer in various extents manages the course of the conversation specifying the acceptable level of variations from the adopted scenario and, in case of certain types of interviews, encourages the interviewee to enter different topics spontaneously and to guide the conversation himself. Secondly, the interview should be understood as an interaction which takes place between two persons who form their experiences and interpretations of their past behavior together. Barbara Czarniawska (2004, p. 49) points out that 'the interview is not a window on social reality but it is a part, a sample of that reality'. The impact of the interviewer on the interpretations provided by the interviewee is determined by his competences and experience in conducting interviews. It can be deliberately minimized. However, its total elimination is impossible. Such factors as gender, tone of voice, age, or the way the interviewer is dressed may influence the conversation. It refers to the third characteristic of interviews, that is, subjectivity. The difficulty to eliminate the influence of the interviewer as well as situational factors makes the answers of the interviewee always the effect of external conditions in certain extent, which means that in different conditions we can receive different answers from the interviewee. It must be also noted that despite the asymmetry of the information flow clearly present during the interview, the interview is always an exchange of information. That is why it is necessary to be prepared for possible questions from interviewee, and the quality of the answers provided by the researcher creates a specific pattern for the interviewee's responses in terms of their scope, depth, and openness.

4.2 Types of Interviews

Fontana and Frey (2008) emphasize that the interview as a research technique has had a long history, but only in the second half of the twentieth century, the attempts were made to systematize the characteristics of interviews and specify different types of interviews, as well as their influence on the form and content of the collected data. Currently, one can find in the literature many various classifications of interviews taking into account various sets of criteria (cf. Kostera 1998, p. 105): the sequence of questions asked and their content. Taking into account the sequence of questions asked, one can specify **standardized** and **non-standardized** interviews. During the standardized interview, the interviewee is asked questions in a precisely determined order, identical for all interviewees. However, in the non-standardized interview, the interviewer in the course of the conversation decides what the sequence of questions asked will be. Their sequence is very often the result of the context of the conversation.

Taking into account the content of questions asked, **structured** and **non-structured** interviews can be specified. In the content of the first type, the form and language of answers is already coded—then we ask the so-called closed-ended questions (e.g. 'How many times a month do you do your shopping in the supermarket?'). In case of the non-structured interview (free-form interview), the open-ended questions are asked in order to collect empirical material. The interviewee answers such questions in a free manner and in whatever form he prefers. These questions most often begin with the words 'how' and 'why' (e.g. 'How do you do the shopping in your family?'). Interviews can be characterized with different levels of structurization, from the questionnaire interview to the natural everyday conversation the researcher can be a listener to. Figure 4.1 presents various types of interviews, depending on the level of their structurization.

Standardized and structured interviews are most often used in the quantitative research in order to verify the hypotheses formulated. The advantage of structured interviews (telephone and personal) is the possibility to collect standardized data from a large number of respondents at

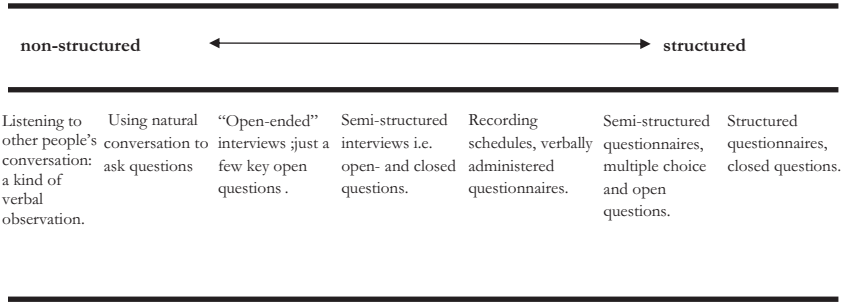

Fig. 4.1 The verbal data dimensions (Source: Adapted from Gillham (2000, p. 6))

low cost. Their popularity can be attributed to the possibility to develop forecasts based on the analysis of large samples (Fontana and Prokos 2007, p. 23). In case of the qualitative research, the most common are non-standardized and non-structured interviews or semi-structured ones. Very often, these research are of exploratory character, and their aim is to explore and describe the phenomena, behavior, and occurring interdependencies, and their purpose is not to test the hypotheses formulated. The researcher does not assume that he knows in which way the interviewee will answer the questions, nor the full catalogue of possible answers. As was described by Fontana and Prokos (2007), when discussing the differences between the structured and non-structured interview, the aim of the first one is to collect precise data possible to be coded in order to explain human behavior in the context of predefined categories, whereas the second one seeks to understand the complex behavior of members of the society without imposing any a priori categories that can narrow the research area.

Questionnaire Interview This is a kind of interviewing where the interviewer has prepared a standardized list of closed-ended questions. Both the interviewee and the interviewer have limited room for maneuver. The interviewee most often chooses the answer from the proposed set having restricted freedom in shaping the statements. The interviewer follows the instruction on how to perform the interview. He must not provide the interviewee with any additional clarifications regarding the topics, not interfere in the content or form of questions regardless the situation or

reaction of interviewer. Moreover, the interviewer must not react very actively or emotionally to the interviewee's replies. The idea is to eliminate the impact of external factors on the answers provided.

There are certain limitations associated with the questionnaire interviews. First of all, the sequence or the way questions are formulated and then asked (e.g. directly or via the telephone) can influence the replies. Secondly, the interviewee may not be honest with the researcher or can simply not remember certain circumstances, especially in case of research of retrospective or reflexive nature. Thirdly, the interviewer through his behavior or appearance can influence the answers received. Fourthly, the interviewee may not understand the question asked, randomly selecting the answer from the catalogue proposed by the interviewer. In case of questionnaire interviews, the person of interviewer is not as significant as in the case of qualitative interviews. Very often, the questionnaire interviews are conducted by pollsters and not directly be researchers.

Free-Form Interview This is a kind of non-standardized and non-structured interviewing in the course of which the researcher guides the conversation. It is very often applied in the qualitative research, especially in those of an exploratory and observatory character together with participant observation. Both techniques are divided solely for analytical purposes; in practice, however, they are inseparable. The unstructured interview offers the possibility of getting the deepest insight into the research topic examined. A special, extremely active role in such interview is attributed to the researcher. Unlike in the questionnaire interview, the interviewer is engaged in close interaction with interviewee, reacting on the words of the speaker and encouraging the interviewee to share experiences and emotions. In case of the qualitative research, it is more suitable to use the word 'conversation' instead of 'the interview' due to its interactive and co-constructive character.

The unstructured interview is the most popular method used by qualitative researchers to collect data (Silverman 2006). However, in order to utilize this method most effectively, one must remember about the specific character of data collected through the interview. Interviews in the qualitative research rather do not allow to obtain 'objective' information

about facts (in the sense of positivist science). What is obtained during the conversation are human experiences, interpretations of facts, events, and behaviors. From the point of view of the exploratory purpose of the research, it is an excellent method, which gives the possibility of getting an insight into how people perceive and understand the reality and allows for better reflection of their perspective in the research findings.

Kvale (2008) emphasized that the purpose of the qualitative interview is to understand themes of the world, obtain the description of the world where interviewees live, and get to know its specific dimensions. Assuming the phenomenological perspective, he outlined twelve aspects of qualitative interview. It involves focusing on the experiences coming from the interviewees' life world and ascribing meaning to them, descriptive nature of the conversation focused on specific topics, naivety, and vulnerability of the researcher who is trying to describe the specificity of the world of interviewees, as well as the awareness of the dynamics of interactions and possibility of appearing the contradictions or changing views in the course of the conversation. These aspects have been presented in greater detail in Table 4.1.

Group Interviews They deal with systematic questioning of several persons. In the group interview, the researcher performs a role of a moderator who manages (in a free way or in a way determined earlier, depending on the purpose of the research and the research protocol) the participants of the research. Very often, this form of the interview is considered to be something in between the structured interview and the non-structured one. Depending on the aim of the research, group interviews can be of different type. The most popular includes focus groups, very often associated with marketing research (for more information, please read Chap. 5 in this volume). Types of group interviews have been presented in Table 4.2.

Among the advantages of group interviews, Fontana and Frey (2008) pointed out the relatively low cost of their performance, the possibility to acquire meaningful data of cumulative and complex character, the possibility to stimulate participants to express their opinions and recall specific events and behaviors together with emotions and feelings associated

Table 4.1 Aspects of qualitative interviews

Life world	Interview as a sensitive and effective method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings associated with the daily life of interviewees
Meaning	The purpose of the interview is to understand the meaning of the main aspects of the world of everyday life of interviewees. The researcher captures and interprets words and the manner of speaking, gestures, facial expressions, emotions of interviewees. The interview is aimed at capturing not only the factual dimension but also a semantic one. It is important to read between the lines
Qualitative	The purpose of the interview is to look for new qualitative knowledge about various aspects of the world in which interviewees live, expressed in words, and not in numbers
Descriptive	During the interview, the interviewees are encouraged to accurately describe their experiences, feelings, and emotions. As a result, complex descriptions are formed which reflect the specific characteristics of the phenomenon, and not rigid categorizations
Specificity	The researcher reaches specific meanings and not general opinions in the course of in-depth descriptions of specific situations and actions
Deliberate naiveté	During the interview, the researcher demonstrates his openness to new unexpected phenomena; he is sensitive and curious about new discoveries remaining at the same time critical of the earlier assumptions of interpretative schemes
Focused	The researcher focuses the conversation on specific topics encouraging the interviewees to indicate the dimensions of the analyzed phenomenon which are important to them
Ambiguity	Statements of the interviewees can be interpreted in different ways; they can also contain some contradictions. The task of the researcher is to get to know the sources of these contradictions which can be found in the flawed communication during the interview, personality of the interviewee, or they can reflect contradiction in the world of the interviewee
Change	The interview can become a learning process both for the researcher and for interviewee, which will influence the change of ways to describe the dimension of topics and meanings attributed to them in the course of the conversation
Sensitivity	The researcher should demonstrate his/her sensitivity while dealing with a given problem

(*continued*)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Interpersonal situation	During the interview, the knowledge is created in the course of interpretations between two persons. The change of the researcher can lead to acquiring different data
Positive experience	The interview can become a valuable and enriching experience for the person being interviewed; however, it can also cause anxiety and trigger defense mechanisms. The researcher should follow the dynamics of interaction in the course of the interview and be able to respond properly

Source: Authors' own adapted from Kvale (2008, pp. 11–14)

Table 4.2 Types of group interviews and dimensions

Type	Setting	Role of interviewer	Question format	Purpose
Focus group	Formal, preset	Directive	Structured	Exploratory, pretest
Brainstorming	Formal or informal	Nondirective	Unstructured	Exploratory
Nominal/Delphi	Formal	Directive	Structured	Exploratory, pretest
Field, natural	Informal, spontaneous	Moderately nondirective	Very unstructured	Exploratory, phenomenological
Field, formal	Preset, in the field	Somewhat directive	Semi-structured	Phenomenological

Source: Adapted from Fontana and Prokos (2007, p. 33)

with them, as well as the flexibility of the formula. Before making a decision to conduct group interviews, one must also consider sources of potential problems. One of them is the unique group dynamics which develops during the interview. In specific cases, the group can be dominated by one person which case will restrict the ability of other group members to freely express their opinions. The role of the researcher is to skillfully guide the group dynamics and properly manage the conversation. The interviewer should also be prepared to take an active role encouraging every participant to speak. In order the group interview fulfill its task, the researcher should collect the opinions from the whole group. In summary, it should be stressed how important role is played by the person conducting the group interview who should demonstrate high competence and sensitivity in this area.

Apart from questionnaire interviews, free-form interviews, and group interviews, a **narrative interview** is a special type of the qualitative interview which focuses on the specific elements of the interviewee's biography (Chase 2005). The narration can take the oral or written form, deliberately evoked by the researcher or heard in the field as a voice observation. Atkinson (1998, pp. 8–9) underlines that the essence of narration is to offer a person a chance to tell his own story in his own way, in a way he prefers, using his own style, form, and means of expression. Narration can involve the interviewee's lifetime from the moment of his birth up to now; it can also describe a fragment of his life or an event of special significance. In the literature devoted to narrative interviews, one can also encounter such expressions as a **life history** or a **life story**. The relations between them are not clear. Some researchers use these expressions interchangeably; the others define the life story as the narration about an important aspect of a person's life, for example, attending college (Chase 2005). The **witness narration** can be considered a special type of narration which is of the political nature and associated with narrations of the representatives of the liberation movements.

Interviews in ethnographic research have also their specific character. Giampietro Gobo (2008) distinguishes their four characteristic features. The first one deals with the specific atmosphere of the interview which results from the fact that the interviewer and interviewee know each other. The second characteristic of the interviews performed within the scope of ethnographic research is their unplanned nature. They take place spontaneously in the course of the participant observation which constitutes the main source of information. Usually such interviews are much shorter than the traditional semi-structured interviews. Concentration on specific topic is the third characteristic of the interviews in etnographic research. Their goal is to know the reasons behind certain behavior, as well as emotions and experiences related to it. The fourth characteristic lies in less stress exerted on the researcher who does not feel obliged to collect comprehensive empirical data during one conversation. Interviews are repeated allowing for the clarification of doubts and interpretation ambiguities.

Fontana and Prokos (2007) consider **creative interviewing** a special type of unstructured interviewing which has no specific time frame nor subject restriction to carry out the research. The researcher should

demonstrate great creativity forgetting about the existing rules and adapting to new circumstances. The researcher is considered to be a co-originator of the interview who enjoys complete freedom in conducting the interview.

There are also other kinds of interviews such as **factual interviews** aimed at seeking information of factual nature, conceptual interviews targeted at understanding the views adopted by a given person or a group. Those types have rather more in common with the metaphor of the miner proposed by Kvale (2008).

In the process of performing research with the use of the qualitative interview, Kvale (2008) distinguishes seven basic stages. These include thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to semi-structured qualitative interviews, their planning, and performance. Presented guidelines will facilitate the organization of research trips as well as increase their cognitive values.

4.3 Preparation of the Interview

In fact, the qualitative interview is a kind of conversation, and therefore it should be assumed that every person in some extent is prepared for it. However, one must also remember that it is primarily the interaction of two or more persons; the final result of which is dependent of each of the parties' efforts. Interviews conducted by journalists, which we listen to every day, are the perfect illustration here: some of them are terribly boring, while others involving the same persons arouse our interest providing interesting information and insights. Competences of the researcher and his involvement are crucial factors, which determine the scope and depth of data collected in the course of the conversation. Silverman (2006) underscores that the researcher in the qualitative project should play an active role—that of the interlocutor and not the one to ask questions. Despite the conversational and open nature of the interview, one must remember that it is the researcher who is responsible for conducting it.

How many of us can agree with the Larry King's statement (1994, p. 9) that a conversation is the greatest joy in life, especially if it involves

a person you have not met before? First interviews are usually a great challenge for the researcher due to high expectations, enormous stress, and the lack of experience. My first interview in Lublin was memorable mainly due to a cup of coffee spilled on the tablecloth during the conversation and many mistakes which now can serve a perfect illustration of the negative behavior of the researcher.

Preparation for the interview should be divided into two stages. The first one includes developing a scenario of the interview based on research questions asked or topics which we would like to explore. The second step involves the selection of interviewee, obtaining their consent to carry out the interview and choosing the location. In case of the field interviews, which are an integral part of the observation, an approval to conduct single interviews is seldom required.

The scenario of the interview is a tool to guide the conversation. It consists of formulated questions or topics we would like to discuss in such a conversation. Given the large stress levels, which accompany the first interviews, it would be a good solution for novice researchers to prepare a list of topics together with the list of questions which could be asked during the interview. One must turn the attention to the way the questions, which should have an open-ended character, are formulated, encourage to giving the comprehensive replies, as well as share experiences and emotions. Closed-ended questions lead to short, often trite answers. It is worth starting the interview with questions of a descriptive character, for example, 'How did it happen?', 'What experiences did you have?', or 'Could you tell me how did you start your company?'. Such questions are relatively simple; the answer does not require much effort from interviewee. At the same time, they have an important function—they form the basis for further, more in-depth part of the interview. Along with the progress of the conversation, one can gradually tackle questions of 'Why?' type which require a critical reflection and trust in the researcher. It is important to remember that the meanings and interpretations, which will be created during the interview, are to a large extent determined by the way questions are asked (Kvale 2008). Questions regarding facts from the interviewee's biography and questions related to emotions and feelings that accompany these events should be asked in a different manner.

The original set of questions prepared is usually modified in the course of conducting research. What gets changed is the way they are formulated, expressions used, the sequence of questions, intonation. Moreover, the answers for the first questions influence the way the others are formulated (Babbie 2007). It is also important to adjust questions to the specific character of interviewee and the language they use. Certainly, the question regarding the mechanisms of intangible asset transfer in the organization might be left unanswered. On the other hand, the questions referring to the transfer of information and sharing knowledge can be more understandable for the interviewee. A good example here would be the statement of one novice researcher: 'Unfortunately, the entrepreneurs during the interview could not answer the question regarding the sources of conflicts between generations in family businesses'. This is rather a research question which should be transformed into a number of questions to carry out the interview which will be understandable for the interviewees.

In the process of formulating questions, one must also take into account the cultural context and the way the interlocutors understand expressions used by the researcher. As was mentioned by Fontana and Frey (2008, p. 126), it is not enough to understand the mechanics of interviewing; it is also important to understand the interviewee's world and forces that might stimulate or retard response. For instance, one of the most difficult topics in interviewing the entrepreneurs is the topic of networking. Questions asked directly usually do not prove successful, they lead to a denial of any role such networking could play in the development of the company or emphasizing the role of the entrepreneur himself. Having performed an in-depth analysis of the topic, one could distinguish the three main causes why entrepreneurs are not so willing to discuss it. First, such words as contacts or connections evoke negative connotations in case of interviews in Poland. Several years ago, I was waiting for the conversation with an entrepreneur in Tarnow who was at that very moment talking on the phone and watching TV. My attention was drawn by the announcement of the so far popular program dealing with current affairs where the editor mentioned that the next episode will be dedicated to the networking, 'who, with whom and against whom'. After such an announcement, the conversation dealing with contacts was

getting extremely difficult. The second cause behind concealing the networking is a tendency to internal attribution of entrepreneurs when talking about successes which leads to emphasizing their own contribution into business development and negate the involvement of others. The third cause why entrepreneurs prefer to conceal their networking activities is their conviction that together with revealing their connections they will lose their power. If the researcher is aware of such mechanisms, he can manage the conversation in a way to minimize the interaction of the mechanisms described earlier and to collect more in-depth empirical data. In case of the networking topic, the scenario of the interview is of a very general character because it is very difficult to determine specific questions before the interview with particular person. In order not to evoke negative associations with the interviewee, it is important to know the 'safe' vocabulary, which is used by the specific interviewee, and to take advantage of it while formulating questions.

Choosing the interviewees and obtaining their consent to carry out the interview may also prove difficult. It is determined by the specific character of the group under research. For instance, entrepreneurs in Poland do not really like being interviewed. As the most popular reasons, they report the lack of time or competences to be interviewed. My disreputable record from the beginning of my adventure with the qualitative research was 32 rejections out of 32 requests for an interview with entrepreneurs in Wroclaw. Unfortunately, such situation can happen despite all our efforts. To minimize their occurrence, one can take advantage of various techniques. First of all, it is worth contacting persons who are members of various associations or clubs. Such people are usually active and open to new experiences. The second way is to use the snowballing technique according to which each person interviewed can become a source of new contacts to potential interviewees. It is also important to choose the time to conduct interviews successfully.

After the proper selection of interviewees and convincing them to take part in the interview, another important element is to determine the venue to perform the interview appropriately. Definitely, the best solution would be the natural environment of the interviewee where he feels most comfortable and, on the other hand, allows the interviewer to enrich empirical data through the observation. Certainly, it is not worth

arranging such meeting in the café of restaurant where there are usually high noise levels which will interfere with the transcription of the interview and the specific atmosphere, rather unfavorable to build trust. In case of interviews with the entrepreneurs, the best place to have a conversation is the company office. What is also important is the proper choice of clothes. For sure, the interview in the consulting company would require different clothing than while interviewing the owners of farms. Certainly, it is a tiny element in the course of preparations for the conversation; however, it can have an enormous importance while establishing relations and building trust at the beginning of the interview.

In the literature, one can encounter a distinction between the researcher and the person performing the interview. For various reasons, interviewing may be handed over to other persons. In this way, one of the most important elements of the interview is lost, namely, flexibility in guiding the interview. The task of the interviewer in this case is to ask the questions defined in the interview's scenario and get the answers. Due to the lack of understanding of the subject matter, and often because of the lack of involvement, many potentially interesting issues, which could lead to important conclusions, are irretrievably lost. What gets lost is also the possibility to observe the interviewee's behavior and his emotions during the interview. The necessity of direct involvement of the researcher is largely dependent on the type of the interview and the qualitative data which will be derived; however, when deciding to entrust interviewing to another person, one should be aware of the consequences.

4.4 Conducting the Interview

Usually the qualitative interviews are relatively long—they can last several hours, even several days. The task of the researcher is to manage the dynamics of the conversation skillfully. To illustrate this phenomenon, let us take advantage of the metaphor of the bonfire which must be lit, and then the fire must be skillfully sustained and put out so as not to bring any harm to the environment. It is similar in case of the qualitative interviews. First, you need to start a conversation and skillfully build the atmosphere of trust and engagement into the conversation. Next, it is

very important to maintain the dynamics of the interview not to destroy it with a difficult or too personal question. Just as we feed the fire in the fireplace, we should feed the conversation with questions, statements, and silence or a questioning look at the right moment. What plays an important role here is the tact and sensitivity of the researcher who should skillfully follow the interviewee asking more detailed questions marking the important moments of the conversation. When the list of topics the researcher interested is covered, the interview finishes. It is a process which, depending on the circumstances, can last from a few minutes to an hour or so.

One of the most important tasks of the researcher at the initial stage of the conversation is to build an atmosphere of trust which has a direct impact on the openness of the interviewees and their willingness to provide in-depth answers. There are several factors making this process efficient. The researcher can take advantage of the so-called transfer of trust if he was introduced to the interviewee by a trusted person. It can be also an organization with which the interviewee cooperates. For instance, in the period 2003–2006 I conducted a series of interviews with entrepreneurs in cooperation with Mikro Fund in Warsaw. Due to the specific nature of how the microfinancing organization operates, entrepreneurs trusted the representatives of the fund and so they were willing to transfer this trust into the researcher. Persons conducting interviews together with gaining experience develop their own unique ways how to build a trust. In my case, my Eastern accent comes in handy because it inevitably evokes interest at the beginning of conversation. I have noticed a certain interdependence between my answer to questions regarding my descent and the openness of interviewee further in the interview. If my story is detailed enough and deals with private issues, I can expect that the interviewee, following the principle of reciprocity, will do the same while giving the answers to my questions. Sharing feelings, emotions, and personal facts with the interviewees is a kind of demonstration of good will and openness of the researcher, which aim at bringing the conversation into the different level in terms of depth and insight (Fontana and Frey 2008). At the same time, one must remember that the researcher should not encourage people interviewed to say more what they would be willing to say (Babbie 2007). First of all, it is due to ethical issues. Secondly, making

the interviewee answer unwillingly may cause the opposite effect, that is, his isolation and refusing to answer further questions. That is why the difficult questions should be asked at the end of the interview.

During the interview, it is important to remember that it is not only the researcher who is interested in acquiring specific knowledge. The interviewee has also certain expectations regarding the interview the fulfillment of which guarantees the quality interaction. The interviewees most often ask about the reasons why they have been selected to participate in the research; they are also interested in the topic of the conversation and the way the collected data will be disseminated. In the course of the interviews, the entrepreneurs, for instance, usually ask for the opinion regarding products and services offered as well as economic forecasts. It is important to devote time and answer the questions asked by the interviewee having in mind, according to the logic described above, that our way of answering will serve as an example to formulate their own statements during the conversation.

The researcher usually starts the interview with the scenario developed in advance; however, he should be prepared to enter new areas and multiple digressions provided by interviewee which could lead to surprisingly interesting interpretations and conclusions. It must be remembered that what is more important than asking all the questions is to follow the interviewee that is asking adequate questions at the right moments. Such skill, however, comes with time. Many experienced researchers describe their first interviews when they were listening to 'the digressions' of their interlocutors impatiently and wondering when they finally tackle the fundamental issues, or interrupting a long speech with further questions (Chase 2005; Czarniawska 1997). For this reason, it is difficult for me to read my first interviews when the entrepreneurs, as I then thought, abandoned the topic and dwelled on about their children, pets, passions, and then I asked them further questions. Now, when I read the transcriptions, I have the impression that I interrupted them in the most interesting moments when they approached issues of great importance to them and, as it turned out later, crucial to understand the subject of research as well.

Another important advantage of encouraging the interviewees to carry on with their narration is their authenticity. Analyzing the questions posed, the interviewees very often think about the most appropriate

response and may try to avoid certain topics (e.g. networking) or respond wishfully. Free statements of the interlocutors are less vulnerable to this type of distortion. However, one should remember that the interview emerges from the interactions between two persons in a particular place and time, which contribute to the final result, so when one of these factors changes, the conversation can be totally different.

In the final phase of the interview, the task of the researcher is usually to verify the logic of statements made by the interviewee and to fill in the gaps. The first objective is usually achieved through encouraging the interviewees to look at the topic from different perspectives. Moreover, a technique is applied of repeating the statements of the interviewee with the use of synonymous phrases with the request to verify the correctness of reasoning. Filling in the gaps in the data gained (which may include periods in the interviewee's biography or in the description of the company's development which were skipped) should be conducted at the end of the interview. Inquiring about the details in the course of the conversation can disturb its dynamics significantly reducing the engagement of the other party. If the entrepreneur, for instance, missed certain years in describing the history of his company's development, one should not interrupt and listen to his story to the end and then ask more detailed questions.

Example 4.1 presents a fragment of the transcript of the interview with an entrepreneur dealing with artistic blacksmithing in the South of Poland. This is the entrepreneur in the second generation who inherited the blacksmith's workshop from his father at the age of 18. The excerpt from the transcript of the interview contents the answer for the question about the meaning of the success to the entrepreneur. The statement of the entrepreneur is comprehensive; one is delighted with colorful language used by the interviewee. It would seem that the entrepreneur takes time to tackle the essence, and still how many interesting topics, worth further investigation, can be found in this statement. Referring to the metaphor of the traveler, how many beautiful landscapes could be seen if the entrepreneur invited us to and if we encouraged him to go deeper into the topics mentioned.

The person conducting the interview should not dominate the conversation. It is assumed that if the researcher speaks for more than 5% of the

Example 4.1 Excerpt from the Interview with the Entrepreneur. Source: Own Elaboration

And could you tell us one more thing, what does the success mean to you?

Ma'am, it is a very difficult question. Success, I'm not sure, probably not the money. Certainly, not because the money is the paper itself, right? It is for sure the condition of giving it back, when the client takes out the money and says it is good, he is satisfied or something. And the success is like some pleasant things when I took part in a competition, because I travel a lot to participate and I have many such pleasant moments when I first get out of the car all people ask me if I am a blacksmith because the blacksmith is associated with a big man with big hands and I tell them, I tell all my colleagues and I know around one hundred and fifty blacksmiths all over Poland and a little bit in Europe because I travel here and there, and I am telling them all the time that it is not here but there. And this is all managed with your head, your head. And I must tell you such nice events, once I was at the competition where I did some housework and some other work, you know, because there are competitions with one day to demonstrate skills. You must present a five-hour show and bring one more work of yours with you. I always do not have the time, no way. I am doing the required work after getting up at 3 a.m. and after 5 a.m. to get into the car and drive. If it takes place somewhere in Legnica or, say, in Wojciechow near Lublin, or in Ropczyce, or in Gdansk. And I hammered, I had half of the work done, no way, half of it, I hammered in two hearths so it means four fire workshops just as there are hearths with three helpers. Those who are my friends from other workshops, you know. So their task was not to cover the hearths, not to do me good because my work will burn. When I reached for it, crack, crack, from the fire, crack, crack. It were six different pieces not linked to each other. So they made fun of me and they always ask me: Jacek, how do you do this? And then they watch it, what to do of it, and I grew up in the blacksmith's shop, my mother when she was pregnant with me, she spent time with my father in the blacksmith's shop, with a hammer, seven years, and you are laughing, my father did not have a helper for seven years, and my mother hammered until she was seventh month pregnant.

I grew up in this heavy-metal, I learnt simple things, hammering until the surface was flat, tapering, I did not without much thinking. I know it must be done and I do this instinctively without thinking about it. I think six fiery operations ahead. When I come across a difficult moment. I am thinking about this moment, about simple things which normally function in the workshop, and I am not thinking at all. And I go on, first, it is rapid, second, they will say standing on the side, come on, we are filming you. Because I have such friends, we were filming, analyzing at home, and thinking it over. We want to repeat this and we cannot manage. And this, ma'am, is how it

is, because you cannot manage. I will not repeat any of anybody's work and he will not repeat any of mine. It is handmade, everyone does it differently. I get up early in the morning because you know these competitions require three-day trips. More like integration trips, you know. Just to laugh and to drink some vodka. You know how it is. Later on some bonfire or something. I get up early in the morning, no, maybe around half past six. I had my helper and I tell him: o phooey!, Jędrek, you thought it right to wash this car, we had it very dirty, and we did not have it washed, and it got even dirtier in the course of the trip, and now the car looks great, polished. You know, he says you must be crazy, he says, I see those guys, one was around 75 and the other 80, they carried water three hundred meters in the buckets and they say: **Such a master cannot drive such a dirty car. And this is what you are asking. It is like a balm to my heart, that is why life is worth living. And it is worth doing, right? Because they saw what I did, they spent their life working in the blacksmith's shop and know this trade.** They did not see my movements, my reactions but they knew it was me. And I am still young, right? Not an old man. So I screamed myself hoarse with the client yesterday, because, you know, it goes in the family. Here is this board with announcements, right? So when my father did not have anyone to punish, he took advantage of us. Reprimands. But when we had a client, a short one, a little bit interested, my father used to talk to him for two and a half, three hours, he told him about everything, not only about blacksmithing, right? And he accompanied him to the board, right? He told him that right now troubles seemed so far away and we had no troubles until the evening, right? And I caught myself once accompanying my guests two hundred meters further, to the shop. And I think it is the shorter way.

interview, it is far too much (Babbie 2007). Apart from the verbal message, the nonverbal communication in the course of the interview is crucial as well. It is important that the researcher takes control of his gestures and facial expression, which could indicate, for example, his impatience or even boredom triggered by the stories of the interviewee. The interviewees very quickly spot the lack of authenticity in interest of the researcher. During the interview, one must also remember to maintain the eye contact.

In order to finish the interview skillfully, one must know several principles. First of all, after finishing the conversation the interviewees may feel anxious about further utilization of information they provided during the interview. The researcher should clearly specify how the data will be used and disseminated. Secondly, switching off the recorder does not mean that the conversation is over. The interviewee feels less awkward

then and very often, referring to previously asked questions, adds some issues which turn to be important to analyze the topic discussed. In this situation, I always feel the irresistible desire to turn the recorder on once again; however, it must not be done. The conversation will most likely terminate and the unpleasant feelings will remain there. After the completion of the interview, it is important sparing some time for reflection, writing down the interpretations, impressions, conclusions that come to our mind—everything that later on will help us to make the work with the transcription of the interview easier. Pictures taken on the occasion of the interview are proved to be extremely helpful.

There is no recipe for the successful qualitative interview, as was concluded by Silverman (2006). Every researcher develops his own individual style of conversations with time, and as it is demonstrated by experience, remaining faithful to this style is the best way to interview successfully. Another important attribute is passion, deriving pleasure from conversations with other people whose extraordinary strength helps to continuously improve the skills of the researcher.

4.5 Conclusions

The interview is one of the basic methods of collecting the empirical data used by researchers from different schools and approaches. This is an extremely comprehensive category which can accommodate both the questionnaire interview and narration. Depending on the assumptions of the researcher, their expectations, the way they conduct interviews, and the character of their conclusions will be different. The interview in the qualitative research is of an interactive and collaborating character; it provides information on human experience, the way they perceive and understand the life word. Knowledge is created in the course of interaction between the interviewee and the researcher whose task is to guide the conversation in a way which will make it possible to accomplish the cognitive aims defined with keeping in mind the principles of research ethics. What is of key importance, especially for the novice researcher, is to prepare well for the interview which involves developing the scenario of the interview, choosing interviewees, and receiving their consent to carry out the interview as well as continuous improvement of the interviewing skills.

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5

Focus Group Interviews

Katarzyna Gawlik

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss one of the most common methods applied in qualitative research—focus group interviews. The method will be defined and explained in terms of its both standard and distinctive qualities in the context of qualitative research. This will follow with an analysis of a typical research process. Next, we will focus on the scope of application of this method. The chapter will end with a closer look at the most popular variants of the focus group interview method.

5.2 What Is a Focus Group Interview?

In the broadest sense, we can say that a focus group interview (FGI) is a group discussion among several invited respondents, moderated by a researcher according to a pre-designed scenario. Actually, the name of

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_5

this research method, that is, focus group interview, underlines its most important features. First, an FGI-based research is conducted in the form of an interview. Second, the interview is held in a group setting. Third, the interview is not fully structured, but rather freely focused on the main theme of the research.

As one of the fundamental methods of qualitative research, focus group interviews have a lot in common with other approaches discussed in this book. Like in the case of many other methods used in qualitative research, the main and most general objective of application of FGI is granting us a better **understanding** of the studied matter or group, an in-depth **insight** into them. Other traits of qualitative research, shared also by focus group interviews, stem largely from the said general objective. It's worth mentioning the issue of purposive sampling, devoid of qualities of the statistically understood representativeness. This makes samples in qualitative research—also in FGI—much smaller than in the case of quantitative research. Also, research results are subject to qualitative analysis, without consideration of statistical significance.

Another two traits of FGIs and of many other qualitative research approaches are **freedom** and **comprehensiveness** of interviews. This means that research follows a loosely sketched scenario determining only a general direction of the interview—topics to be addressed, their sequence, directions of in-depth interviewing. The scenario is thus not a list of closed pre-formulated questions that need to be strictly adhered to in interviews with respondents. Interviews are moderated, and the moderator is an active participant of every such interviews, asking own questions, adjusting the depth, the order, and the language of such questions to the signals received from respondents and based on the information collected as the interview progresses. Respondents play an important part during FGIs as well, able to affect their course and outcome. They can formulate their answers quite freely, they can interact with the moderator, make interpretations, reservations, and elaborations. The questions asked by moderators are usually of open-ended type so as not to suggest any possible answers and not to "force" any specific language or line of thought upon respondents. Conducting interviews in such a free way lets moderators explore certain topics in more detail, pose further questions, elaborate on the information gained, and place this information in some

context by, for example, referring to specific situations illustrating the answers of respondents. Such course of interview differs greatly from structured interviews, dominating the area of quantitative research. The latter type of interview is based on close-ended questions arranged in the form of a survey, where respondents can select from a certain number of pre-formulated answers. These two approaches differ in terms of respondents' possibility to exercise the freedom of answer and to elaborate on selected topics (more on the types of interviews—see Chap. 4 in this volume).

So far, we've named the qualities of focus group interviews which they share with other methods applied in qualitative research. Now let's look at aspects specific to FGIs. Above all, these aspects are related to the group nature of conducted interviews and the dynamics of group effects (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999; Stewart and Shamdasani 2015). The **group effects** taking place in interaction among respondents set, in large measure, the framework for application of the FGI method. They may pose a limitation determining the possibility to use FGIs in particular circumstances, but if taken advantage of consciously and competently, they become an asset and a very significant tool in the range of available research methods.

The group effects occurring during focus group interviews may be very different and depend largely on the selection of respondents, the theme of research, and the way the interviews are moderated. In order to have a good understanding of the specificity of FGIs, we'll take a closer look at the most important effects taking place during every focus group interview. These will include: mutual **stimulation** of respondents, and processes related to the group context of **shaping and revealing opinions**.

A group setting is, by its very nature, a strong **stimulus** for persons involved in such setting. It has a triple impact on the course of every interview. First of all, the effect of group stimulation increases the respondents' engagement in the research situation. Second, a well composed and moderated group may give its members a sense of safety, and thus facilitate the act of breaking the ice and opening oneself up during the interview. After all, in a group of people similar to us we feel safer, we are more willing to interact with each other and to share our thoughts and opinions. Such situation is much more mentally comfortable than a

"one-to-one" confrontation with an interviewer. Thus, it is then possible to encourage respondents to become more frank. Third, stimulation accumulates with each next response of those interviewed as part of a given research project. During an interview, respondents not only answer the moderator's questions, but they also listen to each other's answers and react to them in certain ways. Different opinions expressed by respondents stimulate other respondents to share their own thoughts—they inspire, they encourage the interviewed to confront their own views, to agree or disagree, to follow up on the opinion of the previous person, to weave own experience into the provided response. As a result, a mutual stimulation of respondents in a group setting boosts their memory, lets them recall and reveal thoughts that could otherwise remain untold, considered irrelevant, or simply forgotten.

The effects of stimulation achieved in a group setting make FGIs especially effective in sparking a discussion, encouraging respondents to share their opinions, to enter into an animated exchange of thoughts between each other and the moderator. This makes it possible to collect a big amount of information and gain a multifaceted insight into the issues subject to research.

The second group effect we will explore in more detail may seem a bit controversial when set in a research context. This concerns the processes of **crystallization of and mutual agreement on opinions in a group**.

The main issue related to the effect of agreeing on opinions is that the opinions obtained from individual respondents may not be treated as their own, independent opinions. This is because they are expressed in the context of a discourse imposed, as if, by a whole group. It is very likely that the interviewed, when asked the same question, say, a week before as part of a one-on-one interview, would respond to such question in a different way. Why is that? Because the effect of group stimulation lets respondents recall more of their own experience and then develop an opinion, take a stand in the course of discussion. Many research topics present respondents with questions they have never consciously asked themselves before. They have no ready, thought-out opinions until they have to face a discussion on a given topic for some reason. And such reason may be some everyday situation—like a party with a group of friends, or a necessity to make a decision that involves considering all arguments

for and against it. Only then we start discussing the new topic with others, looking for information, advice, consultation, and thus adopting an own stance on the matter. FGIs induce exactly such processes, and let us watch them proceed live. The phenomenon is an extremely important quality that makes FGIs differ from many other methods, and it is vital to take it into account whenever we intend to apply the FGI method in practice.

Group effects in the process of opinion crystallization work in two ways. On the one hand, they may lead to a uniformization, or standardization, of opinions. On the other, some controversies may appear, and any seemingly slight disagreements between respondents may acquire significance. Very much depends on the imposed context of research—the topic subject to research, the selection of respondents, and the methods of moderation. It's important to bear in mind that the goal of a discussion taking place during an FGI is *not* to reach unanimity in the group. The moderator's role is to assure respondents that they have the right to their own opinions, which may differ from those of others. But it is always important to remember that even the most diverse opinions expressed during a focus group interview are influenced by the group context. This knowledge, however, should not lead us to a conviction that the answers obtained do not reflect the real opinions of the interviewed respondents. After all, every opinion—that is, not just that expressed as part of a research project—is shaped in a social context.

The effects we've referred to above are even more visible in the case of topics which are highly prone to social influence, and in situations when respondents participate in FGIs without pre-crystallized opinions, and face new issues, challenges, and problems only during the interview. These can include some unexpected, ambiguous questions they have not asked themselves before, or a confrontation with an unknown stimulus or matter (some concept, idea, visual content) they have not considered yet and thus have not formed any opinion thereon.

It is reasonable to point to one more consequence of application of the FGI method. FGI involves, in fact, a smaller focus on a single respondent, and a larger on a group as a whole—together with a full context of the processes taking place within it. This context may not be ever ignored or omitted at the level of result analysis and interpretation. It is also very

significant to research design. Drawing conclusions from a study conducted in a single group may turn out to be misleading, that's why it's good to take a closer look at processes occurring in at least several independent groups.

5.3 What Does a Focus Group Interview Look Like?

The next few pages will cover issues related to **the structure of research** and **research samples**, and to **the selection of respondents** within particular groups. We'll answer the question of what a **scenario** of an FGI should look like and what rules should be followed when designing one. Some attention will be also devoted to **the role and the function of the moderator** in the research process, and then we'll look at the features of a typical **focus studio**.

5.3.1 Research Planning: Research Sample and Respondent Selection

When discussing the issues related to group effects in FGIs, we've mentioned that in the case of such research projects, the unit of focus is not only a single respondent, but a whole focus group, perhaps even to a greater extent. According to the prevailing research methodology, drawing general conclusions on the basis of a single observation is illegitimate. Following this line of thought, a focus group interview should comprise more than one focus group as well. The question is then: how many?

Like in the case of every study, when planning an FGI, we have to bear in mind the goal that drives our efforts. This goal will determine **the number and the structure of focus groups** featured in our research project.

A point of departure for a well-designed research project involves determining the questions we want to be answered and those who may provide us with answers to these questions. In other words, we need to determine the population we will engage to investigate our research problem. Do we want to explore the environment of employees of a certain

enterprise, of parents of young children, or of people who intend to purchase a life insurance policy in the nearest future?

The next step is to think how homogenous the group of our interest is. It's all about similarities. Does this group consist of people of similar age, of similar status, using a similar language, following a similar line of thought, sharing similar views? If we notice that our population features groups of people who differ from others in a way that may disturb harmonious communication as part of a group discussion, we should plan separate meetings for each of such subgroups. And what qualities could hinder the said harmonious communication? Quite prosaic ones, in fact, like big differences regarding one's material status or age, which translate into different experience and views of respondents, and make it difficult for discussion participants to treat each other on equal terms. Another quality that diversifies the population of our interest may be the preidentified attitudes to the issues raised as part of our research project. If, for instance, we want to understand the attitude of mothers towards bottle feeding and breast feeding, it's good to consider arranging separate focus groups with those who've chosen both options.

It's also important to ask oneself if it's actually reasonable to include both women and men in a given discussion session. This depends largely on the research topic, and on such factors like the age of respondents. It's very difficult to encourage teenagers included in a mixed group to behave naturally and present their own—real—opinions. Intensification of processes related to self-presentation and competition in such groups is especially significant. In many cases, holding a discussion in a mixed group is very reasonable, though.

The last thing we should take into consideration when planning the number and the structure of our focus groups is location. And again, this will depend much on the research questions we intend to ask as part of our project, and on the framework we've set for the population we subject to research. If we want to interview employees of one company, seated in one city, all of our discussion sessions will take place in one location, of course. But if the studied population is characterized by a broader geographical range and is dispersed across the whole country, our research should take place in several locations. The number of these locations will depend on the specificity of the studied group and topic. Should we conduct

our FGIs in big cities and small towns? Or maybe in the countryside as well? Is geographical diversity of any importance in this case? Can we expect that the views on the matter we wish to explore will differ depending on the part of the country? All these issues will determine the final number of focus groups we will include in our research project.

We already know that there should be more than one group and that it will be possible to determine the exact number thereof once we take all the differences within the population of our interest into account. But it's also important to remember that a too large number of focus groups within a single research project may be, in fact, pointless as well. Regardless of the range of diversity within our subgroups, we don't obtain any new information at some point, and the findings from each next group interview simply confirm our previous conclusions. So when does that happen? It's hard to give a precise and definite answer to every research project. In most cases, a range between four and eight groups is sufficient to give us a sense of the most effectively designed research process—depending on the project, the set objectives and research questions, and the population subject to research.

So how to limit a research project to several focus groups when the population we intend to study is big and diverse? Let's take a look at Example 5.1 to find out.

Example 5.1 Planning the Structure of a Focused Group Interview

Research objective: To understand the significance of computer games in the life of gamers against other pastimes and ways to spend free time

Studied population: gamers

The following specific subgroups have been distinguished as part of the studied population:

- Teenagers—boys, aged 15–19
- Teenagers—girls, aged 15–19
- Young men, aged 20–30
- Young women, aged 20–30

Also, the following have been considered significant traits differentiating the traits of research subjects:

- the amount of time they spend playing computer games (moderate gamers—a couple of hours per week; ardent gamers—ten hours per week and more)
- the location—big city versus small town

The structure of the research project has been designed as follows:

	Big city	Small town
Teenagers—boys	1 FGI with moderate gamers	1 FGI with ardent gamers
Teenagers—girls	1 FGI with ardent gamers	1 FGI with moderate gamers
Young men	1 FGI with ardent gamers	1 FGI with moderate gamers
Young women	1 FGI with moderate gamers	1 FGI with ardent gamers

In total: 8 FGIs

As stated in the introduction, a **sample** in qualitative research is not representative in the statistical sense. Instead, we tend to use purposive samples, sampled according to the assumed qualities our respondents are to represent (Barbour 2007). The idea is not to aim for a broad representation of the studied population, but rather to select its typical representatives. For instance, if we want to organize a study among mothers of kindergarten-aged children, we'll probably concentrate on women aged 25–35. This does not mean that there are no such mothers among a bit younger or slightly older women, but the majority of them is within this age range, and so it is this group that will represent the attitudes typical of kindergarten-aged kids' mothers best.

The case is different when we have reasonable doubts that some even small subgroup of the population of our interest may demonstrate disparate opinions, attitudes, behavioral patterns, judgments, or motivation, and we still find it important to investigate them because of our research objectives. If we decide that the opinions of kindergarten-aged kids' mothers from rural areas will be of crucial significance to us, we need to include them in our research project as well despite the fact that, statistically speaking, there are fewer children attending the kindergarten among kids living in the countryside than among those from towns and cities.

After we design the research plan, that is, determine the number and the structure of the focus groups we intend to study, together with the assigned characteristics, we should see to the right **selection of respondents** as part of each group. A standard number of respondents participating in a single discussion is between six and ten, with eight being a quite frequent quantity.[1] Such group size enables the group effects we've covered earlier manifest themselves in full, and grants respondents a sense of safety. At the same time, a group of such number of respondents is still small enough to let us maintain a coherent course of discussion, to let the moderator control it, and to let each of respondents take the floor.

In general, it's worth pointing to two principles of respondent selection, which should be followed in the case of all focus group interviews. First, it's important to invite people who are not afraid to speak in public, who are not uncomfortable with sharing their opinions or unfolding their true thoughts. They should be confident, outgoing, sociable, and have no problems with expressing themselves or establishing relations. In order for an FGI to run properly, it's therefore necessary to reject people who are reserved, unwilling to express and share their opinions, or particularly prone to peer pressure at the stage of recruitment. The second principle of selection of respondents to a focus group involves excluding people representing an opposite model of social behavior, that is, individuals who are particularly dominant, effective and ruthless in imposing their opinions upon others, closed to dialogue, unwilling to listen to others and to opinions they don't agree with.

There are many survey-type tools that let us measure the level of one's openness and communicativeness, and the level of their susceptibility to group influence. It's possible to take advantage of such tools at the stage of recruitment in order to arrange the group in a way to make it active and involved in the research process. We can achieve the same effect using softer measures as well, by, for example, conducting a conscious, comprehensive interview with a given potential respondent.

The aim of a well thought-out selection of respondents as part of each focus group is to ensure the right conditions to have a free, open discussion involving equal participation of all participants. Apart from the abovementioned principles, it's also important to make sure that the selected respondents are strangers to each other. If a group features, say, a

couple of friends or acquaintances, this leads to a natural formation of an "alliance" between such persons, who may demonstrate communication on a level inaccessible to other respondents. Such situation breaches the principle of equality of all participants, and disturbs the harmonious course of discussion to a great extent.

5.3.2 Scenario of an FGI and the Role of the Moderator

A **scenario** of an FGI serves as material to accompany moderators in their work, which they may use in the course of the moderated discussion as a guide or a "checklist". It is a summary of the planned sequence of discussion, and indicates the order of the topics to be brought up. It also includes the most important questions that need to be asked during the discussion, and the estimate time frames for each topic or thematic block. The total duration of a single focus group interview is within one and a half to two hours, but when drawing up the scenario for our interview, we should bear in mind that it's necessary to plan a margin of at least 15 extra minutes.

In order for a scenario to be useful for the moderator, its form should not be too complex. It should be composed of key words and phrases, developed as a clear list of items, and take one to three pages. It doesn't have to include precise formulations of all questions that will appear during the interview. An FGI scenario is only a framework for the interview, helping the moderator keep order and keep the discussion on track. It's good when it reflects some logical sequence, taking the discussion from more general issues to more specific ones.

The role of the moderator is to conduct the discussion according to the planned scenario. It's the moderator who is to make sure to formulate certain questions in a way understandable to respondents and according to their line of thought within particular general topics that may be raised. When putting questions, moderators usually draw on what they have already heard in the interview—they use expressions and phraseology used by the respondents with reference to the discussed matters. Also, they adjust the level of discourse to the group's capabilities and dynamism

related to certain subtle factors like, for instance, the level of tiredness at a given moment of the interview.

Being open to the language used by respondents, moderators decide when it is necessary to explain certain notions in more detail, and to specify or explore a given topic further. They may ask additional questions or elaborate on issues not included in the scenario if they consider it important from the point of view of the objectives of a given research project. The tools a moderator may take advantage of to channel the discussion in a certain direction are not questions only. Their verbal and non-verbal reactions to respondents' statements are just as important because they might enhance or suppress particular threads. Moderators may encourage or embolden certain respondents by, say, only nodding or glancing at them. Using a recapitulative paraphrase, moderators can enhance a selected thread of the discussion and make it an incentive stimulating respondents to further statements.

The choice of whether to explore certain threads of a discussion in more detail or to suppress and abandon them remains strictly related to the moderator's responsibility for keeping the set time frames. The moderator can take advantage of a certain flexibility within the set time frames when it comes to time planned for particular thematic blocks. But they have to maintain the right proportions and make sure to achieve the goals set in the scenario within the expected time. An occasional consent to give respondents quite considerable leeway in expressing their opinions often forces the moderator to limit any off-topic threads that do not follow the direction in conformity with the objectives of the research project.

Another challenge moderators need to face during interviews involves modeling the group effects taking place during the conducted interviews. The main goal is to ensure respondents a sense of safety and comfort, and to create an atmosphere of openness, encouraging them to share their views. The moderator may also—consciously—strengthen or weaken the occurring stimulation effects, for example, by taking advantage of projection techniques or by conducting the discussion in a skillful manner. Another important thing to be taken care of by moderators is making sure that the group benefits from communicative harmony, reached by means of containing the most dominant individuals and boosting the most reserved ones. A tool to stimulate respondents in expressing and

justifying their opinions, and to make them resistant to an excessive group influence may include requesting them to note down one's standpoint before the discussion starts. It's worth taking advantage of such a tool when, for instance, the research object is the reaction to some proposal made by the moderator to the respondents—an advert, a concept, a description of some project. When asked to note their views down on the spot, respondents are forced to take an initial stand on a given matter. It may change in the course of the discussion, but it will still act as a point of reference preventing them from becoming too much influenced by others or from backing out. A respondent with an opinion that is much different from the opinions of others will be less likely not to mention it if they have it written down in front of them.

Similar effects may be achieved through various types of homework given sometimes to respondents invited to take part in research. Such homework may take on the form of journals or diaries documenting their personal experience in a given area, collages, photo records, or written compositions. They aim to prepare research participants to a discussion by inducing them to give thought to some topics, to self-observation, to summarize one's experience, and to form an opinion about a given topic. Moreover, they grant some insight into individual opinions, not affected by group effects.

5.3.3 Inside a Focus Studio

Focus studios can usually be found in all big cities and many smaller ones across the country. The most important elements of a focus studio are a focus room and an observation room, and the essential equipment includes devices to record the discussion and other appliances that may be useful in the course of the research project.[2]

FGI discussions are held in a focus room with a centrally placed table surrounded with chairs. Respondents sit at the table, and the moderator takes a seat at the head of the table—in order to maintain eye contact with all those present, but remain still a bit "detached" from the group.

The equipment recording the discussions conducted in the focus room (a camera and microphones) should not be hidden, but it's good to make its presence in the room inconspicuous so that it doesn't attract the respondents' attention too much.

The recording of the course of all discussions held as part of a given FGI is a raw record of the research result. It is not only the most important form of documentation, but also a basis for further interpretation and formulation of research conclusions. Discussion recordings are then transcripted (spoken content represented in writing) and used as input for an in-depth analysis, taking what particular respondents have said exactly into account.

Other useful elements of equipment of a focus room include a *flipchart* and a TV set with a DVD player. A well-equipped focus room should offer also a multimedia projector and a display unit. Systems that make it possible to fix visual aids to the walls (boards, posters, photos, *flipchart* sheets) should come in handy as well. Also, it's good if the focus room's decor is rather inviting, homelike, and casual. This facilitates breaking communication barriers and makes it easier to interact with respondents at a deeper, more intimate and familiar level.

A very important feature of a focus studio is a one-way mirror. If looked at from the focus room where the discussion is held, it looks like a regular, although very big, mirror, covering usually almost the whole width of one of the walls. On the other side of such mirror, however, there is a room with a separate entrance, known as observation room. When the light in such observation room is off, the mirror viewed from the focus room is totally non-transparent, which makes it impossible to see the observation room behind it. Effective soundproofing prevents those present inside the focus room from hearing anything coming from the observation room.

If we look at the mirror from the observation room, it will be fully transparent, letting us see what happens in the focus room. A typical observation room comes also with an audio system that transmits the input signal from microphones placed in the focus room and lets observers follow the course of the discussion taking place.

An advantage of conducting FGIs in a studio with a one-way mirror is the possibility to have another observer, apart from the moderator, follow the course of the research project. Such person doesn't have to focus on moderating the discussion, but instead may devote their attention to following the course thereof taking a back seat, so to speak. This privileged

position lets this person notice certain phenomena, threads, and nuances in respondents' behavior that may escape the moderator's attention. This way, the final conclusions drawn from the research project gain a more in-depth perspective, and many relevant details are brought to light.

An additional observer may take notes on an on-going basis, which may later become a source of data to support the following analysis of the course of the discussion. Such person may also supervise the moderator's work, providing them with hints or guidelines on the way to conduct the discussion and to work with the group.

A focus room and an observation room together with a one-way mirror between them are the most important features of a focus studio. In practice, however, not all research projects give researchers the convenience to use a professional focus studio. In the case of small towns and villages, it is necessary to take into account the eventuality of a need to conduct FGIs in makeshift focus studios, adapted to one's research project for the occasion. Such makeshift studios may be arranged, for instance, in schools, community centers, or restaurants. The course of the discussion is then recorded with a portable camera set on a tripod, and if it's necessary to have a live view, the recorded content may be transmitted and displayed on a display unit placed in a separate room. Still, such solution is much less convenient than working in a real focus studio.

5.4 What's the Purpose of Focus Group Interviews?

A loosely structured, free interview with a margin for further exploration of various threads is the right solution in situations where we want **to understand** the behavior of respondents, **to gain insight** into their motives and the ways they form their views and opinions, and make certain decisions. FGIs find application also in challenges related to research **exploration** of a given topic. Apart from understanding of a given matter, focus group interviews provide us with knowledge of the possible spectrum of attitudes, views, opinions, or behaviors in the field of our interest.

FGIs are invaluable also when we're not sure if we use the same conceptual apparatus as our respondents. The specificity of a focus group interview lets the moderator listen and adapt to the language used by the interviewed, and to specify the content and the scope of notions in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

The exploratory nature of FGIs makes them often combined into broader research processes involving application of, for instance, quantitative research (see Examples 5.2 and 5.3).

Example 5.2 Focus Group Interview as an Exploratory Phase Before Quantitative Research

Research objective: To understand the way in which decisions related to car purchasing are made.

Exploratory phase (FGI): gathering as broad a catalogue of decision-making strategies and factors taken into account as possible.

Quantitative measurement phase: checking the frequency of consideration of particular dimensions identified as part of FGIs, checking who exactly (women/men, older/younger people, buyers of costlier/cheaper cars) takes these dimensions into consideration, and what's the hierarchy of the decision-making factors.

Example 5.3 Focus Group Interview as a Deeper View into Quantitative Research

Research objective: To gain a deeper understanding of the values represented by two biggest segments of buyers of life insurance policies.

Quantitative phase: segmentation of life insurance policy buyers based on differences with respect to their attitudes towards family, safety, and the future.

In-depth phase (FGI): focus group interviews conducted separately with representatives of the two biggest segments. The scenario of the discussion concentrates on life values represented by respondents—on what they find important, what motivates them in life, and what dilemmas they face. The moderator tries to get the respondents use examples from their lives to illustrate the covered issues. What does safety mean exactly for this group? If they think about the future, how distant is it for them? What vision of their future do they see?

We have already mentioned the exploratory function of FGIs before quantitative studies and the function of delving into the findings obtained as a result of quantitative research in more detail. Yet, focus group interviews may—and this happens in most cases—provide us with autonomous answers to research questions. These questions will correspond to the specificity of focus group interviews, as described at the beginning of the chapter.

Let's recall the two most important qualities that characterize focus group interviews. First of all, such interviews are free and in-depth. This quality makes FGIs able to give answers to questions about how people make choices and judgments, about the motivation behind their behavior, about the role of different values in their life, and about the associations, or metaphors, they can think of.

Free and in-depth nature of interviews aside, the second quality of FGIs that makes them different from other approaches is about the group processes occurring among respondents. These processes determine not only the specificity of the method, but also the scope of application thereof compared to other qualitative approaches.

Processes of mutual stimulation of respondents predestine the FGI method to **exploratory purposes**, create a space to investigate **phenomena which are not usually subject to a more in-depth reflection or which are hard to verbalize**, or which trigger **creativity** in respondents.

The stimulation effects taking place during focus group interviews work in favor of exploratory purposes in that they let the moderator minimize their participation in the course of the discussion, and—more importantly—limit any acts of forcing or defining notions to a great extent. The moderator's concentration on listening to respondents, on discerning the threads they suggest, and on encouraging them to elaborate on particular issues in the further course of the discussion may result in situations where the moderator is as if guided through the respondents' line of thought on a given matter.

This aspect of FGIs finds application wherever the research objective involves identifying those aspects of respondents' world that remain unknown, unspecified for the researcher, especially when the essence is to identify and standardize the conceptual apparatus used by the respondents, or to recreate their line of thought on a particular subject.

Another area of possibilities related to application of FGIs thanks to the occurrence of the effect of mutual stimulation among respondents involves an opportunity to reach for tools referred to commonly as **projection techniques**.[3] These are techniques for moderating interviews, which grant access to non-verbalized meanings and content represented by research subjects in the way they perceive reality. Their common quality is that they invite research subjects to a certain game, and encourage them to express themselves—but not point-blank, but based on associations, metaphors, images. These techniques operate on a different communication level than a rational discussion based on facts and arguments, and thus require opening oneself to a more playful convention. Respondents are encouraged to spin some made-up stories, create collages, come up with puns, and to engage in many other seemingly frivolous activities. But getting respondents communicate using the said techniques, for instance, during individual interviews becomes often very difficult because they are afraid of abandoning the role of a serious, competent respondent. Thanks to group stimulation during FGIs, application of some of these techniques is much easier and produces much better results. They find application wherever we strive to reach matters pushed by respondents beyond the current discourse, or issues which have not been fully verbalized—impressions, emotions, aspects related to image, and so on.

The group effects taking place during a discussion, related to the formation of respondents' opinion, make focus group interviews perfect for answering questions about **the processes of development of opinions and about the impact of the social context thereon**. Even a single discussion may be a miniature illustration of the course of such processes, and it may be analyzed as such exactly (in the context of a larger number of discussions making up the whole research project).

This does not mean that on a scale of a single group, isolated from a broader social context, these processes will proceed just like in reality. Still, observation of processes of crystallization of opinions in FGIs is valuable in that it lets us explore the type of arguments that respondents turn to. We learn what's important for them, what they pay attention to,

and what they base their opinions on. We can see how different points of view confront each other, which of them tend to take hold, and which of them tend to be abandoned when affected by the discussion. What arguments can change one's opinion?

Even if the said processes are much more complex in reality, monitoring their dynamics occurring in a laboratory microscale setting paves the way to the understanding of what factors impact the final effect and how this impact takes place. Understanding of these processes is of great significance not only to research where we intend to **predict the development of certain opinions or attitudes** but also to studies aimed at providing us with **guidelines on the way to influence** them (see Example 5.4).

Despite the great cognitive value of the aforesaid discursive aspect of FGIs, there are situations when researchers aim to get to know isolated, individual opinions of particular respondents, and any group effects taking place may seem a contraindication against turning to the method in question. Two most important circumstances that could possibly limit the utility of FGIs include an insignificant social influence on the development of opinions and attitudes in the area of the conducted research,

Example 5.4 Studying the Way an Opinion Is Shaped in a Group Context

Research objective: To check if a new TV commercial may reach a "cult" status among older teenagers.

The study involves recruiting teenagers who are considered significant social influencers in their environment—popular among their peers, interested in innovation, often setting various trends among their friends and acquaintances. The moderator shows them the commercial and then watches their reactions, encouraging them to talk about the presented content, focusing on elements that are especially attractive, funny, or awkward, embarrassing, "cringeworthy", or "cheesy". The moderator pays close attention to the process of crystallization of opinions and to any changes in these opinions, concentrating on elements which determine the impression of the commercial as a whole to the largest extent (some particular scene? character? music?).

and situations when it is more crucial to explore not the way in which opinions are developed, but rather the way a given issue is interpreted or understood by individuals.

We deal with the former when we work with topics that are hardly ever discussed with other people, and therefore are of little subjective significance to respondents. Do we ever talk about the qualities of toilet paper with our friends? Do we ever look for advice on what type of toilet paper to choose? If not, then the group effects observed during an FGI will most likely not take place in real-life conditions, and will remain only a phenomenon induced by research setting. Nevertheless, the stimulation value of a group discussion, letting respondents recall things of little significance, may help us get to content that would be really hard to reach otherwise.

The latter of the said circumstances is about situations where the research objective is to check how respondents understand a given issue, with less attention paid to their opinions and judgments. In such cases, if one person from a given group is able to deliver a convincing argument and explanation, this may be enough for others to accept this person's point of view without any major objections. But that does not mean that they would gain such a clear view of the situation without the "prompt" of the said person. The issue in question may arise in research where the object of the research involves, for instance, checking the clarity of some message, the way the message of some advertising or outreach campaign is understood, or the way a given offer is understood.

We should add one more situation where it's worth considering using a different method than FGI to the abovementioned two. This situation involves research covering **very personal, intimate topics** related to issues which are not easy to share in a group discussion among strangers. In such circumstances, turning to focus group interviews is inadvisable because of the artificiality of the situation, due to difficulties in breaking the ice and starting an open and frank group conversation, and—finally—because of the significant distortion of findings resulting from the occurrence of group effects, having a suppressing impact in such case, and enhancing the role of self-presentation for particular needs.

5.5 Types of Focus Group Interviews

We have discussed the outline of the focus group interview method in its most classic form. To end our discussion, we'll take a look at a couple of most important variants of the method in question. They will be marked by departures from the already outlined principles of conducting focus group interviews and by special purposes or circumstances justifying turning to particular types of this method. For the needs of this chapter, we will be using as general names of particular variants of the method in question as possible, ones that are used most commonly in the industry. Still, it's quite important to bear in mind that many of these FGI variants can be found featured in offers of many research agencies under various other names, which is to suggest that a given offered method is original and unique.

A typical duration of a single discussion held as part of a standard focus group interview is one and a half to two hours. There are exceptions to this, though. It may occur that a given research project is to serve a quite simple objective, one that does not require a multi-layered discussion, but involves just a quick opinion poll or observation of respondents' reactions to presented content. In such circumstances, a single discussion may take as little as half an hour. Such discussion sessions are called ***brief groups***, which reflects the brief and limited nature of the discussion. The method finds application in pilot studies conducted before quantitative research, when the goal is to check how respondents understand the questions featured in the questionnaire, and what significance they attribute to the possible answers. In such case, it is less important to explore a given topic or to understand the motivation behind respondents' interpretations than to check the appropriateness of the applied tool.

In practice, however, *brief groups* are quite rare and tend to show significant disadvantages. Even in the case of such short meeting with respondents we should not skip the preliminary stage of discussion, involving providing an overview of the situation, introducing participants, breaking the ice, and ensuring the respondents a sense of safety. Such introduction and warm-up activities rarely take less than ten minutes, with fifteen minutes being the most common standard, and have a

great significance to establishing a bond with the group. This leaves around 15–20 minutes for an actual discussion on the core topic.

But the opposite case, when the research topic is so extensive and complex that it's difficult to achieve the set research objectives within the standard two hours, is much more frequent. This is when we may turn to the so-called **extended groups**. They differ from the standard FGI model in the much extended duration of a single discussion. In the case of this type of FGI, such discussion may last even three to four hours, with even longer duration values occurring as well.

Extended groups pose a particular challenge to moderators. They also have to be organized in especially comfortable conditions in order for the research to be effective. Respondents need to be provided with beverages and snacks, and sometimes also with a hot meal. It's also necessary to make regular breaks. Also, the moderator needs to plan the discussion very carefully so that it is both engaging and stimulating to its participants, and not too intense or demanding at the same time. Apart from the said breaks, it's also necessary to have some moments to relax and unwind, to let the research subjects recharge their batteries a bit.

Another parameter of the FGI method that may be modified as part of different types thereof is the number of respondents taking part in a single discussion, which can be both smaller and bigger than the "industry standard".

In the case of discussions involving participation of a lower number of respondents, we can talk about **mini-groups** (*mini FGIs*). A single mini-group may be composed of, say, four respondents. Such group focuses on the group process to a bit smaller extent, finds it easier to concentrate, and cooperates with the moderator more effectively in some cases. An indication to conduct our research in mini-groups may be the topic of the research, but also the specificity of the studied group. If, for example, we want to study the population of selected specialists from a given industry, then gathering eight persons together and engaging them in an equal, conflict-free discussion might appear quite difficult. Mini-groups work also very well in studies involving participation of children. In practice, however, the solution is selected often because of financial considerations.

Discussions held with a larger number of respondents are quite rare because of the difficulties related to moderation and the low effectiveness of cooperation in more numerous groups. Even if certain circumstances require engaging a bigger number of respondents as part of a single discussion for any reason, the number of those involved should not be larger than twelve. Such a number of discussion participants poses a great challenge to the moderator already, the discussion itself becomes fragmented into minor threads, and the time granted to each participant to answer the set questions gets reduced significantly.

The solution that makes working with such numerous groups easier involves the **presence of two moderators**. Then, after a joint introduction and warm-up, a part of the interview may be conducted in two subgroups at the same time. This requires, of course, availability of another room to accommodate a part of respondents with one of the two moderators. Good communication and effective cooperation of both moderators is crucial to such type of FGIs. They should have the same understanding of the research objective and agree on the means and measures to be implemented to pursue it. The interview scenario and the moderation techniques should be the same for both subgroups. After the phase of separate work ends, it is necessary to get both subgroups together and confront the outcomes of the discussions held separately. Moderators need to pay attention to the thoughts, observations, and arguments appearing in each of the groups. They may be jotted down on a *flipchart* and juxtaposed after the two subgroups are joined back together. The important thing is to check what reactions the presented content provokes among the respondents, how the summarizing discussion of the whole group develops, what appears to be surprising or controversial, and what views tend to lead to unanimity. The said phase of recapitulation requires an appropriate amount of time so as not to restrain any potential discussion that may take place, including a margin for elaborating on the issues that can be raised.

Other FGI modifications pertain to the way of selecting respondents as part of a single discussion. As mentioned before, the traditional approach underlines it is important that individual respondents be strangers to each other. But there is an FGI method variant called ***affinity group***. Discussions held in *affinity groups* involve participation of people

who are acquainted with each other in some way. They are usually conducted in groups of friends, acquaintances, or family members. In special cases, they may also involve a gathering of colleagues. Such selection of respondents guarantees a more casual, comfortable atmosphere of interview, gives discussion participants a greater sense of safety, and allows a more open discussion in many cases. It is then possible to bring up more personal matters, and to discuss things on a deeper level. The communication barriers in such groups are lower than in groups composed of strangers. Respondents often understand one another almost instantly, they have shared memories and experience and can refer thereto when looking for examples. What's more, there are certain effects taking place in such groups that will never occur in groups composed of people not familiar with each other. From a researcher's point of view, mechanisms regulating self-presentation may turn out to be the most important of them. In *affinity groups*, respondents may not create their own image in a way that would differ too much from their everyday "profile", attitudes, or views. The presence of people respondents are familiar with makes them not only comment on and supplement or finish each other's statements but also control—or curb—them in a certain way.

Affinity groups find particular application in situations when we're interested in aspects related to the social functioning of our research subjects in a certain area. An example of a research objective that would benefit from conducting the research project in affinity groups can be studying the ways in which young people spend their free time when they're out of/away from home, or the ways in which families decide on their holiday destinations.

The occurrence of additional effects taking place in a group of people acquainted with each other may appear to act against the researcher's intentions in the case of some topics. The behavior of particular respondents during a discussion in an *affinity group* and the resulting processes of opinion shaping will be both quite different than in the case of a group of strangers. The structure of such group before the research, and especially the relationships between its members, will be also significant. This will result in, for example, situations where opinions and statements of group leaders will be enhanced and given more credit only because of their position, not because of the force of argument. And so, the observed

processes of opinion shaping in the course of the discussion will be distorted due to the context of a given group to a much greater extent than in the case of a standard FGI.

The second limitation to application of the method of *affinity groups* concerns the raised subject matter. There are issues which respondents feel more comfortable with and are therefore ready to be more honest with and open to strangers, maintaining partial anonymity. For example, a conversation about marital problems in a group of female friends may turn out to be a play or a continuation of an everyday effort to create an illusion of a happy family life, or something quite opposite—a ritual of complaining about husbands. The convention of talking about such topics in such group is most likely already established and departing from it may be very difficult in such setting. Like in any other case, selection of the method and a given type thereof needs to match the research objectives, the subject matter of the research, the specificity of the group of our interest, and other research considerations.

Another type of FGIs, assuming a special selection of respondents, is about working with and in **clash groups**. The specificity of *clash groups* involves organizing a single discussion in a group of respondents half of which present a standpoint opposite to that of the other half. Depending on the objective and subject matter of research, the differentiating factor may be an opinion, an attitude, a certain modus operandi, or a brand preference. Respondents may be asked to think their stand through as part of a homework before the planned meeting. It is also possible to give them some time to do this during the discussion. Next, each fraction will work in a smaller group, formulating their standpoint and trying to name and list arguments to motivate and support it. The moderator's role is to make sure that both fractions are fully able to present their standpoint together with argumentation, and create the right conditions for a confrontation of both argumentations. The discussion may be organized then in the form of an Oxford-style debate.

Clash groups are a useful solution if we want to gain a deeper and clearer insight into the motivation of our research subjects, to understand their standpoints, and to explore their argumentation in more detail. The specificity of this method involves "sharpening" the presented views and opinions, which should make them clearer and more understandable to

the researcher. In addition to that, the aspect of rivalry related to polarization within one group translates into a very high level of involvement of respondents.

This is where we should come back to **creative groups**, already referred to in this chapter earlier. Discussions in such groups involve selecting people of special creative potential, with the moderator taking advantage of techniques aiming to additionally boost this potential during each such discussion. Application of this method may lead to generation of new ideas for products, packaging, or communication addressed to the audience represented by the research subjects. In such case, it is important to determine the objectives of our project, to present them to our respondents accordingly, and to prepare for stimulating and channeling the discussion according to the expectations behind the research conducted in such form.

Research objective may also involve improving the already existing content and materials, or finalizing some unfinished projects—like packaging designs or product concepts. Given objectives of such type, it might be advisable to, once again, select respondents with a certain level of displayed creativity and readiness to engage in creative work with the material or content they may be provided with. In such circumstances, it could be good to take advantage of the potential offered by a method of conducting research following the principles of ***sequential recycling***. The method involves conducting a series of FGIs with intervals in the form of short workshops with the participation of the research ordering entity and persons working on a given matter or project. During individual FGI sessions, the abovementioned people follow the course of interviews from an observation room, drawing conclusions and insights from what they can see and hear on an on-going basis. Workshop sessions, in turn, involve a group discussion between observers, which is devoted to a summary of the drawn conclusions and insights. But the moderator's role in the discussion remains still significant. It's important to reach a consensus within a short period of time and to make the relevant decisions concerning modification of the presented materials for further discussions. The discussed designs are changed accordingly, and then shown to respondents once again after being modified and improved during the next discussion.

This method makes it possible not only to work out the final effect corresponding to the expectations of the research subjects, but also to test it preliminarily as part of the last discussions in a series. Carrying out a whole research project composed of a sequence of discussion and workshop sessions makes a given research project lead to a deeper understanding of the way the research subjects interpret and understand the tested material.

When conducting a research project based on *sequential recycling*, it is necessary to design the structure of the planned discussions in the right way, that is, by making sure that the profiles of the selected respondents do not differ too much. Acting according to the principle of not drawing conclusions from a single discussion, it's good to design our research in a way to allow for at least two discussions between the planned workshop sessions. In such case, each of these discussions may involve a bit different group of research subjects (for instance: older people and young people, women and men, or users of different brands).

In the case of the *sequential recycling* method, appropriate selection of observers is just as important as the right plan of discussions and workshops with the research project. After all, this has a decisive impact on the effectiveness of workshop sessions and on the quality of outcomes, which both determine the success of a given project. It is necessary to follow the same principles as in the case of arranging participant groups for any other workshop, trying to make the whole group composed of up to ten people. These people should be individuals involved in the process being the object of our research. They should also be competent and enjoy an authority that would be respected by other group members. To the extent possible, it is important to avoid situations where workshops involve participation of people tied to each other by a clear and direct professional relationship, or who remain under a clear informal influence of any of the members of a given group. Such relations hinder the effectiveness of cooperation and prevent some group members from getting involved. It's better to gather people of a similar status, but who also enjoy the trust and recognition of their superiors, and whose performance the said superiors are willing to accept. In fact, forming an ideal team of observers is rarely possible, but it's certainly worth making an effort to do so.

Lastly, we'll briefly cover one more variant of the FGI method, which involves changing the manner and the setting of conducting discussion sessions. This pertains to **online** discussions, conducted in the form of a moderated chat with respondents. The method seems to have many advantages: it's inexpensive and quick in implementation and—most of all—very convenient for researchers. Discussions are transcribed as they develop, so there's no need to listen back to any records. It is also possible to gather persons spread across different locations as part of one discussion, which solves the problem of any geographic distortion of findings. However, there is a number of certain drawbacks to this method, and only some of them can be eliminated thanks to the current advancement in information technology. At present, the major bars to taking full advantage of this method is the still limited access to the internet, the connection quality, and the general level of computer literacy. Even in the case of well-educated people who use the internet on an everyday basis, not all of them are able to type fast enough to take part in such online discussions. This translates into a problem related to equal participation in research since particular respondents will differ from one another most noticeably not in terms of the presented views and opinions, but in terms of the demonstrated level of communication competence. Also, when it comes to studies based on online discussions, moderators are very limited in the range of measures they can use to eliminate the said differences. But still, the biggest disadvantage of this method is the lack of direct interaction between discussion participants. This strips this method of many features and qualities that make FGIs so valuable. The moderator has no view of the sphere of non-verbal communication. The group dynamics is disturbed as well. It seems that even if any of the current technical issues are solved, the abovementioned limitations will make FGIs remain organized still mainly in the form of meetings based on direct interaction in focus studios.

5.6 Conclusions: How to Make a Focus Group Interview Successful

Let us summarize the most important points of this chapter in the form of a short guide on how to make a focus group interview successful. First, we will need to determine the objective of our research and set the

research questions. Let's think about the significance of group processes and of individual opinions of our respondents to our objectives. At this stage, it will be necessary to decide if the FGI method is the best approach to be implemented as part of our project.

Second, still bearing our research objectives and questions in mind, we'll need to select the most appropriate variant of the method. Should we take advantage of standard focus group interviews, or maybe of some special type thereof? This way we build the framework for specific tasks, starting from determining the research population and then the research sample. How much do our respondents differ from each other? What groups are of interest to us? How should we divide these groups? We answer these questions planning the number and the structure of our groups. Before we commence our research project, we need to compose our research samples of the right mix of respondents. Our respondents should be people who not only meet the recruitment criteria, but who are also open and communicative, able to take active part in a group discussion, and displaying a balanced level of dominance and acquiescence towards their interlocutors. We should also make sure that the discussion scenario has been designed as necessary. It's also important to select the right moderation techniques, that is, ones that will let us pursue our research objectives best.

Finally, when we're already at the stage of interpreting research findings and forming conclusions, we need to remember to consider all individual answers of our respondents in the context of the whole discussion and of the group they have been given in.

Notes

1. There's been a trend to depart from large focus groups as of late, with six-person groups becoming an industry standard, so to speak.
2. In some cases it may be advisable to conduct the FGI in another venue, not a focus studio. For examples, see Bloor et al. 2001.
3. The notion of "projection techniques" is used commonly with reference to a broad spectrum of stimulation techniques used in moderating focus group interviews. They aim to stimulate respondents to produce deeper, less conventional statements and to make it easier for them to convey content that is difficult to verbalize, such as emotions, impressions, metaphors,

or elusive associations. Examples include techniques such as “collage” or “personification”. It is important, however, to stress that despite the commonly applied nomenclature, these are not projection techniques in psychological terms. They do not offer an actual insight into the sphere of the subconscious of research subjects, and interpretation of findings is made on the basis of explanations provided by research subjects themselves, usually without any external key (see: Maison 2001).

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6

The Repertory Grid Technique

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6.1 Introduction

The Repertory Grid Technique is perhaps more often mentioned in organizational research than the Theory of Personal Constructs from which it has been derived. This separation of method from theory can potentially lead to the misuse of the technique, a misinterpretation of the results, or simply the creation of a mutated version of the Repertory Grid. George Kelly, who created Personal Construct Psychology, was said to regret ever introducing the Repertory Grid Technique since in many cases the theory was overshadowed or pushed aside by its offspring, the technique itself.

This chapter will introduce the reader to the theory behind the Repertory Grid, the basic procedure of Grid elicitation, and an overview

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_6

of its possible applications as well as some examples of the Repertory Grid in organizational research.

6.2 Personal Construct Psychology

Personal Construct Psychology, PCP, developed by George Kelly and described in his two-volume work (Kelly 1955), can be difficult to position in relation to other theories of personality and psychology. Kelly originally trained as an educational sociologist and developed an interest in psychology later in his career. Despite having studied psychology to PhD level, he reported a lot of disappointment with the theories he was presented with. He openly criticized Freud, stimulus-response psychology, and many other approaches in the field and later rejected various notions such as ego, motivation, unconscious, or need, as used by other authors. The Psychology of Personal Constructs that he developed presented a wholly new approach to viewing people and psychology. Kelly proposed to adopt a notion of the person as scientist, which would form the basis of his theory.

> When we speak of *man-the-scientist* we are speaking of all mankind and not merely a particular class of men who have publicly attained the stature of 'scientists'. We are speaking of all mankind in its scientist-like aspects. (Kelly 1955/1991, p. 4)

According to Kelly's view, our psychological processes and functioning are driven by behaviors which are aimed at performing experiments in order to improve our prediction and control of certain human phenomena. The way in which we view and interpret the experiments we engage in, and the resulting events, is determined by the transparent patterns or templates which we create. These patterns are used in our attempt to interpret and predict the realities of which the world is composed. Kelly called these patterns *personal constructs*. They are used by individuals to construe the world and chart a course of behavior. Unfortunately, the fit between our constructs and the world surrounding us is not always perfect. Hence, we always seek to improve our constructs by altering them

and increasing their *repertory*, that is, their variety and scope in order to achieve a better fit between our construct system and the realities that surround us.

Kelly had a very clear ontological and epistemological stance and his theory is firmly located within the philosophy of constructivism. The world out there is real; the world in here is equally real; and one's psychology is defined by the way in which one maps the inside onto the outside. Therefore, Kelly's theory centers around a process of sensemaking, how we acquire our knowledge and come to know what we know and how we live out this knowledge. The tools that were developed by Kelly, the Repertory Grid being one of them, were therefore created as means for understanding other's personal constructs, coming very much from the perspective of a constructivist epistemology.

It is important, in a collection of essays on qualitative method, to make a crucial distinction between mode of expression and epistemology, if we are to understand Kelly's contribution. A qualitative analysis provides information in terms of the meaning of events to the people who experience them, while a quantitative analysis provides information about the relative frequency of those events. 'Qualitative' and 'quantitative' are different modes of expression that exist within distinct realms of discourse: but they are *not* necessarily mutually exclusive in the methods one uses in research.

The most numerate and quantitative analysis (say, a factor analysis or principal components analysis) has its qualitative phase, which occurs when the researcher must *name* the factors that have been identified from the variables being analyzed: this is an act of qualitative meaning ascription. Similarly, the most qualitative analysis (some interpretivist account of an individual experience, say) embodies issues of representativeness in its interpretation—how characteristic is that experience, how unusual is that experience, to what extent is the experience idiosyncratic or shared by others—and this is a matter of relative frequency which may not, in a particular research investigation, necessarily lead to any activity that involves counting, but which is, nevertheless, quantitative in nature. *Both forms of analysis can fruitfully coexist in a given account.*

In contrast to these different but compatible forms of expression, the distinction between constructivism (whether the individual constructivism

of George Kelly or the social constructivism of such authors as Kenneth Gergen (1991)) and positivism is absolute. These are *distinct and mutually exclusive approaches* to knowledge, evidence, and proof, and cannot meaningfully be combined, since they involve mutually exclusive epistemological assumptions: positivism deals with variables, a search for truths existing independently of the observer, and views research as a process of discovery following clear rules of evidence; constructivism deals with issues, an attempt to create publicly accepted understandings, and views research as a process of invention compatible with current evidence.

A research methodology cannot be both constructivist and positivist at the same time, just as a person cannot be right-handed and left-handed at the same time; as these terms are defined, it is either one or the other. Kelly developed a very elaborate framework of principles and application for his theory, explaining the ways in which such understanding of someone else's construct system is possible, and to what extent and how people can successfully communicate with each other despite having their own unique construct systems, in a two-volume text aimed mainly at clinical psychologists (Kelly 1955). He provided an account aimed at the more general reader some years later (Kelly 1963). The theory is expressed formally as one Fundamental Postulate and 11 Corollaries (see Table 6.1 for a summary of material of particular relevance to researchers).

Kelly's basic theoretical position emphasizes 'anticipation'. This indicates that sensemaking is a process of matching our expectations, that is, the construct system, against actual experience. It also asserts that we are future oriented, inquisitive in a way that scientists conducting experiments in a laboratory are. However, our construct systems are complex and sometimes not fully elaborated; therefore, the process of construct elicitation through such methods as the Repertory Grid Technique can help us understand ourselves better, and clarify the way in which our constructs system operates.

The personal meanings that people create for themselves are expressible in terms of basic units of meaning called Constructs. Kelly points out that meaning does not reside in a single term, but in a term-as-contrasted with some other term. As Table 6.2 suggests, the word 'Good' by itself is meaningless until we know that we mean 'Good-as-opposed-to-Weak'; or, 'Good-as-opposed-to-Evil', as the case may be. In day-to-day usage, of

Table 6.1 Key terms defined

Key term	Definition	Comment
Personal Construct Theory (PCT)	A coherent and comprehensive theory of human personality and individuality	Developed by George Kelly (1955) with an original focus in clinical psychology; applied in a variety of fields since, for example, organizational development, education, marketing research, cognitive science
Personal Construct Psychology (PCP)	A body of knowledge based on PCT, maintaining and developing a constructivist epistemology of the individual	Shares many epistemological assumptions at the individual level, authors like Gergen (1991) and Berger and Luckmann (1991) at the sociological level
Repertory Grid Technique (Repgrid)	A technique, normally interview-based, for describing and studying personal and interpersonal systems of meaning, developed within PCT	Identifies the individual ascribes to the phenomena s/he encounters in daily experience, expressed in the individual's own terms, and not those of the investigator
Constructs	The basic unit of meaning, consisting of an expressed assertion, and its implicit contrast. Constructs form the basis of the way the individual understands and anticipates events	A Repgrid consists of a set of constructs elicited from the individual, about the topic being investigated. Each construct is obtained by asking the person to state the way in which two aspects of the topic are alike and, at the same time, different from other aspects
Superordinate and subordinate constructs	Some constructs are more central to the individual, with an organizing function with respect to less central constructs	Those central constructs that are particularly important to the individual, because they express personal values, or relate to the maintenance of the self, are called core constructs
Laddering	A process for identifying superordinate constructs	The interviewee is asked which pole of a given construct s/he prefers, and why; the reason for the preference is regarded as indicating a superordinate construct

(*continued*)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Key term	Definition	Comment
Pyramiding	A process for identifying subordinate constructs	The interviewee is asked for a more detailed or explicit expression of a given construct; the response is regarded as indicating one or more subordinate constructs
Resistance to Change Technique	A forced-choice process for constructing a complete hierarchy of superordinate and subordinate constructs	More central/core constructs identified by the extent to which the interviewee chooses them in preference to others, when requested to choose between them

course, the intended meaning is often available from the context in which the person is operating and a single term suffices; but if we seek to capture an individual's personal meaning with precision, we need to make the particular contrast explicit, and that is what Repertory Grid Technique is designed to do.

6.3 The Organization Corollary

This asserts that constructs do not exist in isolation, but form a complex, hierarchically arranged data structure in which personal relevance and meaningfulness provide an organizing principle. Constructs that support and maintain a person's sense of selfhood are the most fundamental, central, and resistant to change.

Individuality Corollary Construct systems are *personal* and it is in the individual's particular system of sensemaking that his or her individuality resides. And here, a metaphor can be helpful. Students trying to grasp the notion of constructivism and various ontological and epistemological positions often struggle with the notion of 'reality' and the issue of the existence of the reality that is the same or different for all of us. One way to look at this is to see the reality as something that can be accessed only

Table 6.2 The formal content of Personal Construct Theory: selected assertions

Fundamental postulate
The world out there is real; the internal world of awareness and understandings is equally real; people operate by construing: building internal representations of phenomena and events that occur in the outside world.
Construction corollary
People develop these internal representations by recognizing regularities (recurring patterns) in their internal and external experience.
Dichotomy corollary
The basic components of such representations, constructs, express meaning in terms of a contrast. Thus, 'Good' as opposed to 'Poor' (as in appraising a piece of work) carries a different meaning from 'Good' as opposed to 'Evil' (as in making a moral judgment). Meaning does not exist unless a specific contrast is expressed, in the form of two mutually opposed poles.
Organization corollary
These internal representations are ordered hierarchically: some constructs are more abstract and subsume other, more specific constructs. The more abstract constructs tend to be more central to the individual, have the nature of personal values, and are more resistant to change.
Individuality corollary
Different people develop their own meanings—their own constructs—for the same events, and this is what gives them their individuality and distinct personhood.
Commonality corollary
While people differ in their internal representations, however, this difference is rarely absolute, and it is possible to speak of degrees of commonality. People are similar to the extent that they construe (see the meaning in) events similarly. (And not because they encounter similar events; nor because they behave in the same way.)
Sociality corollary
People are social animals; they collaborate to shared ends and they negotiate common ways of understanding these ends and the means toward them. People are prepared to understand each others' representations when it matters to them that they should. One way in which they can do so is by engaging in sociality, that is, by attempting to use parts of each other's representations, role-playing what the world might look like from the other's perspective.

Kelly's own terminology is somewhat idiosyncratic, difficult to translate, and has not been used here. For an account of the issues, see Jankowicz (2002); for his own wording of the theory, see Kelly (1963) or, perhaps more accessible, Bannister and Fransella (1990)

through the filter of our individual construct systems. This means that what we see and experience reaches us after it goes through our sense-making process. Our construct systems, those 'filters' as I sometimes call them, are like colored glasses that we cannot remove. I may have my glasses made of green lens on the left eye and red on the right one. Therefore, what I see is tinted in this particular way and my events will seem to me like I see them through my glasses. You may have your glasses made of one lens in green too but the other one will be blue. Therefore, despite some overlap in our 'view' of reality (some experiences will be 'green' for both of us) our overall sensemaking process and the resulting experience will be different.

The power of Personal Construct Psychology lies in careful attention paid to those subtle differences. We appreciate the individual differences and rather than forcing our construct systems onto others (claiming your glasses are green and red too), the process of working with our respondents is focused on unraveling the glasses that you are wearing.

Commonality Corollary This corollary suggests that it is possible that some part of our glasses are tinted in the same or very similar color; therefore, there will be some area of our construing that is very similar or the same. This aspect of our understanding and experience will create areas where we truly understand each other. Because we do happen to think the same way, we can relate to one other's experience and reactions since they resemble our own reaction and thoughts well.

Sociality Corollary However, it is also important for us to live with one another's differences; and, to the extent that our construct systems differ, how can we ever understand each other sufficiently to interact fruitfully with one another? According to Kelly's sociality corollary, a person has to understand another person's way of construing in order to interact with them, in some particular role, in a productive, meaningful manner. In fact, our social interaction is governed by the core role constructs (Horley 1991). In other words, people can find their place in a group of people only if they can understand their construing and their basic assumptions whether they share them or not. Societies consist of individuals and constitute the reflections of people's individual ways of construing. Social

constructionists imply that societies make decisions and act on them (Balnaves and Caputi 1993); however, it is the individual who has to use and apply the particular construct.

Using our metaphor of the glasses, does it mean that I *must* remove my glasses and put yours on? Not according to Kelly. Neither it would be possible for me to achieve this automatically. Our glasses are not possible to remove, remember? In which case, how can I understand you?

It is possible for me to gain a good image of your construct system and understand the way in which you construe your reality through engaging in Sociality: a process of communication, careful attention to what I understand your needs to be, and extended conversation.

Additionally or alternatively, one can use the Repertory Grid interview, for the preeminent purpose of this technique is for us to understand others in their own terms. Since the Grid originated in clinical psychology it was introduced as the means for the patients to understand themselves better as well as psychologists to understand their patients.

Before leaving this account of theory, a further, and rather important, characteristic should be mentioned. Kelly's PCT is perfectly reflexive: as with any theory, it is a way of construing the world which, like the construct systems it models, is open to revision in the light of experience; but it is the only theory within psychology that explicitly posits this assertion, by definition, as a necessary outcome of its own assertions.

And here we have an important political point, in among all the epistemology. There is no difference between the sensemaking of the scientist or researcher using PCT and the sensemaking of the individuals whose construing the researcher seeks to describe and understand. The scientist does *not* occupy a privileged position as s/he seeks to understand the world.

6.4 The Main Characteristics of Repertory Grid Technique

To someone unfamiliar with it, the Grid may seem somewhat complex. Here is an approach that captures personal meaning, something apparently qualitative by nature, yet it involves both qualitative and quantitative means of expression! Some refer to it as a method of analyzing

psychological space by means of statistics (Fromm, accessed 2010), a way of bringing mathematics into psychology (Fransella et al. 2004)—quantitative endeavors, while others view it as a tool for encouraging reflexivity on the part of the respondent, or as a starting point for asking questions that identify the world in the respondent's terms rather than forcing the investigator's terminology onto the respondent (Bell 2009)—activities with an eminently qualitative intention.

As our earlier account of Kelly's epistemology suggests, the qualitative-quantitative distinction is in fact irrelevant to our present purposes. The Grid is preeminently an interpretivist technique that combines both qualitative and quantitative means of expression and, in practice, is a well-structured, easy to grasp, and engaging technique. The definition that probably best reflects these characteristics was provided by Jankowicz (2004) who stated that the grid is essentially a simple rating-scale procedure used in order to understand how a person views the world or some parts of it. In other words, the Repertory Grid can be seen as a way to understanding other's construing of certain subjects or topics by exploring their personal constructs related to this subject.

6.5 The Repertory Grid Interview Procedure

The Repertory Grid Technique provides a means for identifying people's constructs: personal meanings, which combine personal attitudes, beliefs, and values (see Stewart and Stewart 1982) and can be thought of as a mental map that a person has developed on a given subject. A standard grid consists of the topic in question (e.g. 'my friends'; 'jobs I might apply for'; 'personal learning'; even, 'How I view different research methods'!), depending on the purpose of the investigation. The *Topic* is represented by *Elements*, examples or instances of the Topic in question (thus, in the examples above, the Elements would be the names of my friends; the jobs applied for; a list of 'situations in my life from which I really learnt something'; the names of research methods covered in this book). Elements are compared systematically to identify the individual's constructs and the elements rated on the constructs to identify the repertoire of personal meanings the individual has about the topic in question.

Although Repgrid technique involves filling in a record sheet with an interviewee in order to define the relationship between elements and constructs, the accent of inquiry is to listen closely to the respondent. For this reason, the term 'Repertory Grid Interview' can be used as more appropriate as it doesn't evoke the connotations people have with traditional questionnaires and psychometric tests as used in Psychology.

6.5.1 Topic and Elements

The topic simply reflects the subject area we wish to explore. It needs to be clearly specified in advance and agreed with the interviewee. While the topic presents a rather unproblematic element of the grid, the elements that we choose for the grid deserve a little bit more attention. 'An element is an example of, exemplar of, instance of, sampling of, or occurrence within a particular topic' (Jankowicz 2004, p. 13). If we were to complete a grid on various research methods covered in this book, we could simply use them as elements, for example, observation, case study, virtual ethnography, and so on. A grid exploring various occupational choices would list different occupations that have some significance or relation to the interviewee career interests or ambitions.

Elements can be represented by pretty much anything, as long as it is not a construct. From simple nouns (e.g. book titles) to verbs (e.g. writing, reading, conducting interviews, transcribing) to complete brief accounts of critical incidents (here you would need to prepare a set of cards containing descriptions of each critical incidents that is to be used as an elements).

It is important to remember that elements should represent the same category and be of the same kind. In other words, we should not mix abstract with concrete nouns or create complicated and difficult to understand verbal forms. The elements should also consist of mutually exclusive items, that is, they should not contain each other (e.g. 'occupational title' and 'lecturer').

There are several ways of choosing elements:

1. Supplied by the interviewer: these elements are chosen by the interviewer and provided with the grid and the topic.

2. Supplied by the interviewee: here you can control the degree of freedom given to the interviewee by asking them to provide elements that in their opinion represent the topic of the interview or eliciting them in a more structured and controlled way. In case of the latter, you would be eliciting items that best represent the elements you are interested in. For example, in the grid exploring academic subjects you may ask your interviewee to name the following: 'my favorite subject', 'my least favorite subject', 'the subject I found most challenging', 'the subject that I applied the most in my work', and so on.
3. Negotiated: the elements are discussed and agreed jointly by the interviewer and the interviewee.

6.5.2 Constructs

Construct elicitation is perhaps one of the most exciting parts of the Repertory Grid interview. It is in this phase that we help the interviewee engage in a process of deep reflection on their construct system. While it is an opportunity for us to understand our respondent's construct system and help them engage in a process of understanding themselves better, the Repertory Grid procedure is very much a collaborative process. Construct elicitation is about mutual knowledge creation and negotiation over meaning. During this interview we create a microcosm of what is happening in the real world, and we force the person to think deeply about this while helping them to verbalize this meaning into explicit terms. Very often this will be the first time we or our respondent had to put 'labels' or verbal terms on certain phenomena that surround them. This in itself is a very powerful process since it is then that the interviewee suddenly realizes that part of their sensemaking was in fact underspecified, existing on the preverbal or implicit level. For this reason, the Repertory Grid is particularly useful in tacit knowledge elicitation and knowledge management (see, e.g. Boose 1985; Jankowicz 2001), where we make explicit those constructs, deeply embedded in our actions and our behavior, which have never before been described in a linear or explicit fashion.

Construct elicitation is usually conducted by selecting random triads (any three elements) and asking the respondent the following question:

– In what way two of them are similar and different from the third?

What we are inviting our interviewee to do is to express a contrast, and thereby to express a meaning; to group three elements into two, where two of them will form one 'item' which is somewhat different from the third. The description of the similarity between two elements is called the 'emergent pole' of the construct, and its contrast, the 'implicit pole'. For example, using three elements representing different people, in a grid whose topic is 'My Acquaintances', our respondent may decide that two of them are 'Friendly' whereas the third one is 'Unfriendly'.

Eliciting both poles of the construct is important: remember the theory: meaning resides in contrasts and the more precisely one seeks to capture meaning, the more explicit the contrast must be. Good grid interviewing technique consists of helping the interviewee express their constructs as precisely as possible, without the interviewer 'laying' his or her constructs onto the interviewee. We do this as follows.

6.5.3 Laddering Down and Pyramiding

Since our constructs are hierarchically organized (see 'The Organization Corollary'!) during the Repertory Grid interview, we find we are moving up and down the structure of our interviewee's construct system. Precision is important, and so we might seek to elicit relatively subordinate constructs: more specific expressions of an initially offered construct.

'Laddering down' involves asking the respondent to give us more detail about a construct first offered: for example, 'friendly versus unfriendly' is somewhat vague, if we are to gain a detailed understanding of how the interviewee thinks of friendship. During the pyramiding technique we ask such questions as:

– How?
– How can I tell?
– In what way?
– Can you give me an example of this?

And so we might discover that what the interviewee really meant when saying 'friendly versus unfriendly' was 'Immediately approachable versus Takes time to get to know': in other words, the interviewee thinks of friendship in terms of immediate approachability. A different interviewee might offer a different, more specific, underlying meaning.

'Pyramiding' involves asking the person to offer a complete construct for the initial emergent pole, and another complete construct for the initial implicit pole. For example, 'friendly' might decompose into 'Immediately approachable versus Takes time to get to know', while 'unfriendly' might decompose into 'Passively unhelpful versus Actively hostile'.

By using either of these two techniques we create a detailed picture of this construct and can better understand what behaviors, people, or actions our respondent allocates on this particular construct.

6.5.4 Laddering Upward and Resistance to Change Techniques

If we wish to move in the opposite direction and move up the hierarchy to access more central, or core, levels of person's construing and explore their personal values, the laddering up technique should be implemented.

Values are seen as core constructs representing the core features of an individual's identity, or as put in Kellian language, the 'self-concept'. According to Personal Construct theory, values and core constructs are essential to one's identity formation and maintenance. Our mental processes follow core structures and value systems which are comprehensive but not too permeable (open to change). These structures enable us to see a wide variety of events as consisted with our personality while maintaining a complex but organized individual identity (Kelly 1955, p. 356).

Access to central and presumably important constructs is an aid to understanding of the personal meaning systems (Neimeyer et al. 2000). Personal Construct Psychology has the tools and techniques to access core features of an individual's construing at its disposal. And the upward Laddering technique introduced by Hinkle in 1965 is a powerful

tool in this activity. It provides a way of teasing out the meaning and providing verbal labels for the superordinate constructs, often more difficult than in the case of the initial, subordinate constructs (Neimeyer et al. 2000).

This technique became popular among constructivist psychologists as a convenient means of accessing the core features of a person's meaning system and has since been applied extensively in environmental and architectural design, career counseling, and business applications (Jankowicz 1990; Neimeyer et al. 2000; Stewart and Stewart 1982). It works by identifying the personal reasons for construct preferences, eliciting reasons iteratively until basic underlying reasons, identified with personal values, are reached (Jankowicz 2004, p. 189).

> Constructs functioning at this level of superordination are of fundamental importance; an awareness of them is essential for understanding the world of another human being – or ourselves. (Hinkle 1965, p. 34 in Neimeyer et al. 2000)

Upward laddering technique is based on a simple yet powerful iterative procedure. Each construct elicited during the Repertory Grid interview is examined, by asking the respondent to do the following:

1. Identify a preferred pole of the construct.
2. Tell us why this aspect is important to them.
3. State the answer as a new construct.
4. Repeat steps 1–3 until no further level of abstraction can be attained.

And so, for example, asked which pole of the construct 'friendly-unfriendly' is preferred, our interviewee might say 'Friendly': because if someone's friendly, they are 'Fun to be with; as opposed to boring to be with'. Iterating the procedure (step 4), 'fun to be with' is preferred, because it means that one can be 'Relaxed in that person's company, as opposed to Tense'. Iterating again: 'being relaxed in the company of others' is preferred because 'People matter to me versus being Indifferent to others'; and the former is preferred because, well… 'No man is an island; to be human is to care for others…' and so on.

We have arrived very rapidly at a fairly fundamental value statement. Of course, a different interviewee might offer a different focus. Asked why 'Relaxed in that person's company' is preferred, s/he might respond that it means being 'Less tense as opposed to being more anxious' with subsequent iterations resulting in a value statement about the safety of oneself, family, and loved ones in a threatening world.

The procedure is about repeating the question of these four steps above until we reach a core construct/value representing this construct for our respondent. How do we know when we reach the end of the construct ladder? There are several signals we can use in order to come to this conclusion:

- Elicited constructs become more and more abstract, for example, 'chaos versus order' at the top of a hierarchy that began with 'Punctual as opposed to unpunctual' as a construct describing the behavior of one's colleagues!
- Constructs become universal and deal with higher-order issues such as life in general, for example, 'being a good human being'.
- The responses are self-evident and it appears absurd to seek for further reasons for the preference: '*Why* is it important to care for other human beings…? Oh, come on!'
- There is a great deal of intimacy growing in the room and you will begin to feel the deep and personal level that you have both reached through this procedure. Using your intuition and feelings is a great indicator of your skill as an interviewer.

Laddering upward, then, involves the use of this iterative procedure for *each* of the constructs in the respondent's original grid. (NB it is wise to complete the grid at the basic, operational level, with useful and precise constructs obtained by laddering down, or pyramiding, before starting on the search for values by means of the laddering up procedure.) A set of value-laden constructs, positioned somewhere at the top of the hierarchy, has been reached. At this point, the ability to prioritize these personal values by means of the Resistance to Change Technique (RTC) (Fransella and Bannister 1977) can be especially useful since it enables us to provide an identification of the values that are most central, superordinate, and

might not be open to argument or change. During this procedure we are requesting a person to make very difficult choices between various combinations of his/her personal values/constructs and to identify his/her real priorities. Jankowicz (2004) provides an accessible description of the forced-choice procedure involved.

Emotional states such as anxiety and threat are the experiences which accompany anticipated changes to those parts of the person's internal representations which matter to the individual. This has great implications for researchers interested on organizational change and culture.

6.6 But What About the Numbers? And Some Applications

Part of the basic Repertory Grid interview procedure outlined in Table 6.3 involves a rating exercise: each element is rated on each construct, using a simple 5-point scale in which the emergent pole anchors the '1' end of the scale and the implicit pole anchors the '5' end of the scale.

The ratings serve to position the elements along each construct, and so the different elements can be compared with each other, rating by rating, to identify *what* the individual thinks about them. The different constructs can be compared with each other, rating by rating, to identify *how* the individual thinks about them. And these comparisons can be made with relatively simple matching procedures (e.g. subtracting one set of ratings from another to see which elements are most alike in terms of ratings received), or highly sophisticated multivariate analysis techniques such as Cluster Analysis and Principal Components Analysis, depending on one's purposes and intended application.

That would take us beyond the scope of this account; Jankowicz (2004) is a convenient account of the analysis involved. But it is worth listing some of the potential applications, to show how very useful grid technique can be. It originated in a clinical setting as a method for assessing the properties of the meaning systems of different groups of persons, and how these change over the course of treatment. During the 1960s and 1970s it was taken up by market researchers, to identify the ways in

Table 6.3 A ten-step procedure for eliciting a Repertory Grid

Step	Procedure	Comment
1	Agree a topic with your respondent and write it onto the sheet	
2	Agree a set of elements, and write these at the top of the grid sheet	These can be provided by the respondent, imposed by you, or agreed between you
3	Explain that you wish to find out how s/he thinks about the elements…	… and that you'll do this by asking him or her to compare them systematically
4	Taking three elements (nos. 1, 3, and 5), ask your respondent 'Which of these are the same in some way, and different from the third?'	Provide assurance that you are not looking for some 'right answer' and that several things may come to mind; note down one
5	Ask your respondent why: 'What do the two have in common, as opposed to the third?'	Write down the thing the two have in common, in the first row on the left side of the grid sheet and the opposite of this (the reason the third element is different) in the same row on the right of the grid sheet, making sure that you've obtained a truly bipolar expression—a pair of words or phrases which express a contrast. This is the person's construct
6	Check that you understand what contrast is being expressed	Use the interviewee's words as much as possible, but do feel free to discuss what s/he means, and to negotiate a form of words that makes sense to you both. Ladder down if the initial offering is vague or imprecise
7	Present the construct as a rating scale…	… with the phrase on the left standing for the '1' end of the scale, and the phrase on the right standing for the '5' end of the scale. A form of words like this: 'Now, the words I've written down on the left: imagine they define the "1" end of a 5-point scale. And that the words I've written down on the right define the "5" end of a 5-point scale'

(*continued*)

Table 6.3 (continued)

Step	Procedure	Comment
8	Ask your respondent to rate each of the three elements on this scale, writing the ratings into the grid as s/he states them	'I'd like you to rate each of the 3 elements on this scale; give each of them one of the numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5, to say which end of the scale they're nearest to' or words to that effect Occasionally, check that the directionality of the scaling is preserved, that is, that your respondent shouldn't be using a '1' when s/he is offering a '5' and vice versa
9	Now ask the respondent to rate each of the remaining elements on this construct	Always rate the elements on each construct before going on to elicit the next construct
10	Your task is to elicit as many different constructs as the person might hold about the topic	So, repeat steps 4–8, asking for a fresh construct each time, until your respondent can't offer any new ones. Use a different triad of three elements each time: nos. 2, 4, and 6; then 1, 2, and 10, and so on. Aim to obtain 8–15 constructs in all

which potential purchasers construe product characteristics prior to making a purchase decision.

You can be your own personal market researcher! Spend an hour or so doing a careful and thoughtful grid with yourself as the 'interviewee', using makes of car as elements; rate all these cars on the constructs you obtain; add a column of ratings labeled 'My Ideal Car'; and then see which of the vehicles has received the most *similar* ratings to those you gave to 'My Ideal Car'. You will find that you have captured all the information that is important to you in buying a car (assuming that you have remembered to include purchase price as one of your constructs) and you are in a position to go out and buy! And, in point of fact, you will have thought about this purchase decision rather more thoroughly, and more systematically, than you do in most of your purchasing decisions hitherto…

Another early, nonclinical application was in quality control. The desirable characteristics of many products can be measured fairly readily

by means of simple variables such as length, weight, and the like, allowing us to recognize and accept properly made products and reject substandard products. But for many products and processes, the desirable qualities, while known and attended to by experienced quality-controllers, are not self-evident to others; they need to be identified and articulated if they are to be taught to new production and quality control staff. Wine has to be sampled, teas have to be blended, colors have to be matched, and so on. How would you describe what constitutes a well-designed bathroom or a pleasing set of furnishings for a living room? Sometimes it is obvious, at other times, not—and a systematic approach is required. Enter the Repertory Grid.

The technique was also adopted in organizational research and has been applied in the following areas[1]:

- Human Resource Management (HRM), in particular, performance appraisal, job evaluation, training design, or general job analysis
- coaching, career counseling, or vocational guidance
- team building and organizational development
- organizational culture and change management
- knowledge management
- interventions at the organizational level, ranging from those focusing on organizational structure, design and culture to management, and functional processes such as marketing, planning, decision-making, and the development of expert systems

See Stewart and Stewart (1982) and Jankowicz (1990) for further particulars.

It has also been combined with other, more generally known qualitative techniques, such as ethnographic interviewing, in a range of constructivist applications. Dobosz-Bourne and Jankowicz (2006) and Bourne (2008) examined cultural differences in construing, and the travel of ideas between cultures using a mixed method approach utilizing the Repertory Grid Technique and ethnographic methods.

In some applications, quantitative analysis can be fruitfully combined with the more obvious qualitative procedures one would use in any con-

structivist investigation. The most common form of qualitative analysis with Repertory Grid material is the conventional content analysis (see, e.g. Neuendorf 2002). Here, one asks questions about the different kinds or categories of construing of a given topic, that might be present in a sample of interviewees, or with a single interviewee over time. There is much information to be had by reviewing the various kinds of meanings being expressed, in a largely qualitative analysis (although concerns over the reliability of category ascription and of coding to categories might lead to some quantitative work, as with any content analysis!) Additionally, by combining some of the information present in the ratings, with a content analysis of the constructs, some very powerful statements can be made about the kinds of construing present in a sample of interviewees; Honey (1979) provides a straightforward procedural account.

Notes

1. See Stewart and Stewart (1982) and Jankowicz (1990) for further particulars.

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7

Relational Methods in Organization Studies: A Critical Overview

Mustafa Özbilgin and Joana Vassilopoulou

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines relational methods in organization studies. We contend that social reality, despite its layered, complex, and interwoven fabric and its irreducibly intersubjective meanings, relational properties, and interdependent patterns and processes, is often treated in organization and management studies in a way which reduces its complexities to a set of definitions, patterns, and linkages that are often acontextual, ahistorical, or of homologous morphologies (Özbilgin 2006). To bring back complexity of social reality, we also explain the necessity of relational thinking and methods, by providing examples from field studies. Moreover, applying a relational perspective fosters the integration of micro and macro organizational perspectives and provides a framework to study organizational phenomena in 'dynamic and processual terms' (Kyriakidou and Özbilgin 2006, p. 1).

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_7

Relational methods have emerged as a reaction to assumptions of objectivism, and arbitrary separation between research objects subjects and themes as explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2003). Relational methods also stand in opposition to individualism and individualistic methodologies of organizational studies. In our times of reductionism and positivist domination in studies of work, employment, and organization studies, relational methodology has not become widely used. We argue that relational methods offer thoughtful challenges to our current attempts at understanding social phenomenon.

7.2 Ontology and Epistemology of Relationality in Organization Studies

Relationality is by no means new in social science research. In fact, the roots of relational perspectives can be traced back to philosophical works of Marx, Weber, and Heidegger. However, Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), a semiologist, has made the most significant impact in this field by suggesting that the meanings of sounds and words are relationally structured and constructed, rather than being essential properties. This approach is considered fundamental to structuralism, which suggests that social life and meanings gain meaning in human thoughts, practices, and relationships and that they do not have absolute meanings in themselves (Tyson, 1996). The routes of the relational philosophy are sometimes traced back to Martin Buber (1970) who accounted for relationality as 'the space between' signifying the interdependence between the self and the other. Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) explain that Buber's notion of the space between can be adopted in studying organizations, if we are to see the interconnectedness between individuals and organizations.

The commitment to a relational form of analysis is also dominant in the work of Emirbayer, who suggests that we need to see 'relations between terms or units as pre-eminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances' (1997, p. 289). In his 'manifesto for a relational sociology' Emirbayer (1997) focuses on ontology and emphasizes thereby the primacy of

contextuality and process in sociological analysis. The relational approach of Emirbayer draws on Bourdieu, who advocates a relational method for social inquiry.

Pierre Bourdieu, a late French sociologist and philosopher, is, for us, the most significant contributor to the development of relational methods for social investigation: 'The relational method is a cardinal principal of structural linguistics that locates meanings of signs not in themselves but in their contrastive relations' (Swartz 1997, p. 61). In his books, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Bourdieu identifies how social and economic worlds can be reconciled to achieve a better understanding of both:

> … At every moment of each society, one has to deal with a set of social positions which is bound by a relation of homology to a set of activities (the practice of golf or piano) or of goods (second home or an old master painting) that are themselves characterised relationally… (Bourdieu 1998, p. 5)

Bourdieu's proposed relational method offers broader insights for the study of social phenomenon, particularly compared to other methods that attempt to explore 'difference' or 'diversity' in social settings. For instance, the comparative methods, which only expose the contrastive positions of two individual, cultural, or structural phenomena against one another, fall short in capturing their rich relational interplay (Everett 2002). Moreover, the relational perspective promises three ontological benefits, compared to other earlier methodological perspectives: Firstly, social phenomena are examined in their situated context, which reveals the socially and historically situated nature of social phenomena. Secondly, applying the relational perspective allows to focus on 'the space between', through which insights are generated relating to where agency, action, and structures have causal interdependence and where they intertwine and cogenerate social interdependencies and intersubjectivities. Lastly, the layered nature of social reality can be disclosed through relational methods as it accepts objective structures, situated activity, and subjective experience to be considered as relevant to understanding social reality.

The Bourdieuan notion of the relational perspective is situated in the middle of the ontological spectrum that ranges from essentialism to post-modern relativism, which were the isomorphic orthodoxies of the time, in the context of mainstream developments such as the emergence of post-structuralism in social sciences of his time.

Potter (2000), assessing Bourdieu's works and critiques, explains that Bourdieu has demonstrated through using the relational perspective, which situates individuals in their respective social positions in terms of volume and composition of their capital, that cultural and material spheres of reality do exist and they cannot be reduced to either, although they are interrelated and operate in simultaneity. However, criticism related to the Bourdieuan relational method comes, for instance, from Mohr (2000), who argues that the Bourdieuan model ignores divergent dispositions that individuals may possess in choosing their respective social positions. The social field in which positions are taken is largely structured by macro-influences. This approach ignores other forms of competitions and contestations at micro and meso levels. For instance, Somers (1998, pp. 766–767) suggests relational realism as a way forward for social science. She elaborates the ontological perspective of her proposal:

> A relational pragmatist ontology takes the basic units of social analysis to be neither individual entities (agent, actor, person, firm) nor structural wholes (society, order, social structure) but relational processes of interaction between and among identities.

However, it amounts that besides the Bourdieuan realist and relational ontology in sociology, also other disciplines such as anthropology (e.g. Storrie 2003), psychology (e.g. Kwon 2001), human geography (e.g. McDowell 2004), economic geography, and theology (e.g. Shults 2001) have contributed to further development of the field. Moreover, Bourdieu's core theoretical concepts, such as habitus, field, symbolic power, and capital, are increasingly utilized to frame empirical research and to advance debates in core sociological subfields. Bouwen (1998) explains the contribution of social constructionist perspective to the development of relational ontology, in the field of organizational studies,

by making a distinction between the two traditions in the field, namely, the entative concept of the organization and its associated entative concept of the person. The difference between the two concepts is that an entative perspective reflects the fundamental assumption that person and organization can be theorized as independent of each other. However, relational processes can be as instrumental for connecting inputs to achieve outcomes.

Bouwen (1998, p. 305) outlines the factors, which constitute the relational ontology of social reality, in organizational settings. His first argument is that individuals and organizations should be studied in relation to one another, rather than in isolation from one another. Secondly, individuals and organizations signify each other through individual's coordination of activities in organizations. Third, the language is central to this cogenerative process. Four, only during communication language gains meaning. Five, the self-determination of the individuals is influenced by knowing from within. Six, shared meanings are shaped and negotiated by communities of practice. Seven, both innovation and continuity are generated by interaction at the individual and group levels in organizational settings. Lastly, interactions serve to generate and shape shared meanings.

There are ontological developments, which emphasize the importance of relational thinking in organizational studies and have prepared the foundation for methodological innovations that can trace, assess, examine, and analyze the reality of relationality in social settings.

Regarding the above mentioned critical turns in social research methods, four divergent traditions of method and epistemological position have remained in the extant literature: The *universalist* tradition seeks to generate universal and generalizable explanations in forms, patterns, and processes of organization. Human positivism offers the inspiration to this methodological tradition (Layder 1990). Human positivism considers it sufficient to account for varied forms of causation solely by examining sequential occurrences in isolation from external context and other concerns of relationality. The second methodological approach includes research that examines organizational entities in their contextual settings at micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. This tradition is also termed as *contextual* approach to organizational studies in that it does not

prescribe to one best way of organization and allows for situated analysis. This tradition is characterized with methods that generate cultural descriptions, which are generated through a wide range of research techniques. The third tradition of method in organizational studies entails *comparative* evaluations of organizational phenomena again at different levels of analysis and across different sites, such as sectors, industries, or countries. The final tradition of method, which this paper focuses on, sets out to examine the *relational* properties of the organizational phenomena, using tools and techniques that are conducive to reveal such relationality between various constituencies of organizations including, individuals, groups, structural conditions, and the firm (see Table 7.1).

In this paper, we are presenting relational method as an improved alternative to other traditions of method as it overcomes some of the obvious weaknesses in other traditions. Relational methods do not reject but include contextual, contingent, and comparative elements, while at the same time the phenomenon under investigation to be explored in its unique context. As such relational approach offers a deeper understanding of social phenomenon as it counteracts the reductionist tendencies in other methodologies. However, this strength of the relational method constitutes in its major weakness that it requires more detailed and sophisticated look at social and organizational phenomenon. The current

Table 7.1 Typologies of organizational method

	Universalist	Contextual	Comparative	Relational
Main properties	Examines individual or organizational phenomena	Situates individual or organizational phenomena	Compares individual or organizational phenomena	Compares, situates, and examines individual and organizational phenomena in a state of interplay
Main assumptions	Individual and organizational phenomena can be examined in isolation from their context and relational properties	Individual and organizational phenomena are contingent upon situational variation	Individuals and organizations can be compared as independent phenomena	Assumes interdependence, intersubjectivity, and relationality of individual and organizational phenomena

Source: Adopted from Özbilgin (2006, p. 250)

regime of academic scholarship in business schools is characterized with some countervailing pressures. Academic research heavily relies on publishing in journals which tend to limit submission by crude measures as word or page counts. When relational investigation calls for complexity over simplicity, relational methods may be marginalized in the current publication regime.

However, relational methods are also not a monolithic body of research and embrace a wide range of approaches. Lack of closure in application and practice of relational method offers a richness of methodological repertoires to relational inquiry. In this paper, we review several of these different methodological routes one may take under the banner of relational method. We first focus on the emphasis and focus of relational methods to categorize relational approaches under three headings: First, some relational studies emphasize the 'relational' in '*relational* method' and focus on relational processes such as engagement, coordination, satisfaction, motivation, emotion (e.g. Game 2008), among others. For example, Brewer's (2003) research on civic attitudes and behavior of public servant and their social capital uses multivariate analysis to demonstrate that public servants develop stronger social capital through relational practice, that is, civic activities. Although the study does not advocate use of uniquely relational methods, it nevertheless focuses on a relational theme and chooses a method that can speak to the issue at hand.

Secondly, there are methodological approaches that we term as '*relationship* method', which integrate human relationships rather than relationality between phenomena in their methodological considerations, emphasizing human relationships and interaction between individuals in dyadic and group settings in a way to inform their methods. Several concepts, including relational marketing (e.g. Schumacher 1999), relational contract theory (e.g. Feinman 2009), relational counseling (e.g. Garcia et al. 2003), relational trust (Sato 2006), and relational assets, have been developed in the recent years, and these can be examined under this banner due to their explicit thematic focus on the issue of human relationships. For example, Peetz (2002) refers to relational methods as methods that employers employ as part of a three-pronged spectrum of decollectivist strategies. The other two strategies reside in employment practices and informational activities. In Peetz's study, relational is about the relationships between workers and

managers. Another example would be Cowan and Khatchadourian's (2003, p. 301) definition of relationality as a set of constructs; 'Relationality, implying sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of others, can be expressed in terms of feelings (empathy), cognitions (connected knowing) and self-construals (relational self-construal)'. The authors locate relationality at the level of relationships rather than using relationality in its broader sense or to inform their methodological design.

The final group of studies emphasize 'method' in 'relational *method*' and use the concept in its broader sense to capture the interrelatedness, intersubjectivity, and interdependence of individual and organizational phenomena, adopting methods that are designed to capture relational aspects of the subject of their study. Tietel (2000) defines interview as a relational space, and engages with relationality in a way, which informs the methodological choices. This presents an example of this perspective.

The relational method studies may consider individual relationships and relationality as significant in their methodological approaches in variable degrees ranging from integrating relationality as a mere contingency factor impacting on various processes and outcomes of work (*relational* method) to exploring dyadic and group relationships among individuals in organizational settings (*relationship* method) and to considering relationality as a primary and orienting phenomenon which shapes the choice of methods that in turn would reveal relationality among individuals and organizations (relational *method*). The difference of the latter relational *method* is their use of relationality as the primary orienting tool for their research design, rather than a mere construct that serve as a factor of contingency as is the case in *relationship* and *relational* methods.

Relational perspectives to social research in organizational settings do not propose closure to the spectrum of methods that can be used to investigate relationality among individuals and organizational phenomena. Rather, they suggest that the way in which these methodological approaches are used should be informed by a relational orientation, which reflects an awareness of the interdependencies between individual, organizational, and contextual phenomena. Bouwen (1998), for example, attempts to explain how relational methods may be used in a field

study. Although Bouwen (1998) does not propose specific techniques for a relational inquiry, nevertheless Bouwen argues that the choice of techniques should reflect a concern for relationality in organizational settings. The key considerations for the relational methods are that the data should not be disembodied but situated in its context and that the relational method does not only seek data on organizational phenomena but also on processes and relationships between and among individuals and organizations.

Relational methods research has taken a spectrum of routes at the level of empirical study, ranging from studies on the individual researcher and their reflexive practice to studies that explore the relationality between contextual or organizational phenomena. This paper identifies seven strands within this spectrum of relational research in terms of focus of analysis: (a) Relationality of the self: reflexivity in research and inner dialogue; (b) Relationality between the self and the circumstances; (c) Relationality between the self and the others; (d) Relationality between the self, the others, and the circumstances; (e) Relationality between the other persons; (f) Relationality between the other persons and circumstances; and (g) Relationality between organizational phenomena (i.e. structures, conditions, or circumstances).

7.2.1 Relational Methods: The Self-Reflexivity

One of the under-explored issues in studies of business and management remains the reflexivity of the researcher: relationship of the researcher with him or herself. There are studies and calls for reflexivity which are exceptions to this rule. Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) state that using relational methods entails researcher to pursue personal development on reflexive practice (see also Mauthner and Doucet 2003 for a full description of reflexive methods in social sciences), engagement with the research context, and an ability to engage participants in the process of analysis and sensemaking activities. Hall and Callery (2001) also advocate a similar approach, which combines reflexivity and relationality to improve the rigor in grounded research. In the same vein, Luttrell (2000) describes her methodological approach in her ethnographic study, advocating a

sensitizing process, which involves recognition of the significance of reflexivity and engagement with the research process and the subject of research. Her paper tackles some of the tensions in the process of research that emanate from such a reflexive practice.

Inal (2008) acknowledges the significance of reflexivity and the subject of research in her PhD thesis 'A comparative study of the reasons for and means of setting-up a small business: the case of Turkish Cypriot restaurateurs and lawyers in North Cyprus and Britain'. In her thesis, she presents reflexive screens on her own identity, and how this has shaped her information and data gathering through the interviews.

At the level of relational technique, Bourdieu (2003, pp. 282–283) introduces another elaborate tool, 'participant objectivation': What needs to be objectivized, then, is not the anthropologist performing the anthropological analysis of a foreign world but the social world that has made both the anthropologist and the conscious or unconscious anthropology that she (or he) engages in her anthropological practice (…). It is indeed scientifically attested that her most decisive scientific choices (of topic, method, theory, etc.) depend very closely on the location she (or he) occupies within her professional universe.

7.2.2 Relational Methods: The Self and the Circumstances

The relationality of the agency and structure, or the self and the circumstances, as termed here, has been one of the key concerns of contemporary social sciences, owing largely to its feminist and radical critiques. Weskott (1990) explains that the feminist approach to the dialectic relationship between self and circumstances is 'to approach social knowledge as open, contingent, and humanly compelling, as opposed to that which is closed, categorical and human controlling (p. 65)'. Similarly, Brewer et al. (2002) explore intersectionality in gender-, caste-, race-, and class-based theorizing. They argue that the intersection of these categories as well as their relationality warrant adoption of different methods that allows for solidarity through recognition. Solidarity through recognition for social researchers is about understanding difference and heterogeneity

in society with a view to seek transformation and betterment of social life through solidarity. Their formulation does not only highlight social divisions but also the issue of relationality or lack of it as pertinent considerations for social researchers. Furthermore, by drawing on Crenshaw (1991), they explain that feminist attention to gender should avoid essentializing gendered difference, through revealing its interconnectedness and interdependence with race, class, and sexuality. Hence the contribution of the feminist methods to the study of self and the circumstances seeks to reveal, bridge, and connect social divisions while allowing recognition of the construction of self in the context of structural circumstances.

Forson (2007) utilized a relational methodology in researching the business experiences of black women in London. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of gender, ethnicity, and class on the business experiences of black women entrepreneurs in London. A deeper and richer understanding of the business activities of the women could only be procured by a perception of how the different domains of social activity impact interactions within and between each other in their business experiences. In the context of a society stratified by race (ethnicity), class, and gender, the research sought to uncover and understand how the influence of past events and phenomena complicate relationships and current situations in terms of the participants' strategies and actions within the given context. The research design was therefore primarily informed by the argument that to address the agency-structure dualism in social research, one needs to conceptualize it as comprising varying and distinctive characteristics that are mutually interdependent and interlocking. This made the use of a relational approach important in providing linkages between the macro, meso, and micro aspects of the research. The study therefore explored four related layers of business activity—the self and identity of the research participants (their personal experiences and perceptions); aspects of the women's immediate business environment (sectoral influences) that intrude on their activities; the influence of labor market dynamics and policy context (arenas of minority entrepreneurship); and finally, the general distribution of power and resources in the wider society (gender and race relations in the UK to set study in its historical and socioeconomic context). Within this relational

methodological framework, the employment of multi-methods including the use of semi-structured interviews together with observations, survey data, and a documentary review helped to achieve the aims of the study.

Perry and Shotwell (2009) utilize a relational perspective examining White Antiracist Praxis. They argue that it requires a relational understanding of racism, the 'self',, and society for white racial consciousness and practice to move toward an antiracist praxis. According to Perry and Shotwell (2009, p. 33) such understanding occurs from

> a confluence of propositional, affective, and tacit forms of knowledge about racism and one's own situatedness within it. We consider the claims sociologists have made about transformations in racial consciousness, bringing sociological theories of racism into dialogue with research on whiteness and antiracism. We assert that sociological research on white racism and "whiteness" tends to privilege propositional and tacit/common sense knowledge, respectively, as critical to shifting white racial consciousness. Research on antiracism privileges affective knowledge as the source of antiracist change.

Hence the convergence of these three types of knowledge is essential to transform white racial praxis, since it generates a relational understanding of self and 'other', and additionally race, racism, and antiracist practice.

Studying the lives of two Filipinas in situated context and in their network of relationships, Tyner (2002) concludes that individual identity is always in a process of becoming through encounters in different situations, space, geographies, and relationships. Willmott (1999), in his study of structure and agency in a 'failing' school, provides a highly critical account of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in the UK, in which he locates the approach of the OFSTED in the positivist framework and demonstrates its failure to capture diverse range of structural conditions that underpin effectiveness of a school. His choice of participant observation as a technique to reveal the interplay of agency and structure makes possible for him to evaluate the school effectiveness as is, from an open systems understanding with multiple stakeholders, interactions and influences at different levels. The research method also permits for dyadic and multiple forms of relationality between these different constituents to emerge, be recognized, and be evaluated.

7.2.3 Relational Methods: The Self and the Other

Relational between the self and the other has predominantly been considered in the context of the researcher and research participant or respondent relationship. Using a grounded theory framework, Bouty (2000) examines informal resource exchanges between research and development scientists at the interorganizational level. She concludes that 'there is no universal rule, no uniform line between individual and organisational interests. The economic interests of a firm and employees' social capital are intertwined (p. 62)'. In a similar vein, she argues that organizations through informal exchanges make use of each other's resources and the interdependency that this creates should lead to new understandings of organizational resources in the context of research and development sector. In a different attempt at revealing relationality of the self and the other, with their aptly subtitled review paper, Ties that Split Pies, Blyler and Coff (2003) examine how social capital and individual ties may lead to rent generation and appropriation in organizational settings. The article provides a set of proposals to set a research agenda highlighting where the researchers may focus to locate hidden rent as an outcome of social capital.

Stephens (2008) links in her work social capital particularly emphasizing social capital in neighborhoods, to public health benefits, to explain the relationship between economic inequalities and health. In her ethnographic study of social connections in New Zealand, she draws on interviews with 46 residents (about their social connections) of, a rural town, a deprived city suburb, or an affluent suburb. The results of this study indicate

> that social connections are not necessarily located in neighbourhoods, and that social capital will be better understood in a broader social context which includes competition for resources between deprived and non-deprived groups, and the practices of all citizens across neighbourhoods. When considering social capital, an exclusive focus on deprived neighbourhoods as sites for research and intervention is not helpful. (Stephens 2008, p. 1174)

Gergen and Gergen (2003) broaden the scope of relational method of the self and the others to the relationship between the researcher and the readers of research output, arguing that this relationship has historically

served a wide range of purposes, including representation of the other. The authors argue that there are recent trends, which seek to challenge the traditional modes of representation in writing where the author assumed an authority of knowledge in favor of writing and representation modes that are more egalitarian. They argue that this can happen if the metaphor of 'research' is replaced with the metaphor of 'representation', which is true to the nature of developments in social sciences.

7.2.4 Relational Methods: The Self, the Other, and the Circumstances

Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) explored relational methods in organizational research in their seminal paper, *Relationality in Organizational Research: Exploring the Space Between*. Exploring the intersubjective, interrelated, and contextualized nature of relational methods in organizational research, they surveyed a wide spectrum of methodological approaches that are informed by relational thinking. Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) note that although organizational research has engaged with the inter- and intraplay between individuals and organizational phenomena in a way which deem both inextricably intertwined, they set out to bring forward the relational qualities in these studies with a view to contribute to development of relational methods. In social science research, a similar evolution has happened even earlier where social scientists particularly in the realist tradition have argued for a perspective of reality which captures the interdependence between the self and his or her structural circumstances (Bourdieu 1977) and in the relational systems thinking. One of the most accessible methodological contributions in the realist tradition would be Layder's (1993) 'resource map'. The map is his attempt at understanding the interplay between layers of social reality at micro, meso, and macro levels, as embedded in their social and historical contexts. The map contains four distinct layers: the self (includes identity and subjective individual experience), the situated activity (the dynamics of individual interaction), the setting (intermediate forms of social organization and immediate environment of social activity, e.g. workplace or organization), and the context (wider macro forms of social

and economic organization and structures). The interrelationships between these layers of activity are then located in their respective historical context. Macro, meso, and micro layers are not independent of one another; rather, they exist in state of relational interdependence. Following this logic, the relational perspective aids the ability to examine how contexts, settings, and individuals influence each other and are influenced in turn (Kyriakidou and Özbilgin 2006).

Vassilopoulou (2011) follows a similar approach in her thesis, studying the habitus of managing ethnic diversity in Germany. Drawing on 30 stakeholder interviews and a company case study, her study reveals that issues of racial equal opportunities at work remain uncontested in the German context. Instead of equal opportunities at work the concept of integration dominates the German context. She argues that what we are viewing in the case of Germany is a co-optation of the notion of integration with the purpose of setting norms of national identity, which naturalizes inequities of the contemporary racial order in organization and management of immigration, which remains the last uncontested bastion of racial bias. She moreover argues that this is only possible because the majority group defines the notion of integration, in a process of collective interaction, or as Layder (1993) would verbalize in a process of social activity, which serves collective intentions and objectives, such as to manipulate and control ethnic minorities. As a result, issues such as race discrimination remain unchallenged in organizational settings. A further insight results from considering history in her study. History can be understood as a major feature of social life, which influences behavior and social activity in general (Layder 1993). In this regard, she contends that the treatment of the Nazi-past, namely the collective national guilt of post-Holocaust Germany, has shaped the framework of diversity management in Germany in such a way that race related issues have been excluded from the diversity management agenda. Diversity and equality concerns and patterns of disadvantage in the labor market are historically constructed, and they draw the framework of diversity agenda at the national, organizational, and individual level (Prasad and Pringle 2006).

Paliadelis and Cruickshank (2008, p. 1444) apply a voice-centered relational approach in order to explore the working world of nursing unit managers in Australia.

> The decision to use a voice-centred relational approach to the data was based on a desire to delve into the working world of nursing unit managers and uncover the layers within the narratives that specifically related to their perceptions of themselves, their world, and the context in which they work.

Also, using a 'voice-centered relational method', Mauthner and Doucet (2000, p.125) explored motherhood and domestic work, which they studied as part of their doctoral projects. Locating their relational method in the qualitative tradition of research, they used a specific relational method developed by Brown and Gilligan (1992) and others at the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girl's Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. They allude to the kinship of their relational ontology to Giddens' sociological inquiries into the duality of structure and agency. Mauthner and Doucet (2000, p. 125) explain the relational ontology that they adopted:

> The ontological image which has predominated in liberal political thought and the Western philosophical tradition is that of a separate, self-sufficient, independent and rational 'self' or 'individual'. In contrast, the 'relational' ontology posits the notion of 'selves-in-relation'… or 'relational-being'…, a view of human beings as embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations,

The authors achieve this in their study by 'exploring individual's narrative accounts in terms of their relationships to the people around them and their relationships to the broader social, structural and cultural contexts within which they live' (p. 126). They operationalize their version of the relational method through four different readings of their interview transcriptions: The first reading searches for the plot and the story of the narrative and includes a reflexive account, which explores the thoughts of the researcher in response to the unfolding story. The second reading entails an attempt to embody the experiences, feelings, and narrative of the study participant with a view to bring forth the first person in the transcribed interviews. The third reading seeks to uncover the relationality in the narrative of the transcriptions, searching for both relationship

of the self to other individuals and the social and structural conditions. The final reading aims to contextualize the accounts of the individuals, situating them in their respective social and cultural environments.

Following these purposeful readings, which examine, relate, and situate the self, the second stage of the data analysis resumes a relatively conventional path where the rich descriptions that are generated through case studies and summaries in the earlier readings are thematically divided. The authors pay special homage to the issue of individual voice in narrative, the myth of shared female experience, as well as the imbalances of power between the researcher and the research, particularly in the process of translating and relating individual accounts to theoretical explanations. The authors conclude that feminist researchers should take note of the process in which individual 'voices' are transformed into theory and the outcomes. Their relational method engages with three different forms of voice, that of the participants, the researcher, and the research community as reflected in the literature, and theorization is a negotiated process in which these voices are reconciled. They also explain that their relational approach requires an understanding of social life with variable degrees, rather than as absolutes or linear and pure processes, outcomes, or causal relationships. A parallel can be drawn with Zietlow's (2000) study of women and law, in which she argues that relational engagement and contextual reasoning are keys to, what she terms as, anti-subordinating method of process.

Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) argue that relationality is about examining rich interrelationships between organizations and their members as essentially interdependent and intersubjective. The authors portray relationality as a set of values and meanings that refer to organizations as richly interconnected relationships rather than as a discrete methodological tool. The value system that the relational methods proposes involves bridging the divide between subject and object of research, for example, the superficial distinction between and separation of the researcher, the research, and the researched (e.g. Özbilgin 1998), between knowledge and power, and between knowledge and action, revealing their interconnectedness. Seeking to operationalize some feminist theorizations through interviews with 38 nurses' work lives in Canada, Keddy

et al. (1999) demonstrate the strength of the interrelationship and interconnectedness between the nurses' work lives and conditions; their other life constituencies such as children, partners, friends, and leisure; as well as the structural conditions pertaining to healthcare reform.

Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) provide a framework for relational methods in organizational research. Their model includes two dimensions: (1) visibility of interactions: relational methods contain both *tacit* (*interior*) and *explicit* (*exterior*) forms of interaction, and (2) position of relationality, the three layers of this dimension are *multipersonal*, research involving study of relationships between a group of participants; *interpersonal*, research which involves a researcher and research subjects; and *intrapersonal*, research involving research by oneself and on oneself. Juxtaposing these two dimensions along their two and three layers, respectively, against one another, the authors have generated six cells that characterize the matrix of relational methods: multipersonal exterior, multipersonal interior, intrapersonal exterior, intrapersonal interior, interpersonal exterior, and interpersonal interior. They argue that most organizational studies research can be located in the multipersonal-exterior cell including network analysis and complex adaptive systems research. The multipersonal-interior cell is characterized by research that uses correspondence analysis linking tacit phenomenon with structural conditions. Richly ethnographic research with in-depth interviews has been common in this category of relational research. Interpersonal-exterior cell hosts a range of participative, involved research designs, which emphasize notions of insider/outsider and cooperative inquiry. Most feminist research would reside in and draw on this tradition of relational method. Interpersonal-interior cell involves case study research which situates the researcher in the context of research and makes the researcher and their understanding a significant part of the research inquiry. Intrapersonal-exterior cell expressly resides in the psychological domain. Studies of ego development would be an example. Intrapersonal-interior cell includes autobiographical writing, which allows for a relational engagement between tacit and explicit selves. The Table 7.2 below outlines the matrix with its associated methods and tools.

Table 7.2 Relational methods based on the locus and visibility

		The locus		
		Multipersonal	**Interpersonal**	**Intrapersonal**
Visibility	**Exterior view**	Network analysis Coevolutionary and complexity models	Participatory research Insider/outsider research	Investigation of self as research instrument
	Interior view	Correspondence analysis Structurational models	Case study methods Learning history Action science	Journalizing Action inquiry

Source: Adapted from Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000, p. 560)

7.2.5 Relational Methods: The Other Persons

A strand of relational method examines relationality between a group of study subjects. Studies of social capital can be studied under this banner. For example, in his study of social capital, Burt (1997) examines the value of manager's networks and reveals that the value of social capital is contingent upon the number of people doing the same job. Relational method of the study is in its use of network analysis to explore the social capital that managers accumulate through their networks.

Ariss' (2009) doctoral thesis titled 'Careers of Skilled Immigrants: A Study of the Capital Accumulation and Deployment Experiences of the Lebanese in France' examined social capital accumulation and deployment of Lebanese skilled immigrants who live in Paris. The study revealed that participants before and after their migration were subject to barriers and opportunities at the individual, organizational, and macro-contextual levels. They described their experiences of capital accumulation and deployment as being linked to the difficulties that obstructed their careers in France. Nevertheless, building on strategies of capital mobilization, interviewees attempted to change their reality by coping with and overcoming the barriers to their career development. According to Ariss a multilevel approach was helpful in situating the experiences of these immigrants within the context of their organizations and national settings.

In their theoretical paper which seeks to locate difference along class, race, and gender dimensions in social relations, Bottero and Irwin (2003) argue that relationality in the context of locating difference along social cleavages should be informed by an understanding of the intertwined nature of cultural and material bases of social relations. The authors argue that separating these two spheres of cultural and material social relations, as has been the case in earlier works, bodes ill to revealing the construction of symbolic, value based, as well as the material bases of social relations.

Pullman and Gross (2003) survey a hospitality organization and consider two different contextual elements, physical and relational, which moderate loyalty. The change in industrial composition, with the growth of the service sector in industrialized countries, has meant that the relational context has changed in terms of relations between and among service providers and customers. Pullman and Gross' (2003) work reveals the impact of relational context on loyalty and emotional outcomes. Although their theoretical framework takes relational context as central, their methodological approach treats it only as a variable.

7.2.6 Relational Methods: The Other Persons and the Social/Organizational Phenomena

Mohr (2000) argues that the relational method that Pierre Bourdieu proposes has many merits including its capacity to reveal the duality of culture and practice and its strong proposition that institutional life can be examined through relational methods. However, Mohr (2000) also suggests that Bourdieu was more skilled in refining his version of relational methods than operationalizing it. Bourdieu uses a two-dimensional mapping technique (correspondence analysis) with total volume and overall composition of capital in each dimension of the axis. The measure developed by Bourdieu and presented through correspondence analysis interrelates social phenomena with forms of capital possessed by different groups in society and provides an example of this ideal type of research.

In another exemplary study, Mahon et al. (2004, p. 171) use a network analytical method to explore the relationship between organizational phenomena that 'could have a negative impact on organisation's ability to

reach its objectives if left unattended' and stakeholders simultaneously. Through this study, they identify that 'there is much insight to be gained from a structural analysis of the ties that bind social actors in the non-market context' (p. 185). The network analysis techniques at the group level also cross the group and context divide, revealing the relationality in between. In a similar piece of research, Buris (2004) employs network analysis to examine 'the academic caste system', and the interplay between postdoctorate job opportunities and academic prestige of departments. The analysis reveals the material outcomes of academic hierarchies of group members and demonstrates that the higher the prestige of departmental prestige, the higher the graduate's employment chances.

There are several phenomena, which do occur only in organizations and are uniquely of organizational nature. However, the units of analysis of these phenomena occur naturally at several levels. A relational perspective has been utilized to study, for instance, phenomena such as stress and burnout (Malach Pines 2006), organizational health, networking (Kyriakidou 2006), knowledge integration (Costanzo 2006). Moreover, some phenomena are micro phenomena but occur only in organizational settings. Kyriakidou and Özbilgin (2006) argue

> Because micro-organizational issues only emerge in the context of organizations, it is necessary to think organizationally, in terms of organizational processes, as well as behaviourally.

Several studies, studying organizations, for example, phenomena such as coordination (Hoffer Gittel 2006), organizational learning and knowledge creation (Schwandt et al. 2006), and organizational commitment, employed a perspective that relates organizational processes to individual behavior as suggested by Kyriakidou and Özbilgin (2006).

7.2.7 Relational Methods: The Organizational Phenomena (i.e. Structures or Circumstances)

At this methodological domain reside studies, which explore relationality between structural circumstances, i.e. the macro constructs of organizational studies. In her investigation of the relationality at the firm level,

Nelson (2004) introduces two approaches to relationality. These are ideal types of *separative* versus *soluble* relationship types. She describes separative relationality in the firm level as rejection of relationality with visible borders and divides between functional or strategic units of the firm. Whereas the soluble firm model is based on the recognition that firms are made up of interconnections at individual and group levels at within and outside the firm. Nelson explains that this distinction is reflected between neo-liberal versus critical depictions of the firm.

Ericson (1996) also studied two structural phenomena, social networks and class structure, with a view to understand their interdependence. The study was conducted in Toronto, Canada, and drew comparative insights from Bourdieu, using a social network variety measure developed by the author. The chapter suggests that social network variety is a better indicator of cultural variety than class as proposed in Bourdieu's methodological approach in *Distinction* (1984). Massey's study allowed for two structural constructs to be explored in terms of their interplay. In human geography, Massey (2004) and McDowell (2004) argue that such interplay exists between space, time, and structures.

7.3 Conclusions

Relationality offers both a conceptual lens and a methodological perspective to the study of complex organizational phenomenon. As such relational methods are recognized in recent years as conducive and appropriate choices for complex and sophisticated processes, contexts, forms, and occurrences in organizations and organizing. Much attention has been devoted to relationality in recent years in terms of its ontological, epistemological, methodological classification. The gold rush in search of relationality has engendered new methodological perspectives ranging from techniques, which sought to situate the researcher in the research process through reflexivity to methods, which aimed to reveal the interplay between and among the self, the others, and the circumstances in organizational settings. In this chapter, we have attempted at reviewing this extensive body of literature with a view to explaining the ontological

and epistemic position of relational methods and presenting a typology of relational methods that reflects its multidirectional and interdisciplinary development. We advocate that relational methods are particularly useful for investigation of individuals and organizations in ways that remain true to their interwoven, situated, complex, and sophisticated nature.

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8

Template Analysis in Business and Management Research

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8.1 Introduction

Thematic methods of data analysis are widely used in qualitative organizational research. In this chapter, we will introduce you to Template Analysis (King and Brooks 2017), a particular style of thematic analysis that has been widely used in organizational and management research as well as in many other disciplines. We will begin by explaining how thematic approaches to data analysis are commonly used in qualitative organizational research, before moving on to present Template Analysis as an approach with particular utility in this field. We will then present a case study example to illustrate how Template Analysis is used by qualitative organizational researchers. In our conclusion, we will consider the overall

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_8

strengths and weaknesses of the method and reflect on further developments which may extend the use of Template Analysis as a flexible form of thematic analysis with wide utility in qualitative organizational research.

8.2 Thematic Approaches to Qualitative Data Analysis in Organizational Research

Thematic analysis is widely acknowledged as an accessible and useful approach to the analysis of rich and meaningful qualitative data—indeed, Clarke and Braun (2013) describe thematic analysis as the 'basic' method of qualitative data analysis. Thematic approaches to data analysis are extensively used in qualitative organizational research and beyond. They often appeal to qualitative researchers because of their potentially broad application: they can be applied to very different qualitative data sets across a wide range of research topics.

The term 'thematic analysis' does not refer to a single method, and in qualitative organizational research, there are numerous different approaches to thematic analysis (e.g. Framework Analysis [Ritchie and Spencer 1994], Matrix Analysis [Nadin and Cassell 2004] and—the focus of this chapter—Template Analysis). Styles of thematic analysis can vary in how they define themes and in how they organize and structure analysis. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assert that the principal focus of all thematic analysis approaches is on identifying, organizing, and interpreting themes in detailed qualitative (textual) data to highlight and convey key messages. In this chapter, our focus is on Template Analysis as a particular style of thematic analysis, but we will first look at some of the key features of thematic analysis approaches and consider how Template Analysis relates to them.

8.2.1 Styles of Thematic Analysis Used in Qualitative Organizational Research: Methodology Specific and Generic

An important distinction is between *methodology-specific* and *generic* forms of thematic analysis. In qualitative research, it is important to be

clear about the distinction between *method* (the particular techniques used to collect and analyze data) and *methodology* (the general approach taken to carrying out a piece of research). *Methodology-specific* forms of data analysis use thematic analysis as an integral part of a wider methodology. Examples of methodology-specific forms of analysis include Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] (e.g. Smith et al. 2009) and Grounded Theory (e.g. Corbin and Strauss 2008). Both IPA and Grounded Theory involve the identification of themes in qualitative (textual) data sets, but analysis is undertaken in a particular way while adhering to particular assumptions. IPA draws on a range of phenomenological ideas and principles, and the type of thematic analysis undertaken is 'meticulously idiographic' (Smith 2015), moving only with great care from very detailed within-case to cross-case analysis. Grounded Theory studies look to uncover and theorize social processes relating to a particular setting. As described by Corbin and Strauss (e.g. 2008), Grounded Theory methodology delineates clearly differentiated stages in analysis which incorporate several forms of thematic analysis including open coding and axial coding. As methodology-specific forms of analysis are embedded within distinct methodologies (and are clearly underpinned by particular philosophical assumptions), a researcher cannot, with any credibility, decide to analyze their data using such approaches after the study has been designed and data have been collected. Researchers using a methodology-specific form of thematic analysis are similarly obliged to adhere to the particular method of analysis their methodology specifies.

Other forms of thematic analysis are not tied to any particular philosophical, theoretical, and/or methodological position, and we refer to these as *generic* forms of thematic analysis. Template Analysis is an example of a generic style of thematic analysis, and other examples include Braun and Clarke's (e.g. 2006) style of thematic analysis as well as Framework Analysis(ibid), Matrix Analysis (ibid), and Analytic Induction (e.g. Johnson 2004). Generic styles of thematic analysis can provide researchers more flexibility and adaptability to the particular requirements of their own work—rather than applying a methodology as a whole package, using a generic style of thematic analysis can allow researchers to respond to the particularities of their own aims and setting. However, just because generic forms of thematic analysis do not come

with an inherent philosophical foundation, this does not render such concerns inconsequential. For researchers using a generic style of thematic analysis such as Template Analysis, the onus is on the researcher themselves to think about (and explicate) their own position—and to ensure that analysis is carried out in a way that is coherent with it.

8.2.2 Defining and Organizing Themes in Thematic Analysis

King and Horrocks (2010) succinctly define themes as '*recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/ or experience which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question*' (page 150). This definition emphasizes the role of the researcher in defining what might be deemed 'relevant to the research question'. Descriptions of themes being 'discovered' can sometimes give the false impression that themes exist independently of the researcher, but to portray themes as concealed, objective entities waiting patiently in the data set to be 'unearthed' by the intrepid explorer-researcher is fundamentally incorrect. While different approaches to thematic analysis may take various positions on exactly how themes relate to the experience of research participants, we would maintain that all thematic analysis methods recognize the central importance of the researcher's engagement with the data through the process of analysis. The above definition also stipulates that a theme is intrinsically recurrent, something distinctive, and characteristic in a piece of textual data. This means, for example, that a one-off comment in a particular research interview could not be said to constitute a theme. However, it is worth clarifying that a theme need not necessarily be identified *across* cases: it might be that a researcher identifies a theme that is unique to a single case, and we would not see this as necessarily problematic. In fact, it may usefully highlight how one case differs in significant ways from others in the sample.

Forms of thematic analysis vary in the extent to which they stipulate how themes should be defined and organized. Approaches to thematic analysis which use an *inductive* form of reasoning (concerned with moving from specific observations to more general propositions about the

research topic) emphasize a 'bottom-up' approach to coding, whereby coding categories and themes are not stipulated in advance but developed through engagement with the data. Other thematic analysis approaches may be very strongly theory-led and employ a more *deductive* form of reasoning, in which case coding categories and themes are more likely to be determined in advance and a 'top-down' approach to coding utilized. Forms of thematic analysis vary in the extent to which they use inductive or deductive reasoning: where different approaches to thematic analysis position themselves on this inductive-deductive continuum depends very much upon the methodological approach being taken (IPA, e.g., would always take a highly inductive approach). Generic approaches to thematic analysis (such as Template Analysis) can, in contrast, be used from a variety of methodological positions and do not therefore have a single fixed position on this continuum (and work using Template Analysis often tends to be pragmatically located somewhere in a mid-range point [King and Brooks 2017]).

8.2.3 Coding in Thematic Analysis

Codes and coding are other terms commonly referred to in the literature on thematic analysis. As there is some variation as to exactly how these terms are used between different approaches (and additional variation in their use and meaning across different academic disciplines), some caution is needed here. We understand 'code' to refer to comments linked to extracts of text, indicating material identified by the analyst as relevant to their research question. Codes may then be developed (as analysis progresses) into themes—so coding is the process of indexing text with codes and (as analysis progresses) themes. However, given the aforementioned variation, it is always worth considering how a particular author understands these terms and how he or she is employing them.

Some forms of thematic analysis stipulate a particular sequence by which the researcher builds up their coding structure through the process of analysis, often moving from the descriptive to the interpretive and finally toward overarching themes. Other forms of thematic analysis (including Template Analysis) are less prescriptive and do not stipulate a particular set

sequence of coding levels or an explicit distinction between descriptive and interpretive coding. Template Analysis additionally explicitly encourages greater depth of coding where data are rich and highly relevant to the research question—multiple levels of coding may be used to elaborate fine distinctions within main themes (King and Brooks 2017). The extent to which different approaches allow for flexibility in relation to coding structure can be seen as a strength or a limitation depending upon the particular researcher and their study aims. Moving from descriptive to interpretive coding can help to ensure that analysis remains close to the text initially without proceeding too hastily into the development of abstract, interpretive themes. Clear instruction as to the number and structure of coding levels may also be appealing, especially to more inexperienced qualitative researchers. For other researchers, flexibility and adaptability may be appealing, and this may be especially true in a field such as organizational research, which is generally pragmatic in orientation.

8.2.4 The Philosophical Position of Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis can be underpinned by any of the philosophical positions used within qualitative research. For methodology-specific forms, philosophical assumptions are built into the overall methodology, as we noted above with reference to IPA and Grounded Theory. For generic forms, such as Template Analysis, the researcher needs to specify their position and ensure that they use the method in a way that is congruent with it.

There are numerous different ways in which philosophical positions within qualitative research have been characterized. We find it useful to make a distinction in terms of both epistemology (our assumptions about what we can know through research) and ontology (our assumptions about the nature of the reality we research). We have proposed a four-way classification scheme (King and Brooks 2017), which we summarize below.

- **Qualitative neo-positivism.** This shares the assumptions of most quantitative research; it holds that there is a real world separate from our particular perspective on it and that this world is knowable with confidence through application of rigorous methodological procedures.

- **Limited realism.** This perspective shares the ontological assumption that there is an external, objective reality, but does not believe we can ever fully know it independent of our particular perspective on it. We can seek transferable understandings from our research through careful consideration of our positions as researchers, but conclusions must always be tentative and partial.
- **Contextualism.** Research from this position either denies the existence of a single reality independent of human perceptions of it or treats such ontological questions as essentially unanswerable. It also believes our knowledge of any phenomenon cannot be separated from our personal engagement with it. We can seek a plausible account of the nature of participants' experiences and/or the social processes in which they partake and offer this as a source of potential insight to bring to bear on other settings. But we cannot generalize from such accounts or argue that any one interpretation is the 'best'.
- **Radical constructionism.** This stance takes the relativist assumptions of contextualism further by viewing all human reality as open to alternative constructions, including the knowledge claims of social scientific research themselves. It sees language as the building material for such constructions and as inevitably permeated with issues of power. From this perspective, talk about generalizability is simply another attempt to construct a version of reality.

We discuss the way these philosophical positions shape the practice of thematic analysis in general and Template Analysis in particular in King and Brooks (in press) and King and Brooks (2017), respectively.

8.3 Using Template Analysis

So far, we have introduced you to the use of thematic analysis approaches in qualitative organizational research and discussed the different styles and key features of thematic analysis approaches used in this field. We will now move on to describe in more detail a particular style of thematic analysis which has been widely utilized in organizational, business, and management research: Template Analysis. In this first section, we will

take you through the steps that are typically followed by researchers using Template Analysis. These are not intended to be rigidly prescriptive, but they offer a guiding framework within which the qualitative data analyst can work. It is generally a good idea for novice users of the method to adhere quite closely to the usual approach; with more experience, you will gain confidence in adapting the technique to your needs when necessary.

The procedural steps that are characteristically followed in Template Analysis are:

- Familiarization with the data
- Preliminary coding
- Clustering
- Developing the initial template
- Modifying the template
- Defining the 'final' template
- Using the template to interpret the data
- Writing-up

We will now take you through each step in more detail. While we will most frequently refer to data in the form of interview transcripts, it is important to recognize that Template Analysis can be used with any form of written textual data, including participant diaries (e.g. Radcliffe 2013), observational field notes (e.g. Frambach et al. 2014), and pre-existing organizational documents (e.g. Maguire 2008).

8.3.1 Familiarization with the Data

Template Analysis does not seek to code each line or block of text as if it were a discrete unit, separate from the transcript (or other data item) as a whole. Rather, making sense of a particular segment of text in order to code it requires you to consider its meaning in relation to the participant's full account. For that reason, it is vital to be as familiar as possible with the data before you begin coding. You should read through the data

several times, resisting the temptation to actually code until you feel you know it well. For interview data, it can be helpful to listen to the recording too. Clearly, you will be at an advantage if you carried out the interview yourself and even more so if you transcribed it, but we would still recommend a full read through at the start of analysis.

While it is crucial that you are familiar with a data item before you start to code it, it may not always be practical to attempt to familiarize yourself thoroughly with an entire data set at the start of analysis. If you have a very large number (in qualitative terms) of data items, it may be impossible to read through the whole lot and retain in your mind a clear sense of each one's 'story'. It is therefore sensible in such circumstances to focus on familiarization with a subset of the data, which you will code first. This fits well with the way the initial template is commonly developed in Template Analysis, as we will describe later.

8.3.2 Preliminary Coding

This step is where you begin to identify what interests you in the data and to mark it in some way for inclusion in further analysis. Some researchers may want to use specialist software to help with coding and analysis from the start (commonly referred to as CAQDAS which stands for 'Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software'). We tend to stick to paper and pencil methods at the early stages of analysis, finding them more flexible and convenient than working on a screen; we will often enter the more developed coding onto a CAQDAS program at a later stage. If you are working by hand, we would suggest you print out data items in double-spaced format with wide margins, to give you plenty of room for noting. Applying continuous line-numbering to each document is also helpful for indexing your coding.

When carrying out preliminary coding, your task is to mark or highlight each segment of text that may say something of relevance to your research question and add a brief note that captures what you found to be of interest. There is no need to be concerned with defining fully thought-out themes at this stage, and if in doubt as to whether a

particular point is of relevance, we suggest erring on the side of inclusivity. One thing that is explicitly permitted (though not compulsory) within Template Analysis is the use of *a priori* themes. These are themes which are defined in advance of the start of detailed analysis, often based on theoretical ideas that have guided a particular study, or on pragmatic concerns such as evaluation criteria. If a segment of text appears to relate to an *a priori* theme, you simply code it to it. It is important to note that a priori themes do not have any kind of 'protected status'—they are just as much subject to revision or removal as analysis progresses as any other theme.

8.3.3 Clustering

When you have finished preliminary coding—either for the full data set or on the subset you have chosen to start with (see below)—the next step is clustering the codes (including any *a priori* themes). This enables you to begin to identify themes and the possible relationships between them. It is often helpful to start by looking at your full list of codes from preliminary coding and see where you can rationalize by merging under one title very similar codes and removing obvious duplications. Codes are clustered together in meaningful groups, which share some common perspective on the data. As these clusters develop, you will be able to constitute themes that are more clearly defined than your preliminary codes. You may begin to see how subthemes within clusters could relate to each other—especially in hierarchical terms, where a more specific theme identifies a narrower aspect of a wider issue or perspective.

It is important not to rush this stage and try to 'fix' relationships between themes to soon. The quality of analysis is almost always enhanced by spending time trying out different ways of defining and organizing themes. We find this is facilitated by carrying out clustering using sticky notes ('Post-Its') with codes/themes marked on them and indexed by line number to supporting transcript extracts. These notes can easily be moved around to try out different ways of organizing—and thus of thinking about—your analysis.

8.3.4 Developing the Initial Template

Once you feel you have a good sense of how your clusters and their constituent themes are defined and how they relate to each other, you can develop an initial version of your coding template. It is normal (but not obligatory) in Template Analysis to do this on the basis of a subset of the data—for example, in a study with 20 interviews, you might start to develop an initial template after carrying out preliminary coding and clustering on five of the transcripts. The precise number of data items on which to base this is always a matter of your judgment for a particular study. If you do it on a very small subset, you are likely to need to make very extensive changes to it before you can finalize it. Using a large subset (or even the full set) is less of a problem, except that you lose some of the efficiency and manageability of analysis that can come from an earlier construction of an initial template. As a rule of thumb, the more diverse your data items are, the more you may need to include in your early analysis to produce a reasonably comprehensive initial template. So if our hypothetical study that included 20 interviews was narrow in focus with participants from very similar perspectives, we might feel confident to construct an initial template after three transcripts. If it was much more broadly focused and included very diverse participants, we might delay forming the initial template until we had carried out the earlier steps on, say, eight transcripts.

When constructing the initial template, make sure that your coding levels are clear. This may be done by typography (e.g. font size, font formatting such as boldface or italics), indenting, and/or numbering levels. Templates are most frequently presented as linear lists, but they can be shown in other ways, such as a mind-map format. King and Brooks (2017, Chap. 3) show an example of how the same template may be displayed in linear or mind-map styles.

One of the advantages of the mind-map format is that it is more effective than the linear for showing connections between theme clusters. Themes which characterize such links are known as ‘lateral’ themes. In Template Analysis we refer to lateral themes that permeate many or all clusters as ‘integrative themes’. You may choose to define a particular

aspect of participants' accounts as an integrative theme, rather than a main theme, because you want to indicate the way the issue threads through much of the discussion across the interview (or other types of data). For example, in a qualitative evaluation of a community palliative care service, Brooks and King (2014) defined an integrative theme that captured the sense of 'specialness' of the service.

8.3.5 Modifying the Template and Defining the 'Final' Version

Once you have an initial template, the next step is to develop it through an iterative process of trying to code data with it, noting where there are problems or limitations in so doing, and modifying the template. This cycle can be repeated as often as required to produce a final version to which all data can be coded. There are three key questions about this step that need to be answered for any particular analysis:

- How often do you revise the template?
- When do you recode data to new versions of the template?
- How do you know when you have reached a final version of the template?

Considering the issue of template revisions, we would normally not try to produce a new version after every fresh data item to which you have applied your current template. Rather, we would normally code a batch of data items, noting where there were problems with existing themes, or significant aspects of the data not captured by the template. For example, in a study that comprised of 20 interviews, we might build the initial template based on five of them, then code another three with it, before producing a second version. The more diverse the perspectives in your data, the more likely you are to need to produce new template versions sooner rather than later. Revisions might include: re-defining themes to increase or narrow their scope (shown through moving them up or down hierarchical levels), moving themes between clusters, adding new themes—or even entire new clusters—and deleting themes that have become redundant as the template has developed.

It would be possible to go back and recode previously coded data every time you produced new version of the template, but this would certainly be a very time-consuming strategy, and we would suggest in most studies unnecessary. Depending on the size and complexity of the study, and the extent of changes to the template, we might typically only recode once or twice before the final coding to the last version of the template. This, of course, begs the question of how you know when it is appropriate to define a 'final' version of the template. In a sense we would argue that you can never say that you have reached an ultimate and definitive version—hence the scare quotes we put around the word 'final'. There are always further revisions that could be made, and you may want to interrogate your data in different ways for different purposes, requiring re-analysis and re-thinking of the template. However, thinking about the analysis of a discrete piece of work, you should not consider your template as 'final' until (1) all sections of the data relevant to your research question can be coded to it and (2) the template is clear and well-organized enough to facilitate your final interpretation and write-up of the data.

In addressing all of these issues, you need to maintain a pragmatic focus on the purpose of your project and the resources you have available—especially time. If you are carrying out a short-term and perhaps quite broad-brush evaluation project, you may use relatively few iterations of your template, and only do a full re-coding once at the very end. In contrast, for a large, complex academic research project (including a doctoral project), you may develop many versions of the template and fully recode several times in the course of analysis.

8.3.6 Using the Template to Interpret the Data

The act of defining themes and organizing them into a template is a form of data interpretation. However, it is not enough to simply show your 'final' template, code all your data to it and then summarize the contents of every theme in turn. This would result in a presentation of findings that was very long and in all likelihood very tedious for readers; equally, it would do little to help make clear the central messages of your analysis

for your research question. You will always need to develop your interpretation further once you have coded all your data.

Given that Template Analysis is a generic form of thematic analysis, it is not possible to be narrowly prescriptive with regard to what you need to do to fully interpret your data. This will depend on your philosophical and (where relevant) theoretical approach as well as the methodological details of your study. Brooks et al. (2015) provide examples of how Template Analysis is used in three very different types of study. We can say, though, that pattern-finding and prioritization are very likely to be a major part of the interpretive process. You may want to consider, for example, what is suggested by the fact that particular themes tend to occur together in particular cases or that the dominant themes in some subgroups of your sample differ from others. In terms of prioritization, you need to ask yourself which aspects of your analysis make the most important contribution to answering your research question.

8.3.7 Writing-Up

There are typically three ways in which researchers tend to present the findings from Template Analysis studies. Firstly, and by far most frequently, they organize findings around the thematic structure of the template, explicating the meaning of themes and illustrating with direct quotes from the data. Even in a piece of writing the size of a PhD thesis, you will need to be selective about which themes you focus upon, in line with our previous comments about prioritization. The theme-by-theme approach can be very effective for conveying an overall sense of the key findings from the analysis, in quite an efficient and well-organized way. Inevitably, though, it does not allow for a very strong sense of the perspectives of individual participants.

The inverse to the theme-by-theme approach is a case-by-case presentation. In this, findings from each participant are examined in turn, highlighting themes that are of particular interest and importance in their account. This style allows for a clear, holistic sense of individual positions, but for all but the smallest studies (in terms of numbers of participants) will require a considerable word count to deliver. There is also a danger of

a good deal of repetition, where there are strong similarities between some participants' perspectives.

A third option is to provide a theme-by-theme account but supplement this with a small number of individual case studies. There needs to be a good rationale for the choice of case studies—for example, to illustrate different positions that emerged from the analysis or to highlight differences between participant groups.

Whichever presentation style you choose, you should use direct quotes from the data to support your themes. This enables the reader to get a flavor of what the themes are capturing in participants' personal experience and helps to clarify the meaning of themes. We would generally advise against the use of too many very short quotes, as these do not give much sense of the participant's voice and can make the findings rather fragmented. It is also very important not to simply present quotes and then do little more than paraphrase them in your comments. You need to *interpret* the quotes—tell the reader what is of interest in them and why and how they contribute to the argument you are developing.

8.3.8 Quality Assurance in Template Analysis

There is considerable debate about the criteria by which we should judge the quality of qualitative research, with some authors trying to modify criteria from quantitative research, some proposing specific qualitative criteria, and some arguing that it is not possible to define any general criteria for qualitative research. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore this debate; see Johnson et al. (2006) and Symon and Cassell (2012) for useful discussions of it. Regardless of the merits of particular arguments in this area, we agree with the authors just cited that quality criteria—and the means of assessing them—need to be coherent with the underlying philosophical position of a project. Thus, in a project adopting a radical constructionist stance, it would make no sense to assess inter-rater reliability of coders, as such a strategy is grounded in realist assumptions at both an epistemological and ontological level.

We briefly summarize below some common quality assurance techniques used in Template Analysis.

- **Independent coding.** Various forms of independent coding are widely used as quality checks in all forms of thematic analysis, including Template Analysis. They include comparisons between members of the research team or between researcher(s) and methodological or subject experts from outside the team. In Template Analysis such comparisons may be carried out at any stage but are probably most common at the preliminary coding and initial template steps.
- **Respondent feedback**. Research participants may be asked to comment on analysis—usually at a fairly late stage in the process. They need to give explicit consent for this activity above and beyond interview (or other data collection methods) participation. The ethics of asking people to revisit their experiences should be considered carefully, and whatever the philosophical position it would be naïve to think they can simply 'rubber stamp' an interpretation as right or wrong.
- **Audit trails.** An audit trail is a step-by-step record of the analysis process. It can help with quality assurance by ensuring the researcher can give a full account of how their analysis developed and why key decisions were made within it. Template Analysis lends itself well to keeping a detailed audit trail; the researcher simply needs to keep a record of the development of thematic clusters and each iteration of the template, with notes as to where and why changes were made.
- **Thick description**. This term comes from anthropology (Geertz 1973) and relates to the importance of providing the reader of a research study with as rich a contextual description of the project and its setting as possible. Keeping a research diary throughout a project can help with this.

8.4 Case Study: Cultural Differences and Customer Experiences in the Hospitality Sector

In this section we present a detailed example of the use of Template Analysis in business and management research, specifically in hospitality management. It is taken from Saloomeh's doctoral research; as such, it is appropriate for her to present it in the first person singular.

8.4.1 Background and Introduction to the Case

Due to the ease of travel in the modern world, the hospitality industries are dealing every day with numerous customers/guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. These differences in culture (values, norms, customs, and language) often mean that perceptions toward service delivery vary. Tabari et al. (2016) underline the importance of cultural differences for guests' satisfaction in the hospitality industry and argue that dealing successful with these differences requires organizations in the sector to generate a cultural intelligence that involves emotion, sentiment, and sensitivity.

Research that explores cultural diversity, ethnocentrism, service encounters, satisfaction, and expectations of customers is often quantitative, using questionnaire-based measures to ask customers or managers about their experience, mostly based on comparing two or three nationalities. In this study, rather than looking at broad comparisons between national groups, I wanted a more in-depth understanding of individuals. I therefore used a qualitative research method—interviews—to explore perceptions, experiences, and expectations during interaction between host and guest.

Aims The focus of my study was to explain *the effect and role of cultural differences on customer expectations and behavior in the hospitality sector*. The aim was to provide a better understanding of diversity, not only tolerance but also acceptance of and adaptation to diversity, which help to improve the quality of being a good host and to increase the level of satisfaction, for both, guest (customer) and host (employees).

Zhang et al. (2005) stress that although a number of studies have endeavored to identify differences in customer services in different countries and between cultures, an underpinning framework for understanding cultural differences needs to be addressed. Thus, my study aimed to develop a model to introduce the influence of cultural differences and the role of cultural sensitivity in the process of interaction between host and guest in relation to managing customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry.

Philosophical Position In this research I took a constructivist epistemological position, recognizing that my own subjective position could not be removed from the research process, including the analysis. I assumed, though, that there is a real world 'out there', independent of our view of it, even though our perspectives on it can never be truly neutral and objective. This equates to the 'limited realist' position described above.

The Research Setting and Participants This research has been conducted by focusing on London and New York as major multicultural cities. London is one of the most culturally diverse cities in Europe and as the capital of the UK plays the role of host to a multicultural and multinational society, serving a wide range of the migratory population (Pantelidis and Wrobel 2008). Similarly, New York (NY) was chosen as a comparable city in which to conduct this study and has an equally diverse and migratory population and culture.

Strauss and Mang (1999) emphasize that intercultural service encounters (ICSEs) are all about interactions between service providers and customers from different cultures. However, much of the previous research focuses either on staff or customer points of view. For the present study, I decided to collect data from both parties (hotel managers as hosts and customers as guests of the same hotels) to fill in the gap in previous studies and also to gain more insight to inform the development of a new model of the impact of cultural differences on host and guest interactions.

Data Collection The flexible and open nature of qualitative research made it appropriate to the aims of this study and the intention to develop a new model grounded in staff and customer experiences. Further, I employed the semi-structured interview method since the focus of research is on personal experiences and attitudes toward the hospitality industry.

Two sets of semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions were designed to generate detailed descriptions of the experiences and opinion of both hotel managers and customers of the same hotels in the selected cities. To help develop these questions, and to provide insights for data analysis, I carried out a small pilot study in New York, involving three staff and ten customers from three hotels.

For the main study, I selected large hotels (100 or more beds) which were members of chains which served a high volume of international clientele. Managers were selected from a variety of roles in each hotel, but all had significant past experience in international chain hotels. A diverse sample of customers was recruited from each hotel, including both domestic and international visitors. All were required to have had some previous experience of staying in a hotel. In total 72 participants were recruited and interviewed, 6 managers, and 30 guests from each city. These came from six hotels in New York and six in London. Interviews varied in length from 30 to 45 minutes for managers and 15 to 20 minutes for customers. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in full.

8.4.2 Template Analysis Procedure

I completed and transcribed the New York interviews before commencing data collection in London. Practically, it therefore made sense to analyze the New York data as a whole, first. My choice was then whether to use the final New York template as the starting point for the London analysis or begin afresh with analysis of the London data. Because I did not want to make assumptions that cultural difference issues would be the same in both settings, I decided on the latter option. I describe below the steps to developing the full template for the New York data and then the full study final template.

8.4.3 Familiarization with the Data and Preliminary Coding

Before starting any coding, I read through all my transcripts and listened to the audio recordings. Once I felt I was very familiar with the data, I transferred my transcripts into the MAXQDA qualitative analysis software, and I began working through each transcript, coding all sections of text that were potentially relevant to my research question. While my approach was mostly 'bottom-up', I did use some *a priori* themes, based largely on insights from the pilot study. These were:

- Cultural difference
- Language
- Communication
- Dealing with differences
- Accent
- Appearance
- Cultural training
- Cultural awareness

Rather than working on a subset of the data, as is often done in Template Analysis, I carried out the preliminary coding on the full New York data set, as I wanted to be as sure as possible not to overlook potential themes. This was a reflection of my lack of experience with qualitative research (including Template Analysis), as I discuss further in the concluding part of this case.

Another option to consider was whether to develop separate templates for staff and customers. Because I was interested in comparing the perspectives of the two groups within each setting, I decided I would try to encompass both sets of experience within the same template.

8.4.4 Clustering

Once I had completed preliminary coding, I began to look at how the emerging and *a priori* themes could be grouped together in meaningful clusters. I did this in the MAXQDA software, using the facility to highlight words and phrases in different colors. It is important that clusters capture shared meaning rather than just semantic similarities between theme titles. To help ensure I was focused on this, I listened again to transcript audio recordings during the clustering stage.

8.4.5 Producing the Initial Template

As the clusters developed, I considered how the themes within them could be organized hierarchically, and on the basis of this, I started to construct a first full version of the template. The initial template had a

total of thirteen top-level themes; most of these were sub-divided into three hierarchical levels, though one had just a single sub-theme level and another went to a seventh level.

8.4.6 Modifying the Template

Once I had produced the initial template, I went back through all the New York data, applying it to each transcript and noting where problems occurred. These might be where it was evident that a new theme was needed or where for the sake of clarity changes to existing themes were required. As I made changes to the template and tried it again, it also became clear that some themes had become redundant and could be deleted. Example 8.1 shows how one theme from the initial template was changed through this iterative process of template development. As can be seen, the main theme of Variety of Customers on the initial version has been replaced by a theme entitled Customer's Identity. This change provided more flexibility to cluster other codes under it as sublevels, such as, appearance, types, differences in language, accent, and way of dressing. Thus, the new top-level theme breaks down aspects of difference in customers' identities in a fuller and more systematic way than was done on the initial template.

Example 8.1 Example of Changes in Themes from Initial Template to Final Template

Initial template	Final template
2. Variety of customers	**1. Customer's identity**
2.1. Different background	1.1. Different backgrounds/Origins
2.1.1. Time of visit	1.2.Different language
2.2. Identify originality	1.2.1. Different accent
2.2.1. Kind of differences	1.2.2. Different dialogue
2.2.1.1. Action	1.3. Appearance
	1.3.1. Way of dressing
	1.3.2. Way of greeting
	1.4. Types
	1.4.1. Business
	1.4.2. Leisure
	1.5. Expectations

8.4.7 Developing the Final Template

Following the modifications to the initial New York template, as described above, I finalized a full version from this part of the analysis. I then repeated the same process for the London data, and once I had a final template for that part of my study, I systematically compared the two templates. It was clear that the key issues captured were very similar, so I went about the task of merging the two. As a quality check in this last stage, I decided to use an independent coder to help me clarify where improvements to the overall final template could be made. I gave him my full template and access to my coding in the MAXQDA software and asked him to critically reflect on how well the template encompassed relevant material in the data. On the basis of our discussion following this, I made some changes to lower order themes that helped capture issues better and then finalized the coding of all the data. The final version of the template for the full study is shown in Example 8.2. I used this as the basis for my interpretation of each of the top-level themes, to help me build my new model of cultural difference in the context of service/customer interactions.

Example 8.2 Final Template

1. **Customer's identity**
   - 1.1. Different backgrounds/origins
   - 1.2. Different language
   - 1.3. Appearance
   - 1.4. Types
   - 1.5. Expectations

2. **Communication and language**
   - 2.1. Language barrier
   - 2.2. Behavior
   - 2.3. Emotion
   - 2.4. Non-verbal communication
   - 2.5. Verbal communication
   - 2.6. Problems
   - 2.7. Respectful vs. disrespectful
   - 2.8. Good vs. bad communication
   - 2.9. Impact of knowing more language

3. **Culture**
   - 3.1. Definition
   - 3.2. Cultural differences
   - 3.3. Cultural awareness
   - 3.4. Cultural closeness
   - 3.5. Element of culture
   - 3.6. Your own culture
   - 3.7. Role of culture in daily life

4. **Reason of adopting home culture or host culture**

5. **Satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction**
   - 5.1. Emotion
   - 5.2. Satisfying all different cultural backgrounds
   - 5.3. Impact of culture on each of them

6. **Hospitality**
   - 6.1. Definition
   - 6.2. Culture in hospitality

7. **Service**
   - 7.1. Intuitive service
   - 7.2. Differences in service
   - 7.3. Dissatisfaction of service
   - 7.4. New York Service
   - 7.5. London Service

8. **Diversity of staff**
   - 8.1. Problem with cultural diversity
   - 8.2. Religion vs. staff

9. **Training**
   - 9.1. Importance of training
   - 9.2. Standard training

10. **Multicultural**
    - 10.1. Definition
    - 10.2. Service in New York/London as a multicultural operation

11. **New York/ London**
    - 11.1. New York/London culture
    - 11.2. New York/London service
    - 11.3. Reason of being in New York/London
    - 11.4. Living in New York/London
    - 11.5. Operating service industry in New York/London

8.4.8 Writing-Up

To write-up my analysis, I decided on a theme-by-theme approach. At the start of each thematic section, I presented the top-level theme and its subthemes in a table. I used quotes from both cities and from managers and customers to help highlight the similarities and differences in perspectives. As noted before, a main aim of this study was to help produce a model of cultural differences in service/customer interaction. I had drawn up an initial conceptual framework from my literature review; I wanted to use the qualitative data analysis to develop this further, filling in the gaps in previous understanding. My final template was my main source of insight into achieving this. I supplemented it by creating 'Word Clouds' for all the text coded to the themes that were most important to my analysis, using the free Word Clouds online software (available at http://www.wordclouds.com/). This helped me to focus on how the themes could feed into the model (Tabari et al. 2016).

8.4.9 Key Challenges and Learning Points

The key challenge in my research was the large scale of the project, with 72 interviewees from two different groups (staff and customers), in two different cities. My choice to treat the two cities initially as separate data sets, developing templates for each before merging them (as described above), worked well in terms of providing reassurance that the commonalities between them were not just a product of how I conducted the analysis, as may have been the case if I had imposed a single template from early on. I found it useful to employ software for coding throughout (MAXQDA) as it helped me manage a large volume of transcript data.

Another significant challenge was that this was my first time conducting qualitative research, and I knew no one in my area who was familiar with Template Analysis. As a novice researcher, I sought advice and input from others to develop my understanding of qualitative research in general and Template Analysis in particular. I discussed each step in the research process with my supervisory team and as described above used

an experienced colleague for independent scrutiny of my overall template. I found it helpful to attend and present at several conferences and also to submit some of my work for publication (Tabari et al. 2016). One aspect I would change in the light of gaining more experience of Template Analysis would be to build my initial template earlier, from preliminary coding and clustering of a subset of the data in each setting (still incorporating *a priori* themes). This would have been more efficient than carrying out the early steps on all transcripts, without any threat to quality—so long as a good diversity of transcripts was included in the subset.

8.5 Conclusion

In this final section, we will consider the potential limitations and main strengths of Template Analysis as a style of generic thematic analysis.

A potential pitfall of Template Analysis is that the strong focus on developing the coding structure—the template—can turn into an end in itself rather than a means to the end of facilitating a thorough and convincing analysis of the data. It is always possible to modify the template one more time; remember, the goal is not a perfect template but one that is good enough for the task at hand. Sufficient time must be given for the interpretive work that is required after all data have been coded to the 'final' version of the template.

Although we have stressed repeatedly the flexible nature of the guidance provided, it remains the case that any analytic approach that is based around a sequence of typical procedures can be used in too prescriptive a manner. For novice users, we would suggest that adhering reasonably closely to the steps described can be useful, but with increased experience, researchers should have the confidence to build on the core features in ways that best suit their requirements. Conversely, just as some may view Template Analysis too prescriptive, others may find it too flexible, given that it allows so much choice about how the template is constructed and what the final version may look like.

Despite our observation that some researchers may find Template Analysis too flexible, we would see its adaptability as a major strength. Researchers can adapt procedures to fit the needs of their study—whether

in terms of their particular philosophical/theoretical approach or the pragmatic demands and constraints they face (or both). Choices can be made about whether to use *a priori* themes, how soon to develop an initial template, how many iterations of the full template to apply, and so on (see Brooks et al. 2015, for an illustration of this flexibility in relation to three very different projects).

Another important advantage of Template Analysis is that it encourages transparency in the process of analysis, since the researcher is able to keep a careful record of each step. As the template develops through several iterations, researchers can look back at earlier versions to help them reflect critically on the analytical choices they have made. Equally, at the end of analysis, the detailed documented history of the process provides a thorough audit trail, which we have highlighted above as a valuable contribution to quality assurance.

To conclude, we believe that Template Analysis provides a style of generic thematic analysis that balances clear procedures with flexibility. With an extensive and growing literature available in terms of studies using the method, it has much to offer qualitative researchers in business and management.

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9

Discourse Analysis

Aylin Kunter

9.1 Introduction

Discourse is 'language use relative to social, political and cultural formations; it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals' interaction with society' (Jaworski and Coupland 1999; Thomas 2003). This definition focuses on language as the object of analysis, thus encouraging a linguistic analytical perspective. However, if we take the assumption that all facets of human experience and activity are socially constructed, it is to say that there can be no totally objective science, history and literary scholarship, as they are all influenced by the society in which they are created. Those who argue for the existence of a 'discourse theory' argue that historical accounts are socially constructed and that they are a product of the era and society within which the researcher is living.

It is argued therefore that how we see ourselves, and in turn what we are not, can be understood through the analysis of discourse. It is also

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_9

argued, relatedly, that 'without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 2). Assumptions behind the methodology of discourse analysis (DA) recognize the role of 'text' or 'discourse' in our everyday lives and its contribution to the construction of our social and organizational realities. But before DA is summarized as a methodology, it is important to make clear what will be meant in this chapter by the terms text and discourse.

9.2 Text

Phillips and Hardy (2002) define the concept of discourse as 'an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination and reception that brings an object into being' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 3). Applying these ideas to work organizations, Thomas (2003) describes part of the process of the construction of the object that is management discourse for example, as diffusion. He then goes on to identify three main groups who are crucial to this process. These are business people, academics, and intellectuals. According to Phillips and Hardy (2002), however, and crucially to the methodology of DA, it is assumed that texts do not have meaning individually and that it is only through their interconnection with other aspects of the discourse and the context in which they are produced that they carry meaning. It is important at this stage to clarify what for the purpose of this chapter is assumed as text.

Each text is seen as a discursive unit within an interrelated array of other texts. It is then further the connection between this discourse and the social reality it constructs for each individual that makes DA an effective tool for studying social phenomenon.

> DA is a concern with text, discourse and context because it represents a methodology, not just a method that embodies a strong social constructivist view of the social world. Discourse analytic approaches vary in approach and perspective according to philosophical and analytical approaches, but the thing they do have in common is that they seem to be united by an attention to an interpretive and reflexive style of analysis. DA therefore

> takes the approach of a strong social constructionist epistemology; it assumes that the world cannot be known separately from discourse. (Burman and Parker 1993)

The analysis of the subject of culture and organizations must therefore imply an analysis of discourse *about* objects. The subliminal messages contained in advertising comprise of images and discourse. It is through advertising, for example, that we are told what it is we actually consume through objects. Through this discourse and image playing their role, advertising supplies us with the ideal object and its system of thought. These objects are heavily connotated and so are self-referential.

'Texts may take a variety of forms, including written texts, spoken words, pictures, symbols, artefacts and so forth' (Grant et al. 1998). With the emergence of social and postmodern semiotics, the definition of the word 'text' can be broadened in relation to previous definitions to include such things as cultural artifacts such as art, architecture, music, novels, poetry, songs, and plays (Nissley 2004). Fairclough (2003) argues that constructions of space, time, and space-times are frequently constructed through texts; however we must be careful not to rely just on written texts, as there are aspects of the environment such as interior design, urban design, and architectural design of buildings that can also play a part in this construction.

Further to this, Nissley (2004) argues that the world is in fact in the midst of an image revolution, that it is pictures, stories, metaphors, and visual arts that construct the language of the current economy. It is further argued here by Palus and Horth (2002) cited in Nissley (2004) that 'the palette of communication options and more importantly, of idea of making is expanding enormously, transforming the way people think. For today's creative leadership a new kind of literacy is required: a literacy of images' (Palus and Horth 2002, p. 71 cited in Nissley 2004, p. 294).

What is crucial to the understanding of discourse as qualitative research method is that such texts contain symbols which represent the social structure from which the discourse has emerged. Further to this and relatedly, according to Fairclough (2003), style and identity are important sites for analysis. It is interplay between body language (the physical materiality of

bodies) and language that constructs style. That's various gestures have relatively stable meanings. It is this relationship between discourse and the non-discursive world that has a dialectic nature. Fairclough (2003) goes on to make a point regarding 'The aestheticisation of public identities' and that social life has undergone a process of aestheticisation. The idea of embodiment and politics are discussed here, and our attention is turned to the fact whenever a politician makes a public appearance, it needs to be seen as an aesthetically worked event. As an embodiment; including gestures, stance, facial expressions, and movements.

According to Nissley (2004), visual representations of a brand or organization are symbolic constructions that act as metaphorical representations of an organization. Because texts are produced at a particular time and place, they represent to a certain extent the history of the social system and within that of the language used to construct the discourse. This therefore enables us, through the analysis of these symbols or texts, to gain an understanding of the 'partial' histories of the players within the discourse at a particular time and place.

The idea of a partial history is an important one here, as according to Phillips and Hardy (2002), 'a partiality is due to the structuring of relations of the power of the participants' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 4). There is therefore here recognition that discourse is constructed by players with varying power and influence and that the recorded or accepted history of both the participants and institutions involved in this social construction does not necessarily give a complete picture. This chapter will therefore consider not only language as text but other symbolic and organizational artifacts such as advertising, images, interior design, and logos. This is in line with ideas previously discussed around the idea of discourse as representative of social structure, and relations, through the ideas it communicates symbolically.

9.3 Discourse

Moving on from theories regarding the nature and structure of text, the study and analysis of this phenomenon are carried out through the analysis of discourse. It is therefore with this awareness and recognition of the

nature of the discourse and its partiality that discourse analysis (DA) attempts to ascertain the constructive effects of discourse through the 'structured and systematic study of texts' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 4).

A related debate is around the issue of the extent to which researchers should focus on text or context. There are arguments associated with both focal choices. According to Hardy (2001), researchers who focus on text are often criticized for not locating the data within a particular historical context and so are unable to analyze the constructive effects of language. In the opposite situation to this, in trying to capture and convey context, researchers can privilege their interpretations of a particular text and put words into the mouths of those involved. Another debate according to Hardy (2001) is that of structure and agency. This debate considers whether or not individuals have resistance. According to Tsoukas (2000) the debate regarding structure and agency has good points on both sides. Both realists and constructivists are correct. Tsoukas (2000) argues that although it is right to say that there is a social world outside our heads, the social world as according to social constructivists is also defined by language based distinctions and that define one reality culturally and historically as opposed to another. In a study by Hardy and Maguire (2010), it was found that discourse can in fact, in the case of the UN conference on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), create field configuring events, and ultimately can change institutional fields (Hardy and Maguire 2010).

The extent to which discursive activity shapes reality is still being contested and poses a threat to the acceptance of DA. According to Marcus (1994), in discussing the relationship between postmodernism and anthropology, the postmodern premise is that a fixed, final, or monological interpretation of a given subject is not possible. This, according to Marcus (1994), had encouraged the field of anthropology to challenge its own representations of reality and assertions of reality. It is here through the use of juxtapositions of seemingly incommensurable factors that comparisons can be used in order to uncover multiple and changing realities. It is through this so-called 'postmodern' vision that these seemingly unlikely juxtapositions can shed light on yet to be discovered scenarios and cultures.

Fairclough (1995) has helped to define the critical, in critical discourse analysis. In relating the methodology proposed here to the philosophical assumptions in the previous section, which proposes a critical approach toward social change, the methodology will follow the lead of Fairclough (1995). According to Fairclough (1995), it makes little sense to study verbal interactions as if they were not related to social structures. For Fairclough (1995), the use of the word 'critical' in relation to discourse analysis is tied in with, first and foremost, investigating verbal interactions with awareness of their determination by, and impact on, social structures (Fairclough 1995, p. 36). It is here that Fairclough goes on to discuss that under normal conditions due to the naturalization of social conditions, much is obscured. The goals in this sense therefore of Critical discourse analysis are there to denaturalize. The idea of 'critique' in Fairclough's sense is used to draw attention to the fact in human interaction, these interconnections and that 'chains of cause and effect may be distorted out of vision' (Fairclough 1995, p. 36).

In understanding social phenomenon, and the benefit of carrying out discourse analysis, according to Bordieu (1991), 'Sociology can free itself from all the forms of domination which linguistics and its concepts exercise today over the social sciences only by bringing to light the operations of object construction through which this science was established, and the social conditions of the production and circulation of its fundamental concepts' (Bordieu 1991, p. 37). According to Fairclough (1992), 'We are beginning to realize the ways in which changes in language use are linked to wider social and cultural processes, and the potential in analyzing this use of language in understanding social change'. Further, according to Jaworski and Coupland (1999), despite the variations in emphasis, discourse is an important concept for understanding society and human responses to it, as well as for understanding language itself. The idea of discourse can therefore be thought of as a manifestation of societal changes and conditions, which bring about a language and specific relations of power. Boje et al. (2004) argue that, 'we can consider organizations as material practices of text and talk set in currents of political economy and socio-history – in time and space. From this point of view, what an organization is and everything that happens in it and to it can be seen as a phenomenon in and of language' (Boje et al. 2004, p. 571).

It can be seen, however, that many definitions of discourse as a site for analysis focus on language. However, it should be noted that there is a large body of research that argues that discourse goes beyond language in use, that discourse is made up of language, which represents the social order, and also language, which shapes social order; that it is language, which shapes the interaction of individuals with society. Boje et al. (2004) caution however that treating organizations as sites of uniform coherence and univocal harmony is unrealistic. They go on to argue that there is always more than one possible way of reading any organizational event or situation by pointing out that discourse or texts are not just confined to language.

According to Grant et al. (1998), researchers too have questioned the validity of monological accounts of culture and organizations, and that this tendency can be avoided by developing a more interactive form of analysis. These more 'dialogical' forms of analyses acknowledge that organizations are made up of many discourses which in turn are interpreted to have plurivocal meanings by those involved. This in turn gives rise to a multiplicity of organizational realities, quite different to the idea of one reality and culture advocated by some. The implications of this according to Grant et al. (1998), we cannot construct a singular account of any organizational reality. Importantly, there are implications here for researchers, who have a 'way of seeing' that is specific to their cultural and social background.

Grant et al. (1998) encourage us in fact to think of discourse in the wider sense of communication and to extend our analysis to those texts, which are nonverbal and nonvocal. These include performance art, sign language, painting, sculpture, photography, design, music, and film. If discourse is to make meaning then many of the texts may make use of more than one semiotic system. This study will approach discourse in this way, considering more than one semiotic system in order to gain a better understanding of a culture.

Bearing this in mind and moving on from the manifestation of social and political systems, onto looking more tangibly at what constitutes discourse, raises the question of 'how does this relate to our every day lives?'. Phillips and Hardy (2002) argue that 'Discourses are embodied and enacted in a variety of texts, although they exist beyond the individual

texts that compose them. Texts can thus be considered a discursive "unit" and a material manifestation of discourse. Texts may take a variety of forms, including written texts, spoken words, pictures, symbols, artefacts and so forth' (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 4). Fairclough (1993) also finds it appropriate to extend the notion of discourse from being any product, whether written or spoken, to other symbolic forms such as visual images, for example, advertising.

In applying these ideas to the contemporary workplace, Grant et al. (1998) argue that, 'the term "organizational discourse" refers to the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed' (Grant et al. 1998, p. 3). It is therefore suggested that texts contain symbols, representing the social structure from which the discourse has emerged. Because these texts are produced at a particular time and place, they represent to a certain extent the history of the social system and within that of the language used to construct the discourse. This enables us, through the analysis of these texts and in turn symbols, to gain an understanding of the partial histories of the players within the discourse at a particular time and place.

These players can include organizations, employees, academics, media, and consultants. It is text relating to these groups that will be analyzed and interpreted in order to gain a better understanding of the various dimensions of the discourse. Discourse is constructed by players with varying power and influence and that the recorded or accepted history of both the participants and institutions involved in this social construction does not necessarily give a complete picture. Taking a more critical approach at the ways in which organizations employ various strategies in order to try to control their employees, Grant et al. (1998, p. 1) argue:

> The analysis of organizations as they struggle to survive and expand within the context of globalizing market forces, presents us with a bewildering diversity of management strategies, policies and practices. In order to make sense of progressively uncertain, inconsistent and fluctuating managerial behaviour, commentators have increasingly turned to the analysis of the

> language and symbolic media we employ to describe, represent, interpret and theorize what we take to be the facticity of organizational life.

Critically, Fairclough sees the increasing role of discourse in social transformations is being accompanied by an increased concern to control discourse. The desire is to bring about social and cultural change through the 'technologization of discourse'. These 'technologies of government' are systematically applied to organizations by professionals, who specialize in providing training in discursive practices such as interviewing and counseling. For Rose (1990), during the 1980s the images of the employee were altered in line with societal changes. The theory of the 'protestant work ethic' which contained a set of economic values for the worker, such as moral, personal, and social good, was supported by the predictability of social relations such as continued employment in a single industry, marriage, and children. This ethic is being replaced by a new economic image of the modern citizen, which is that of the consumer. We are therefore presented with an opportunity and choice to make our lives meaningful as individuals within society by selecting our personal lifestyles from a range of media such as advertising, soap operas, and films.

9.4 Dimensions of Discourse

It is important to establish what exactly is constructed through this discourse and through the dimensions of this discourse. According to Fairclough (1992), discourse contributes to the constitution of the dimensions of social structure, which either shape or constrain it. 'Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (Fairclough 1992, p. 64). According to Fairclough (1992), we can distinguish three aspects of the constructive effects of discourse:

(1) Discourse contributes firstly to the construction of 'social identities'.
(2) Discourse helps construct social relationships between people.
(3) Discourse contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief.

> Discursive practice is constitutive in both conventional and creative ways: it contributes to reproducing society (social identities, social relationships, systems of knowledge and belief) as it is, yet also contributes to transforming society. (Fairclough 1992, p. 65)

The minimum conditions an effective method of discourse analysis should fulfill in order for it to be an effective method of analysis:

(1) It would need to be a method of **multi-dimensional** analysis; this will enable the relationships between discursive and social change to be analyzed.
(2) It would need to be a method for **multifunctional** analysis; changing discourse practices contribute to a change in knowledge (including beliefs and common sense), social relations, and social identities: and one needs a conception of discourse and a method of analysis which attends to the interplay of these three.
(3) It would need to be a method for **historical** analysis; Texts are constructed through other texts being articulated in particular ways, ways, which depend upon and change with social circumstances.
(4) It would need to be a **critical** method. Relationships between discursive, social and cultural change are typically not transparent for the people involved. Nor is technologisation of discourse. Critical implies showing connections and causes which are hidden. (Fairclough 1992:9)

Boje et al. (2004) suggest that when applying methods and levels of engagement, with discourse and in turn text, that methodological diversity and multilevel analyses are applied. They go on to say that they wish to encourage more work that seeks to understand both micro and macro discursive phenomena in relation to organizations. Fairclough (2005) also argues that a transdisciplinary approach to CDA is key, an approach in line with a dialectical view of discourse. Culture in this case will be considered as something that is constructed by discourse, and is changed by discourse. It is via this discourse that individuals experience and construct and experience their interpretation of a culture.

Further to this, according to Linstead and Grafton-Small (1992), the understanding of social culture requires the careful consideration of

everyday practices within particular organizational and sociohistorical contexts. Just as reading is a formative process, the consumption of corporate artifacts in the form of product or image is a significant and neglected part of the process of the recreation of subjectivity. The exploitation of the margin (Derrida 1982) is to overturn the meaning of the term, to overturn the direction of the discourse, to deconstruct the culture. It is in this way that the emergence of the force of the other culture can be enabled. In studying organizational or corporate culture, the position of the researcher as a vessel through which information regarding an organization's culture needs to be considered and included as part of this recreation of subjectivity. It is only in this way that it will be possible to come closer to understanding research data for what it is capable of telling us about a given situation.

9.5 Discourse Analysis

According to Linstead and Grafton-Small (1992), the study of social culture should focus closely on: 'The clandestine (secretive) forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups and individuals already caught in the nests of discipline' (Burrell 1988, p. 226 cited in Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992, p. 332). In order to help understand the forms culture may take, the notion of a *bricolage* can be used in order to investigate and understand what is assumed to be a creative process of meaning making by users. In these ideas there is a movement from the dominant approach to studying culture, which seeks to produce a reading of the culture, to a more postmodern view, which seeks to appreciate the organization as an interweaving of a variety of texts and textual features.

Hardy (2001) however argues that there are some difficulties associated with this methodology. First, there are difficulties in knowing exactly what data to collect. Second, studying organizational text within a broader context can be challenging. The structure vs agency debate remaining unresolved has further implications for discourse analysis, and finally there are demands for more reflexive research which can be difficult to meet. Further to this, according to Linstead and Grafton-Small

(1992), the understanding of organizational culture requires the careful consideration of everyday practices within particular organizational and sociohistorical contexts. Just as reading is a formative process, the consumption of corporate artifacts in the form of product or image is a significant and neglected part of the process of the recreation of subjectivity. The exploitation of the margin, in Derrida's (1982) sense, is to turn the meaning of the term, to overturn the direction of the discourse, to deconstruct the culture. It is in this way that the emergence of the force of the other culture can be enabled. In studying organizational or corporate culture, the position of the researcher as a vessel through which information regarding an organization's culture needs to be considered and included as part of this recreation of subjectivity. It is only in this way that it will be possible to come closer to understanding research data for what it is capable of telling us about a given situation.

There needs in fact to be an investigation into what is not present, what is not said, and what it obscured within the text. Discourse analysis does this by drawing on ideas and representations of culture, to unpack the elements that form our understanding of it, and to enable a better understanding of the subject in hand. Text itself can take in a variety of forms and does not just consist of language. It can consist of music, theater, performance, images, and design. Many of these aspects of organizational life work to legitimize a particular movement or culture. By looking beyond or behind these symbols, we can begin to understand our world better.

9.6 A Practical Example of Discourse Analysis

As part of a doctoral thesis, a case study organization was analyzed in terms of its discourse. A pseudonym has been used for the purpose of this chapter. Data was collected from the Internet, documents, and through speaking with employees at the organization. The meanings of the language, symbols, and images were then 'deconstructed' in order to understand the culture and meaning of discourse and what this meant in a broader, social context.

Example 9.1 Discourse Analysis

'Doing good things'

These words, that seemed to resonate throughout angelic drinks as an organization, for example, a visit to their webpage and a look in the 'us' section and then 'ethics', take you to the section on 'doing good things'. This section details some of the ways in which Angelic drinks try to 'do good things'.

'We believe there are some small but good things we can do on a day to day basis at Fruit Towers to help those around us. Here is a couple;

Drinks for the homeless – getting our excess stock to those who need it.

Supergran - how knitting hats for our drinks raises money for good causes.

Charitable support

We give 10% of our profits away each year to support community based projects through the Angelic foundation'.

This really did seem to bother me. The words had bothered me from the outset but I really didn't understand why. Why did this seemingly appropriate idea make me feel so uncomfortable? After all, the organization did produce their orange juice made with 'lovely fresh hand- selected oranges and nothing else at all' or fruit smoothies made from 'a blend of crushed fruit, pure and fresh juices and nothing else'. I also knew at this point of being about to embark on my study of Angelic drinks that the organization seemed to focus on important social and environmental issues. For example, social issues such as homelessness and the elderly seemed to be on their agenda. This impression is achieved by frequently contributing to selected charities as a part of their 'Angelic foundation', Angelic drinks' charitable initiative. Examples of such projects are raising money through organizing a music festival last year for a charity for country holidays for inner city children called 'CHICKS' and this year for the charity 'well child', a charity that helps sick children get better. Angelic drinks also donate their proceeds every year from their sales of their drinks over the Christmas period to elderly people in return for them knitting hats to go over the lids of their smoothie bottles.

Angelic drinks also seemed to show an interest in international social issues. They achieve this by using their literature and images of native people from the countries their fruit is sourced from in their advertising, looking happy and working hard. These images and words are used in order to highlight the importance to Angelic drinks as an organization of ensuring suppliers in developing countries receive fair payment for their produce. I was also very much aware that frequent mention was made by Angelic

drinks of environmental issues and of the earth's sustainability. This is achieved by focusing their literature and their images on issues such as carbon emissions, recycling and materials development for their packaging. Angelic drinks also achieve this by associating themselves with various environmental organizations that work toward minimizing the impact of our activities on the environment so we can then in turn minimize the damage being done to the planet and ourselves. An example of this is the 'Angelic foundation' which is a grant giving charity that works in partnership with community-based projects and NGOs (mainly in other countries). We are told on the website by Angelic drinks that through this charity 'they build relationships that enable local communities to develop long-term solutions to their needs. What excites us are innovative projects that make best use of natural resources to create a better future'.

These issues Angelic drinks focuses on therefore are for me some of the most important issues we as individuals and organizations are faced with today: The issues of fair trade, environmental sustainability, and equality and diversity. If the above issues are so dear to my heart as a potential employee at Angelic drinks and as a researcher, then surely I should be happy and excited about joining an organization, which so visibly and actively champions these causes? Surely, as an organization, they were living up to this frequently used slogan 'Doing good things', weren't they? They were doing good things, weren't they? Then why was I so skeptical and uncomfortable about this possibility?

My background is one factor in my feelings toward this seemingly ethical and correct discourse. I come from a critical management studies background in the sense that I am critical of the more mainstream assumptions of businesses and management theory. This meant that I found it hard not to believe that it was above all else making money, and lots of it. It was exactly this sense of discomfort that motivated to apply for the job of summer helper for the summer of 2005 in the first place.

I wanted to try to find out for myself what it meant to 'do good things', or maybe just to confirm my worst fears, that Angelic drinks were using these ideas of making the world better, in order to make more money for themselves. According to Lau (2000), it is a disturbing new-age trend toward self-absorption that enables people to think that the discourses, which constitute this sphere through consumption, constitute political action. Believing this to be so is a dangerous misconception. It is this argument that is made by Zizek (2006), as he argues that for 'liberal communists' as he calls the owners of organizations like Angelic drinks, the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity. That charity functions as a humanitarian mask hiding the underlying economic exploitation.

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10

Designing a Qualitative Research Project

Agata Stasik and Adam Gendźwiłł

10.1 Introduction

It should be clear from the very beginning of this chapter that this will not be a detailed step-by-step guide to presenting a research problem and designing a study. It would be impossible to create such a guide owing to the varied nature of qualitative research: the methods used, the accepted paradigms, and the possible areas of application. Designing and conducting research is a craft—it can be mastered through practice. It can be learned by observing the work of experienced researchers, or through a close reading of reports and papers based on research. However, the key way to achieving excellence is our own practice and, once the project is finished, reflecting on how the design and performance could have been improved; in other words, through a critical and reflexive approach to our own work.

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_10

If designing qualitative research is a craft whose rules cannot be fully codified, then what can this section offer to the readers? Despite the diversity of legitimate approaches to the theory and methods available to qualitative researchers, we can identify questions which one must always, or virtually always, answer when formulating the problem and designing research. Steinar Kvale (1996) notes that at this stage the project may at times require a kind of an explorative interview with a researcher, which will help us better understand why, how, and what we want to do. Following this line of reasoning, we will suggest certain outlines for an interview we can carry out with ourselves at this stage of research design. We will try to identify the most important questions to ask ourselves while designing the study, as well as a few suggestions as to where the search for answers to these questions can begin. This is perhaps the most accurate type of a universal guide to qualitative research design that can be offered.

There are many more recognized procedures in qualitative research than in quantitative, and the rules for assessing its quality are not standardized (Flick 2008b). It should be noted, however, that the multitude of correct solutions should not lead anyone into disregarding the design stage of research; on the contrary—we should put effort into it all the more. This flexibility means greater responsibility for the final result, and a greater number of potential traps. In order to avoid them, we should demonstrate reflexivity and consistency.

By **reflexivity** we understand an attitude in which we consider what is investigated, how, why, and what for; we consider our role and professional responsibility, and we can indicate our assumptions as well as describe any involvement which may affect the findings. It is important here to understand the theoretical assumptions which we adopt when formulating the problem, and on which the methods are based. This attitude does not appear right away, we usually start from an interest in a wider area or phenomenon, and full clarity—the condition for creating a good research project—comes from work in the stage of formulating the problem: comprehensive discussions with yourself, with other researchers, and with experts outside of academia, as well as a thorough literature review.

By **consequence** we understand taking care that our research conduct results from how the research topic is shaped conceptually, so that the carefully thought out research question can drive all the other steps of our proceedings. In formulating the research problem and deciding on a specific theoretical approach, we consistently choose the right tools and techniques for data collection and analysis, as well as for presenting research findings. Properly understood consequence does not mean rigidly sticking to the original conceptualization and remaining oblivious to what is discovered in the data—depending on the selected theoretical approach, we have the ability to reformulate the original problem, put forward a new one, abandon some assumptions, or adopt additional ones. Consequence can therefore be maintained either by preparing a strict research project and aiming at checking the original hypothesis or gaining knowledge about a previously defined phenomenon or process from the very start, as well as by choosing the "funnel approach," according to which the area of our interests is very broad to start with, but we assume that categories relevant to the project will emerge only during the data collection and analysis. The latter approach can be characterized by consequence too, as long as its choice comes from a good understanding of the problem and the accepted theoretical perspective, and if we are aware of the procedure for collecting and compiling data, which will help us get closer to the findings.

The next sections of this chapter will present the subsequent stages of the research design journey, starting from a vaguely defined area of interest, and ending with a detailed research project proposal. Let us first discuss the questions we face when formulating the research problem—those helping us to reflexively approach the research. We will then describe issues that need to be resolved when matching to the problem research methods which help us to be consistent. In the last part of the article we will discuss the decisions which need to be taken when planning the details of research project implementation, including ethical issues (although we should remember that they are relevant in each of the discussed stages).

10.2 The Theory and the Problem, or Formulating the Research Question

The list of issues which may occupy researchers undertaking qualitative research is practically infinite, and their diversity is huge. A few well-known examples, like the research of Thomas and Znaniecki on Polish peasant migrants, of Anselm Strauss on terminally ill patients, of Paul Lazarsfeld on communities affected by unemployment, or of Erving Goffman on "total institutions," can help us realize the wealth of such research—and the list continues. However, each of these examples shows that a good qualitative study—that is to say one which develops our understanding of the social world beyond a reasonable doubt and more often than not has significant practical implications—is driven by the research question.

However, we usually set off not from an elegantly worded problem, which can be found in the introduction to a strong article by an experienced researcher or in an outstanding book, but a vague interest in a field of knowledge or a social phenomenon. Of course, when looking for a research topic, it is worth focusing on what fascinates us—commitment to a problem significantly increases the project's chance for success, and the motivation necessary to go through the series of stages does not fade (Morse 1994). However, finding an interesting field is only the beginning. The topic then needs to be formulated so that others can also see its importance—to demonstrate that the question is not trivial and to make the issue "researchable"—to form the question in a way that allows finding an answer by using the methods at our disposal and convincing the reader that the answers we can deliver will be reliable. Achieving this state usually requires gradually narrowing down our interests: selecting such a slice of reality from our area of interest will show as much as possible the problem which intrigues us and at the same time will embed the research in a specific environment.

To come closer to this aim, we may want to find answers to the basic questions: (1) **what** is it that we are studying? (2) **for whom**, or **why** are we studying it? (3) **what** are we studying it for? (4) **how** are we going to study it? We do not usually ask ourselves these questions sequentially;

moving one step in any of the highlighted areas helps us to find more accurate answers to the other. For example, the answer to the question "what are we studying?" becomes more precise when we already know how and where we are going to study it (cf. Stake 2010, p. 74). Let us look more closely at the said questions (Table 10.1).

The question "what?" is the fundamental question about the research problem, formulated in the language of the specific, structured theory, using abstract theoretical concepts or existing within a defined theoretical approach, which (as with, for instance, the grounded theory strategy) provides the rules for a conceptual recognition of the world. There is no room in this chapter to discuss in detail the controversies associated with the concept of theory in qualitative research methodology (see, e.g. Flick et al. 2004 or Maxwell and Mittapalli 2008 on "paradigmatic conflicts"). Nevertheless, we need to be aware that there are several patterns of relation between qualitative research, its findings, and social theory. The pattern we choose will greatly affect all the subsequent steps of the proceedings, and so the question of the relation to the theory should be one of the first we answer. What possibilities are typically used?

It sometimes happens that the aim of a qualitative study is to confirm, refute, develop, or refine a systematic theory under certain conditions—however, it is not common. It is much more likely that, when designing the study, we choose assumptions and methods associated with a particular theoretical perspective. They allow us to describe the world and present the problem conceptually, but not necessarily to propose and test hypotheses. An example of such a theoretical perspective can be derived

Table 10.1 Questions aiding the design of qualitative research

What?	For whom?/why?	What for?	How?
Problem Theory	The world of academia The world outside academia Theoretical significance Practical significance	Instrumental knowledge Reflexive knowledge	Unit of analysis Case selection validity (generalizability) Accuracy Reliability Tools Data collection and analysis techniques Implementation resources

from linguistic studies on critical discourse analysis, which deals with the role of language in society or ethnomethodology, focusing on the study of routine ways to build a common world of meanings.

It may also happen that researchers use abstract theoretical concepts, such as power or memory, using the achievements of various theoretical traditions and treating them eclectically, and looking for significant contexts to interpret a particular phenomenon, rather than a systematic theory with assertions, hypotheses, and designated methods (Cheek 2008; Jasanoff 2004). Such use of concepts and relationships between them also helps in early problematizing of the research subject and going beyond a mere description of the phenomenon.

Yet another approach assumes that it is only at the stage of determining the research aim that a medium-range theory is created, based on the regularities emerging from the data, as in grounded theory and related approaches. Although in this case our approach is usually much more flexible, choosing this road does not exempt us from work in the research design stage. According to Uwe Flick (2008a), the days when you could go into the field and "just do it" are over also for qualitative researchers, owing both to the enormity of the research conducted to date and to the development of theories supporting the methods used. Also Valerie Janesick (1994) emphasizes that the research question is essential in directing research design, although she advocates flexible research design.

Even if theoretical issues are not the most important when addressing our research problem—for example, the fact that the research is clearly oriented to practical goals, as are many studies supporting public policies through providing diagnostics or evaluation—we have to keep in mind that there is no research without theory. Even work focusing on the practical significance of a problem uses theoretical assumptions, as the choice of the methods or legitimacy of the questions is only possible if we assume a certain way in which social reality exists. The less time we spend on considering these issues, the more we are forced to rely on colloquial, common sense social theories or research perspectives, to which we are accustomed and which we routinely accept. It is worth noting that this approach might reduce the quality of our research.

A useful overview of the various approaches to research is proposed by Flick (2008a), who calls them "research perspectives." Examples of a

popular perspective in qualitative studies may be the approach aimed at reconstructing the point of view of the research subjects, rooted in the tradition of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, or the approach whose objective is to describe the mechanisms of constructing social situations, related to constructivism and ethnomethodology. As an example, let us consider research into the institution of prison. A researcher conducting studies within the first perspective could reconstruct the ways prisoners experience and make sense of the situation of forced detention, on the basis of in-depth interviews. Within the context of the second perspective, they would describe the implicit hierarchy forming mechanisms, supplementing interviews with in-depth observations. How we formulate the problem and how we use the qualitative methods we have selected is usually linked to the context of one of these traditions. In the following chapters of this book we will also see clearly that certain theoretical traditions are associated with specific methods and means of formulating problems; similarly, presented qualitative research methods have their theoretical assumptions and types of problems which correspond to them the most.

Theory (understood here as broadly as possible) helps us to avoid answering the question: "what are we studying?" too superficially, to problematize the focus of the research, and to translate it into research questions. It is difficult to provide a universal recipe for a good research question, but it is possible to point to examples of recurrent research question types (Table 10.2), with the reservation that the list is by no means exhaustive.

Charles Tilly (2006) suggests accurately assessing the parameters of the research problem: its scope of conclusions and range of contribution, when formulating the problem. The larger the scope of conclusions and range of contribution, the greater the risk that the research will fail and the higher the expectations faced by researchers, but also the greater the potential cognitive benefit and scientific success. Tilly shows that by placing the research question in the context of existing arrangements, we can set ourselves various goals—from relatively simple ones, such as filling factual gaps in the existing knowledge, to challenging both the answers given and questions posed so far. Finding your own questions on the coordinate system proposed by Tilly requires gaining a good orientation

Table 10.2 Selected types of research problems

Research matter	The involvement of parents in the school education of their children	Commemorating the Second World War
Research questions		
Description/exploration of behavior	What are the different forms of parents' involvement in the school education of their children?	What different forms of commemorating the War exist at different levels (private, state, religious spheres)?
Factors affecting behavior	What factors affect the diversity of forms of parents' involvement in the school education of their children?	What factors affect the diversity of forms of commemorating the War?
Meanings assigned to behavior	What values or meanings do the parents attribute to the diverse forms of involvement in the school education of their children?	What values or meanings are attributed to the various forms of commemorating the War?
Description of behavior contexts	What external conditions (historical, environmental, institutional) help or hinder certain forms of parents' involvement in the school education of their children?	What external conditions (historical, environmental, institutional) help or hinder certain forms of commemorating the War?
Changes over time	Have the forms of parents' involvement in the school education of their children changed over time (and how)?	Have the forms of commemorating the War changed over time (and how)?

(*continued*)

Table 10.2 (continued)

Change over time due to intervention (the problem of *ex post evaluation)*	Have forms of parents' involvement in the school education of their children changed (and how) due to intervention (e.g. a parent support program)?	Have forms of commemorating the War changed (and how) due to intervention (e.g. a historical policy program or the construction of the particular museum)?

Source: Authors' own adapted from Schensul (2008)

in the existing literature. This stage—particularly time-consuming when entering a new field—is necessary in the process of posing a good research question.

The question "why?" asked before conducting the research justifies the significance of the project. There are two basic ways to convince ourselves and others (including colleagues and members of grants committees) that the problem is worth their attention, their time, and the money required to conduct the research. We can argue either for its theoretical or practical significance. These two ways of justifying the importance of research are not, of course, fully separable; however, we usually lean toward one of them, which drives the research design as well as the way the study is implemented later on. While theoretical significance is an essential criterion of excellence in academia, the assessment of the practical importance of research in social sciences generally requires referring to problems defined externally (mostly by business, politics, or public administration). Hence the question "why?" should be considered together with the question "for whom?", which asks about the recipient or purchaser of the project.

At the research design stage, the questions "why?" or "for whom?" should serve the thorough consideration of the involvement of the researcher, sponsors, and parties commissioning the research. This involvement also impacts the way the problem is formulated, as well as the specific criteria for assessing the project's success. Ethical or political involvement does not have to disadvantage the research—within certain paradigms, such as feminist theories, or certain contexts such as advocacy, it is indeed essential (see Chap. 5 by Davydd Greenwood in Volume 1 on

the *action research* movement). However, it should always be conscious and clearly declared, and we should also anticipate what deviations may be expected due to this involvement.

The question "what for?" asks about the expected results of the research and about its purpose. The answer to this question can be considered in terms of the concrete findings of a research project, such as a book, a scientific paper or a popular science article, expert evaluation, or a successful social intervention; however, we can look for more abstract answers, considering, for example, the question of the significance of research findings for social change or, conversely, for the maintenance of the existing social order. Finally, the answer to the question about the obligations of the researchers and the consequences of their work for the recipients of the research as well as the wider community opens the field to relevant ethical considerations.

The importance of the questions "who?" and "what for?" is convincingly argued by Michael Burawoy (2007), who calls on the representatives of the social sciences to constantly reflect on the type of knowledge they produce. The answers to the questions "who" and "what for" allow us to indicate the types of knowledge which may differ considerably in terms of truth criteria, validation methods, attitude to policy and politics, accountability criteria, as well as deformations and pathologies.

The recipients of research findings can be specialists either in a particular field of science ("scientists speaking to scientists") or in environments outside of academia, mostly politicians, officials, or businessmen. Research, argues Burawoy (2007), can be used either to select appropriate measures to put into practice our a priori objectives, or to assume that the findings themselves can specify or change certain aims; in other words, knowledge can be instrumental or reflexive. Depending on the answers to the questions "for whom?" and "what for?", we can distinguish four types of knowledge resulting from research: professional, expert, critical, and public knowledge. For example, an ex post evaluation study of a support program for the unemployed, commissioned by a state agency in a tender, will generate knowledge most similar to the sociology of expert knowledge, useful in public policy, and in solving problems defined by the client. Social studies, allowing the intervention of the person leading the researched social process, such as Alain Touraine's well-known study

on the Solidarity movement (1983), are closest to the model example of involved public sociology. The work of researchers focusing on professional sociology, communicating their findings and achievements, primarily to colleagues from the same field through publications in journals and academic publishers, contributes to the development of the discipline and to a large degree remains the source of the standards of research and researcher excellence—this group includes most scientific papers, providing reliable knowledge on the researched phenomena and an example of efficiently applied techniques for research and analysis. Finally, critical knowledge, also addressed primarily to professionals, reveals and renews the political, ethical, and methodological foundations of sociology, pointing to new goals and new ways of practicing the discipline. This category includes works of Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu, or Bruno Latour.

The last of the key questions at the research design stage, the question "how?", asks in fact about the research methods and the conducting of qualitative research. We consider these issues in the next sections of this chapter.

10.3 The Problem and the Method, or Method Selection

The consistency of qualitative researchers manifests itself in how they match their research methods to the problem in hand. Detailed guidance on what methods are the most suitable for specific issues is provided also by the next chapters of this handbook. Here we will focus on methodological issues common to various research methods; issues toward which each method, and each person applying it, must take a stand at the design stage of a research project.

It is worth perceiving a research method as a whole: a systematic collection of theoretically rooted principles for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. These principles are largely determined at the design stage of a research project. Researchers make use of standard schemes, tested tools, and repetitive patterns, but at the same time create a unique procedure, tailored to the particular research questions and

data. In qualitative research the method is adapted to the problem—and to the researcher. We can therefore say that it is very difficult (if not impossible) to apply the same method to examine a different fragment of social reality. We then write that researchers "develop a method"—as usually they do not invent a new, innovative research method but also do not apply it in exactly the same way as it was used previously.

A situation in which we choose the method before we understand what question we want to answer is definitely not beneficial, although such a temptation appears especially when we have mastered a selected method or when we simply "like it" (Stake 2010). However, Uwe Flick (2008a) notes that non-arbitrariness matching the research method and scheme to the problem—in other words, the fact "we do not chose a qualitative perspective, a specific approach within it, or specific methods due to a general affection we have for them"—is one of the crucial aspects of evaluating the quality of a study.

Posing the problem does not only specify what the focus of the research is going to be, but usually refers also to the issue of what will constitute the **unit of research**. In social research, this may be a person, a social group or network, a formal organization, a statement as a discourse unit, a photograph, and so on. Formulating the problem usually limits also the collection of research units. At this stage of research design it is necessary to go one step further: to develop a case selection method for a qualitative study. It is not sampling in the same sense in which a random sample is selected for a survey—most of the time, it is referred to as **case selection** or **theoretical selection**, driven not by principles of probability but by criteria deduced from theoretical assumptions.

Following Michael Patton (1990), we can refer to the most frequently used case selection models in a qualitative study. We can select **extreme or deviant cases** (e.g. to study how illness is experienced, we can choose to interview patients who are terminally ill or suffer most acutely, and to study the social impact of unemployment—a village where almost the entire population have lost their jobs, like Marienthal in Lazarsfeld's research); **intense cases**, where we select people with extensive experience in a specific situation, but we do not focus on extremes (e.g. when researching adoptive families, we choose the cases of families who have decided to adopt several times); or **maximum variation cases** (e.g. when

studying politicians we choose subjects who differ in age, gender, party affiliation, professional experience, or other characteristics important from the point of view of the problem). At times, we choose **critical cases** which allow us to generalize the claim we are proposing, or make it easier to decide which of the proposed explanations is the most likely. The choice of critical cases is based on similar principles as that of **disconfirming cases**, which could contradict our claims—in this way we can explore the limits of the generalizations we propose, or create more subtle classifications. More about case studies in Chap. 1 by Marta Strumińska-Kutra and Izabela Koładkiewicz, in this volume.

It is also worth mentioning a case selection method related to the last two, advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). They propose that cases for research should be chosen through **constant comparison** during data collection and analysis, associated with a concept which is key to grounded theory: **theoretical saturation**, a stage of research where the analysis of subsequent cases does not enrich our understanding of analytical categories and the relationships between them—which is a signal that data collection can be concluded. The concept of theoretical saturation may provide answers to a difficult question of how many cases should be examined in order to achieve a convincing result; however Ingeborg Helling (1988) rightly points out that all too often researchers consider this concept as a skeleton key, limiting themselves to "mention of the theoretical saturation process," which is "not sufficient for the reader to assess the outcome." What is more, achieving this stage may be more due to the research area (and, once more, a well posed and adequately narrowed down problem) than the case selection method itself.

When considering the question of case selection, we must also keep in mind the practical limitations of access to research subjects. For categories of research units to which access is difficult, the ultimate criterion for selecting one or more of them may be only their availability; this can often reduce the value of research, especially if we want to formulate some kind of generalization, as it is very likely that the only accessible cases have some common characteristics, which makes them systematically different from the inaccessible ones. For example, if we aim to examine the life of prisoners in an authoritarian country and we obtain permission from the authorities to examine two prisons indicated by

those authorities, we can expect that the findings will not represent the life of other prisoners.

Many methods assume the use of **research tools**, such as observation sheets, interview scripts, code books for content analysis, and so on. At the research design stage it is often possible to develop the first versions of the research tools, such as guidelines for in-depth interviews. When developing the tools, it is important to check whether their content corresponds to the content of the research question. The omission of relevant aspects of the research question in the research tools will mean that giving a complete answer to them will not be possible. Preparing well thought out research tools is especially important when working in a group, or when data collection and analysis are the responsibility of people other than the person who has designed the study.

As mentioned earlier, the question of assessing the quality of qualitative research is subject to a lively debate (cf. Lincoln and Guba 1985; Tobin and Begley 2004; Flick 2008b). While quantitative research is governed by fairly explicit rigors of relevance, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability (which are often measurable), in qualitative research these criteria are not unambiguous. Once more, one of the key reasons for this state of affairs is the diversity of theoretical approaches and applied methods. Developing clear, universal criteria would have to be connected with standardization—with the loss of essential benefits stemming from the application possibilities of qualitative research. However, it is possible to indicate questions that relate to the suitability of the method for a given problem, and will help us to ensure a high quality of research.

The first is the question about how using a particular method can lead us to examine what we have declared; in other words—whether all the aspects of the problem we have posed will be described. It is also a question about whether the method directs us toward real—or at least reliable—data (e.g. group interviews usually will not yield reliable data on how to hide old age from others).

The second question is concerned with the impact of the person conducting research on the research findings. In qualitative research, the concept of reliability is not typically considered in terms of replicability of findings by other researchers. The relation between the researcher and the research is strong enough to measure reliability by revealing all the

relevant factors related to the research situation which may have contributed to affecting its findings. It is also important to reliably present the stages of the research process and the collected data, and so allow the reader to assess the conclusions drawn by the author.

The third crucial question refers to the scope of validity of the project's findings. Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985) postulated that instead of asking about the generalizability of findings in qualitative research (i.e. the possibility of their generalization), we should ask about the possibility of their legitimate transfer to another cultural context. We do not need to ask, therefore, a nonsensical question about whether the results of unrepresentative (in a statistical sense) qualitative research relate to a smaller or larger population. It is replaced with the question of whether the results of qualitative research can bring anything new to the understanding of a fragment of social life in a different place or time. In a similar context, Robert Yin (1994) suggests that the findings of qualitative research should be subjected to analytical (theoretical) generalization, rather than the statistical generalization characteristic of quantitative research.

To sum up, since there are no universal guidelines that would facilitate the selection of a suitable method for each problem, we need to remember to thoroughly consider matching methods to the problem, to reliably present not just the findings, but also the data, and to deliberate on how the chosen method and case selection will allow us to determine the scope of validity of the findings, or whether they will allow us to transfer the conclusions to a different context.

10.4 The Resources Necessary to Conduct Research

The implementation of qualitative research should be carefully thought through as early as in the design stage. It is worth considering how to mobilize different resources: researchers, time, money, equipment, contacts, and so on. At the research design stage, we need to carefully assess what resources will be needed to carry out the study, taking into account the constraints, both external (applicable laws, the code of ethics, the

hierarchy of priorities in grant competitions, the grant amount), or which are set by researchers themselves (such as the budget records and project timetable) in order to effectively manage the project and bring it to a successful conclusion.

Flexibility of qualitative research, mentioned above many times, does not mean that qualitative research can be freely "redesigned" if ill-considered implementation constraints are discovered: a "redesign" of a study is a burden to the person leading it. The flexibility of qualitative research is worth using when in the course of research we gain unexpected, interesting data, which prompt us to describe new aspects of a given phenomenon; the "redesign" of the study is then proof of our craftsmanship and sensitivity.

When thinking about the research implementation stage, we should first of all take into account the following limitations: temporary, financial, legal, ethical, and competence (related to the limited skills of researchers). Let us look at them briefly. A research project, like any project, must have a designated end. The end of a project is normally defined in two ways: indicating the expected date of its completion, and listing the results which should be achieved before the deadline. When directing a project, we try to achieve all the promised results in the allotted time (or earlier). This is made easier by a **timetable**—in the simplest version, it is a breakdown of all the research activities into stages, and the assigning to each of them of the time needed to work on it. More complicated timetables (e.g. Gantt charts) gather information also about the links between stages, both of the division of responsibilities among the researchers and of the time when individual resources should be mobilized. The more complex the research process (e.g. requiring the involvement of dozens of researchers in various stages of the research, or specialized equipment), the more useful it is to have a complex schedule. When planning a study, researchers should consider what other time commitments they have (e.g. whether they are or will be engaged in other projects), and how the passage of time affects the studied problem. It is basically a question about what is the best time to carry out the study.

The time availability of the subjects is also important (e.g. some educational research is impossible to conduct during the holidays; researchers of administration staff know that recruiting busier respondents for

interviews takes longer, etc.), as are foreseeable events that can affect the results (e.g. when researching politicians, we need to take into consideration the dates of elections). It may happen that we decide on a research environment which for some reasons is difficult to access: whether in institutions reluctant to allow research, or in disadvantaged environments, where an attempt to acquire the necessary trust can be time-consuming and the effects uncertain, or when searching for subjects with specific experience, who may be difficult to identify on first contact. In this situation, we must make sure that the time required to gain access will not affect our schedule.

Also, a research project has its **budget**, into which financial constraints are written—more often than not it is the result of a difficult compromise between the researcher and the institution funding them. The more detailed the budget records, the less flexibility in spending money and the more important that the researcher is cautious and meticulous at the research design stage. This is when we should calculate the costs involved in the project, for example: what materials (books, reports, database access) and equipment (voice recorder, camera, computer software for qualitative data analysis) need to be bought? What salary for those employed in the project should be allocated for individual research activities (designing tools, database queries, interviews, transcripts, and creating reports)? Do we need to provide remuneration for the research subjects, and if so, how much? How much will it cost to support field research: travel, accommodation, and food allowance?

When designing a study, we must also consider legal restrictions—mostly those associated with access to research subjects, institutions, and to data. In some studies it is necessary to obtain formal permission to carry out research and meet internal conditions (e.g. in studies of the organizational culture of companies, the rules of a researcher's stay in the company are usually clearly defined; in studies of the religious experience of nuns, we should expect that our visits to the convent will be limited by its rules).

At the stage of planning research in detail, we should once more consider any **ethical dilemmas** and the special responsibility toward people and institutions subjected to the research. The most important rules to be observed are: the prohibition of causing any harm to the research subjects,

the voluntary nature of participation in research combined with full information about the purpose and course of the study (and so the prohibition of misleading research subjects as to the purpose of the study, and preventing situations in which the subjects do not know that they are the object of research and cannot refuse), the right of the participants in research to withdraw from research at any time, and the right to anonymity and confidentiality. Special care should be given to research into "sensitive" subjects: children, the sick, or those living in difficult conditions (more on this in Chap. 11, Ethics in Qualitative Research, Volume 1).

Equally important are the rules related to scientific integrity, which, although they derive from the requirements of academia, can be inferred from obligations to the research subjects. This includes, for example, a fair analysis, preventing conscious omissions, and avoiding the collection of non-significant data which will not be used in analysis, or is related to sufficiently well described phenomena (Flick 2008a, pp 70–75). In other words, we need to consider if "using the research subjects" makes sense and whether or not it is an unnecessary burden for them. This question takes on particular importance if we expect that the topic or course of the study will in any way be a psychological burden for the subjects, as in the case of research on experiencing loss or illness trajectory.

Many ethical dilemmas arising during the research design stage are solved using common sense. However, it is worth confronting common sense solutions with the existing qualitative research ethics guidelines (see Chap. 11, Ethics in Qualitative Research, Volume 1).

When writing about the competence constraints, we refer to situations in which the researcher lacks the knowledge or skills necessary for the proper execution of the study. In the research design stage, it is worth checking what knowledge and specialist skills the implementation of research will require, and whether we can make up for these deficiencies in the course of the project. We do not mean just an extensive reading of the subject literature. Taking up some research problems requires, for instance, knowledge of the foreign languages in which source documents are drawn up, or which are spoken by potential respondents. Other topics may require detailed knowledge of the law in a particular field of social life. Some technical skills (such as familiarity with software for encoding visual data) can significantly speed up the stage of analyzing the collected

data. If possible, we might want to set ourselves goals slightly exceeding our competence resources, so that each project will also be an opportunity to learn.

Once we have considered all of the implementation difficulties, we can begin the thorough preparation of a **project proposal**. The idea for the study usually needs to be written down according to the specific requirements of any/the grant competition organizers or scholarship sponsors. Although such documents exists in a wide variety of forms, we can attempt to create a model structure of a research project proposal using the most frequently repeated elements (see Example 10.1). At the stage of writing a research project proposal it is worth using the guidance of experienced researchers and submitting successive drafts of the document under critical assessment of colleagues dealing with similar themes.

Example 10.1 The Research Project Proposal: Based on Schmitter (2002)

1. **Introduction**—a brief description of the project, the project in a nutshell getting the reviewers' attention. It must contain information on what we are examining, using what methods (without details), and why (what inspired the research, what the findings can achieve, why this is an important subject).
2. **State of the knowledge**—incorporating the research idea into the existing achievements of scholars. This is the place to review the key literature, both theoretical work and empirical studies. It is worth writing here about deficiencies in the knowledge ("blank spots" which our research can fill). Schmitter points out that the literature review gives reviewers an idea of the candidates' erudition and of the research traditions they want to refer to (or which they are opposing).
3. **Description of the research problem**—determining the focus of the research, and on what grounds it becomes its focus. Schmitter advises us to separate, as clearly as possible, what we are examining (describing, questioning, explaining, etc.) from theoretical assumptions (which we accept and which will not be studied directly) in this part of the proposal. This is also the place to present possible explanations and to consider their validity.
4. **Methodology** or **operationalization**—a systematic description of the research tools and activities necessary to achieve the result. This is the place to describe the methods, namely: case selection, and data collection and analysis, as well as to justify the choice of these methods, and

indicate their limitations. It is also where we can refer to the problem of the reliability and accuracy of research methods.
5. **Project feasibility**—considering the possible problems with data availability. An optional part. Schmitter suggests that it can be included in a project whenever we expect problems with implementing the research.
6. **The importance of project findings**—a forecast of what the research findings may change, and what new paths of exploration they can open. There are two essential questions: what new knowledge will we gain? What will be the scope of validity of the project's findings? This part should refer to the deficiencies identified in the literature review.
7. **Bibliography**—the list of key works used to prepare the project. Schmitter emphasizes that for many reviewers this is a crucial part of the proposal—it is important to compare whether an ambitious, comprehensive research idea is accompanied by an equally ambitious, comprehensive subject literature review. He also points out that the reviewers may see it as valuable if the reading list is "unusual," indicating the author's own explorations beyond the canon.

10.5 Conclusion

Posing a good research question—weighty and researchable—and developing an appropriate research method pave the way to success for the entire project. The later stages of data collection and analysis, as well as the presentation of the findings to a large extent depend on how early we have shown reflexivity and consistency. A well-prepared research design is a detailed map which will help us direct the study, but it is also a ticket to implementing its intentions—usually, the decision to grant funding for research is based on a project proposal formulated in writing.

At the end of this chapter, we present a questionnaire proposed by Charles Tilly (2006), used to assess the degree to which a research project has been considered. We hope that after reading this chapter those who are designing their projects will find it a little easier to answer all of Tilly's 10 tough questions:

- What main questions will your study address?
- Why, how, and to whom do those questions matter?
- What sorts of answers to those questions are worth considering?

- How will your study address the questions?
- What form will the evidence take?
- What are some possible conclusions from the evidence?
- What are the main technical problems you will have to solve?
- What are the main conceptual problems you will have to solve?
- What are the main theoretical problems you will have to solve?
- What are the main practical problems you will have to solve?
- Where will you start? Why there?
- What form will the final product(s) take?

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11

What Should Be Avoided During Qualitative Research?

Beata Glinka and Przemysław Hensel

11.1 Introduction

Any researcher implementing a project—regardless of whether qualitative or quantitative methods are applied—is faced with numerous dilemmas and choices to render the study feasible and, ultimately, to draw valid conclusions. Qualitative research is often regarded as a poorer version of quantitative research. Researchers often contribute to this image by neglecting the quality of their work, or by taking shortcuts when they give in to the temptation to obtain and report spectacular results as soon as possible. As outlined by the authors of the subsequent chapters of this textbook, who discuss different methods and types of research, qualitative research needs to be systematic and is very often time-consuming. Accuracy and reliability of a qualitative research project require methodological precision and diligence. As pointed out by Silverman (2013), qualitative studies are not designed to protect researchers from applying

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_11

igorous, critical rules as such rules apply to any endeavor aimed at separating fantasy from facts.

This chapter will identify the most common pitfalls of qualitative research, examine the stumbling blocks and dilemmas typical of subsequent phases of research, and present a number of solutions to common dilemmas faced by researchers.

11.2 Typical Pitfalls in Qualitative Research

Potential errors—technical as well as conceptual—abound in organization research. As our assessment of whether we are faced with an error or a valid method of conducting research depends largely on our assumptions about the nature of reality and our chances of understanding it, formulating a catalogue of mistakes is a complex task. It is in this context that we need to consider analyzing research results, drawing conclusions, and reporting our findings.

In organization research, two opposing sets of assumptions are adopted by researchers: subjective and objective (Burrell and Morgan 1979). These are discussed in more detail in Chap. 2.

Both sets of ontological assumptions have consequences at the epistemological level. As realists assume that social reality exists objectively, they commonly conclude that it can be objectively examined and described. For example, in the field of cultural studies, this difference in ontological assumptions can be summarized in the following manner: proponents of realism are convinced that the organizational culture is a "thing" that can be objectively measured and explored, while supporters of the nominalist approach believe that researchers subjectively interpret what they see and not what there "really" is (Martin 2003). If the social world is made up of permanent structures that are independent of our point of view, the aim of the research should be to discover these structures and explain social phenomena through cause-effect relationships. These assumptions are typical of researchers representing the *positivist* research program. With their nominalist ontological perspective, *anti-positivists* strive to explore the social reality rather differently. As a rule, they abstain from the search for cause-effect relationships and claim that

social reality is relative and can only be comprehended from the perspective of an individual involved in a given social situation.

Given such far-reaching divergences in basic assumptions, mutual accusations of methodological errors—a common occurrence in organization research—are hardly surprising. This phenomenon is so widespread that it has even been given its own name: it is often referred to as "culture wars"[1] (Martin 2003). Objectivists tend to be distrustful toward the results of participant observations. Within the positivist paradigm, a researcher participating in an event or an action that he/she describes cannot avoid having an impact on the object of his/her research. From the point of view of objectivists, it is comparable to the mistake made by a lab assistant who feeds the rats from the experimental group better than those from the control group. What is more, according to positivists, a researcher who becomes personally involved in an action that he/she explores cannot keep the necessary distance from the object of the research. Subjectivists' answer to this claim is that only a participating observer can properly understand the examined phenomenon. In addition, his/her experience will prove a valuable contribution to the understanding of the phenomena, provided that he/she is aware of the constraints and opportunities afforded by participant observation (Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

In qualitative research of organizational culture this problem is compounded by another phenomenon. In traditional anthropological studies, researchers explored cultures of tribes from faraway places, which were completely alien to them. This is not, however, the case of the majority of organization research projects, as their culture is rooted in the culture represented by the researcher (Martin 2003). As a result, the latter will constantly wonder about the extent to which representatives of the culture he/she examines are similar to or different from him/her. The exploration of similarities and differences may prove so compelling that it will become the main focus of the research. As a result, the researcher will lose track of the most important aspects of the examined culture.

Subjectivists reproach objectivists that their propensity to focus solely on what can be objectively weighed and measured makes them ignore many phenomena of utmost importance for management, for example, the role of emotions in organizations (Gagliardi 2007).

Objectivists argue that research carried out within the subjectivist paradigm does not actually contribute much to our knowledge of the social world, because it is based on descriptions of individual cases that cannot be generalized and regarded as reflecting the entire population. In return, subjectivists retort that the supposedly "hard" data used by objectivists is not, in fact, as reliable as objectivists claim it to be: it stems from our interpretation of reality. The illusion of data objectivity can be explained by the fact that we disregard the manner in which it is collected and classified into abstract categories (Garfinkel 1967). Not only can researchers apply different methods, but these methods may be based on completely different assumptions about the world and the nature of the examined phenomena. Both objectivists and subjectivists have recourse to qualitative methods, even if the latter do it more readily. Research design, the manner in which it is carried out, and its conclusions should be consistent and congruous with the assumptions. However, it is worth noting that dilemmas and criticism have their origin in the collision of "different worlds" in which research is carried out.

11.2.1 Research Design

Regardless of the premises, an appropriate design is key to the quality of research. The first question that a researcher needs to answer is whether qualitative methods are suitable for exploring the problem/area of interest to the researcher. The "original sin" of many quantitative projects lies in the fact that their authors intend to attain what is unattainable through a qualitative research project (cf. Silverman 2013). For instance, a research deciding to examine "the extent to which company profit is determined by the scale of outsourcing" by anthropological interviews can hardly be expected to bring satisfactory answers to such questions.

Difficulties and dilemmas related to research design are contingent on the methodology that the researcher intends to apply. It is, therefore, clear that a particular methodological procedure should be selected as early as possible. In most cases, the appropriate research procedure allows one to deal with dilemmas, for example, through indicating the first steps that should be taken in designing research. One of the most typical

dilemmas is the decision whether to acquaint oneself with the extant literature before initiating the project or afterward. In research based on objectivist assumptions and the use of traditional research procedures, researchers usually begin with reviewing literature and formulating hypotheses (or research questions) on its basis; the hypotheses are subsequently verified through qualitative research. However, the order in which many projects (grounded theory, ethnography) is carried out differs from the above: the process starts with formulating research questions and working hypotheses based on the collected data; they are subsequently verified and responses are formulated; literature is not included in further stages of research and in the interpretation of results. The order of subsequent research stages depends on the adopted convention. It is, therefore, indispensable to recognize the convention before designing and carrying out the research. The adopted procedure will also influence the choice of methods: interview (and its type), observation, or text analysis. For example, research based on grounded theory methodology (see also Chap. 3) involves observation and notes; the researcher's failure to include these components is a serious mistake.

Designing research is also a test of the researcher's understanding of the essence of qualitative methods. It is common to equate "qualitative research" with "research on a small sample" to assume it is not mandatory to justify the selection of interviewees or to apply simplified procedures. As a result, many novice researchers mistakenly assume that qualitative research is simply an easier and less complex version of a quantitative project. It is difficult to speculate about the genesis of this erroneous assumption; the fact remains that a number of research projects suffer from it and potentially interesting research is sometimes carried out in a perfunctory manner, without contributing anything to the existing body of knowledge. Research design should also specify how the researcher intends to ensure the **credibility** and **reliability** of his/her work. Another dilemma is linked to triangulation (Konecki 2000) and its types (see also Chap. 3). The nature of many research projects justifies the use of more than one triangulation method. This is particularly important at the stage of analyzing data and drawing conclusions.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed at the stage of preparation is determining how the researcher will gain **access** to the field

in which research will be carried out: a specific organization, professional group, social group, and so on.

Gaining access to organizations is burdened with a significant risk of error. The investigator may be perceived by the employees as a threat or they may fear that his/her presence will interfere with their daily tasks and activities. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to provide honest and thorough explanation of the researcher's intentions at the earliest possible stage of the process. At this point, we must remember to explain our intentions in a manner that will not influence the behavior of the employees. It is advisable to describe our research interests in terms of the processes that we intend to observe rather than the aspects of work we are interested in. If our intention is to carry out a shadow study of sales managers, which is to ascertain whether the age of employees has a bearing on the way in which they are treated, we can tell the employees that we are interested in their daily work practices, without specifying which aspects of these practices we shall focus on.

Trying to gain access to an organization at all costs can be considered a mistake on the part of the researcher. If managers and/or owners of the organization are reluctant to accept the proposal, it is often better to renounce than to insist.

Example 11.1 Access Issues

A coauthor of this chapter was looking to carry out his research in one of Poland's largest newspaper publishers. The company has a very strong corporate culture and is allegedly afflicted by the "besieged fortress" syndrome. The environment is perceived potentially threatening; the company is very protective of its secrets, and even seemingly trivial information is cautiously guarded. Senior management is formed by a group of people who have known each other for decades.

It took more than three months to gain access to the organization. Eventually, it became possible after a person who had numerous acquaintances within the company vouched for the researcher. Nonetheless, even with his "credentials", the investigator was regarded with utmost suspicion. If he had learned anything interesting about the organization, it was only because some of the interviewers happened to "forget themselves" and said more than they wished they would. However, the majority of the answers boiled down to evasive and inconclusive phrases, for example, "it depends: sometimes yes and sometimes no".

As part of the same research project, the author sought to enter another company operating in the same sector. The majority stake in the company was held by a Scandinavian entity. The researcher's first attempt at contacting the company was a phone call to its office. The first conversation with the Scandinavian owner was arranged on the same day. The CEO seemed very excited about the opportunity to talk about the business and the company's plans for the future. Meetings with other employees were promptly scheduled with the help of the CEO's secretary.

11.2.2 Conducting Research

The following phase of the research process, where pitfalls abound and the researcher may be forced to resolve a number of dilemmas, is the stage in which research is actually carried out. Here, the first requirement is a systematic approach. Researchers are often tempted to take shortcuts, for instance, by extrapolating the observed trends or formulating conclusions prematurely. For example, when conducting the nth interview, the researcher may assume that he/she knows what will be said and speeds up the process, listens absent-mindedly, and so on.

It is important to note that we are not referring here to the so-called saturation, that is, a situation in which the researcher has already carried out a sufficient number of interviews or gathered enough data to be able to move to the final analysis and draw conclusions.

Each researcher hopes that his/her work will lead to the discovery and exploration of interesting relationships. This natural desire can have dire consequences when the researcher focuses on curious details, titbits, trifling, and inconsequential (or even accidental) details. The pursuit of an interesting story, which is reminiscent of the journalistic search for a "hot topic", may result in inadvertent[2] data manipulation. The researcher can thus "pull" specific phenomena, observations, or statements out of their context, and thus completely change their meaning, distorting the interpretation in a way that has little in common with a thorough and rigorous problem exploration.

Describing their past experiences seems to pose serious problems to many researchers, for example, when they intend to prepare a case study

of the organization in which they once worked. Aside from any dilemmas associated with the study of one's own culture, there is a problem of data reliability: when working at the organization, researchers did not conduct the research or carried out systematic observations and only now go back to these experiences in order to draw from them and use them as the basis for the description/analysis.

At this point, it seems apposite to go back to the aforementioned issue of triangulation: if the researcher takes into account the need for triangulation when designing the research, the risk of falling into any of the pitfalls described is limited.

When conducting a qualitative research, we may face various obstacles due to the fact that we need to get our bearings within the examined area. As already mentioned, the studied area is often embedded in the researcher's culture, which prompts continual comparisons, looking for differences and similarities; this, in turn, results in the omission of important topics or aspects of the studied phenomenon (Martin 2003). On the other hand, Agar (1996, p. 100) claims that researchers[3] must deal with the culture shock resulting from the sudden necessity of interacting with a group of unknown individuals. Unaware of the rules and principles in place, the investigator does not know how to interpret the new reality. The more adamant he is to stick to his/her assumptions, the less he/she will understand the explored issue and group.

Qualitative research is arguably more engaging for a researcher than a quantitative study, which has been repeatedly pointed out in this publication. Alongside positive consequences, it brings about a number of dilemmas, or problems, due to both a particular "culture shock" and the modification of the studied area by the investigator who becomes excessively involved in the research. Researchers, especially those lacking extensive experience in qualitative projects, happen to take the side of particular individuals or groups, comment on specific actions, or suggest solutions to problems. What is more, excessive empathy may result in the researcher becoming personally involved in the life of the studied group/organization, thus losing sight of the project's purpose. Certain ethical dilemmas may also appear in the process: is it right to conduct disguised observation? Can I use the interlocutor's statement that will clearly identify him/her? Can I use data that has been imparted to me as confidential?

Will the publication of research findings be detrimental to those whom I have interviewed? When deciding to embark on qualitative research, we must be aware of its scientific and emotional consequences.

A separate group of problems is related to organizational and technical aspects of research. These problems are partly connected to those described previously, and the most common include inadequate research preparation, "blowing" the opportunity to enter the organization, inappropriate use of technical means, neglecting the obligation to take notes on a regular basis, or inadequate interview forms. Poor preparation may result in false judgments about the object of the research, failing to comply with the rules of the organization in which research is carried out and even unwittingly insulting the respondents (e.g. confusion about the sector in which the organization operates, forgetting the names of interviewees, inadequate knowledge about the specific character of the organization, etc.). As a consequence, the researcher may be considered ignorant and an intruder; this will keep the door closed and thwart any attempts at fieldwork.

Researchers often have recourse to a variety of technical devices, such as cameras and voice recorders. Although it is a mere truism to say that they should be properly used, researchers often forget about it. The coauthor of this chapter once conducted a most interesting four-hour interview without having turned on the tape recorder.... We must also remember that technical aids are there to facilitate and not to hinder the process: if they unduly interfere, or distract the interviewees, we should ask ourselves if the potential benefits will not be forfeited by the distance these devices create between the interviewer and his interlocutors.

Many research procedures, for instance, projects based on grounded theory, require the investigator to take notes. If we fail to remember about it, notes are taken after and not during the observation phase. By doing so, we tend to analyze and write down our interpretations instead of describing what we see and hear.

A very broad category of pitfalls associated with conducting qualitative research consists of those encountered during interviews. Although they have been extensively described in this textbook, let us reiterate the most common mistakes: imposing and suggesting answers; forcing interviewers to respond, even if they clearly do not want to make a statement or do

not have the necessary knowledge to do so; and focusing on oneself instead of the interviewees.

Methodological rigor also has a tremendous impact on the credibility of research. The description and awareness of research methods used allows the researcher to control the study from the point of view of the research community and to trace the course of the analysis, the interpretation of evidence, and the drawing of conclusions.

11.2.3 Drawing Conclusions and Reporting Research Results

One of the most consequential and common mistakes in qualitative research is drawing hasty or premature conclusions. If we think we "know the truth" after only a few interviews, we are about to commit this mistake. Undeniably, in qualitative research, just as in any area of human life, Pareto's principle applies: 80% of results are the outcome of 20% of efforts. Indeed, the first interviews will tell us a lot about the organization we have just began to explore. It is hardly surprising: after all, our initial knowledge of the organization is nonexistent, and therefore we perceive even the smallest snippet of information as a tremendous step forward. However, we must remember that the most interesting, intelligent, or simply the most open interlocutors are a minority within any population. This is why we must listen to all statements, even when it seems that we know exactly what the person in front of us is about to say. Who knows, perhaps the most interesting interlocutor will be the last one we interview.

The second common mistake is the unfounded generalization. On the basis of research carried out in a single company, the investigator draws conclusions about the entire industry or a given type of organization. Qualitative research does not serve this purpose. It is carried out to examine a particular, unique situation in order to illustrate and help us understand different ways in which relationships form and develop within companies or organizations. However, it should not be considered as proof that a particular type of behavior is typical of all organizations of a given type.

This mistake can probably be attributed to the fact that the purpose of quantitative research is to discover general cause-effect relationships. Many authors mechanically apply this line of reasoning to qualitative projects. A mistake can also be committed at the stage of reporting research results. To further complicate things, a specific manner of presenting research findings may be considered perfectly legitimate in a particular academic community, while it is regarded as an error in another.

When depicting a particular culture, authors must make numerous decisions concerning the writing stage. First and foremost, they must decide to what extent they will detach themselves from the examined culture and to what extent they should be "visible" in the narrative. Up until a few decades ago, it was assumed that the author should both maintain the greatest possible distance from the examined culture and be practically invisible in the text. This approach is clearly utopian, as there is no such thing as a "transparent" style and each author marks his/her writing in a unique manner (Czarniawska 2003).

Many journalists have recourse to this kind of "detachment" claiming through their style and narration choices to "present bare facts; it is up to the reader to draw their own conclusions". This method of presenting research results allows the author to manipulate the reader in much the same way any other method does. For it is the author who decides which facts and events are recounted or omitted, in what order events are related and characters introduced; the author decides about the pace of the text, the length of sentences, and the wording of the stories.

Nevertheless, to this day the breach of the principle requiring authors to distance themselves from the recounted events and the described culture is perceived as a serious mistake in many academic circles. It is important to be aware that different ways of recounting research findings exist, as it allows us to consciously choose the manner that is best suited to our particular situation and needs (Van Maanen 1988, 2010).

11.3 Conclusions

Rigorous qualitative research should result in accurate and reliable conclusions. In this chapter, we have striven to sensitize readers to a number of typical problems they may encounter during the research process.

Novice researchers often feel that the dilemmas they must resolve in the course of their work are exceptional, or even that they can be blamed on their poor preparation. The reality is quite different: every researcher has to answer many questions and avoid pitfalls that may compromise the value of his/her research. Problems start to appear already at the stage of recognizing the premises and designing the research; often they continue even after the report presenting research findings has been written.

Notes

1. This term has nothing to do with culture wars understood as a conflict between representatives of different national cultures or civilizations (cf. Huntington 2007).
2. There are, arguably, cases of purposeful manipulation, but we assume that this is a matter of elementary ethics.
3. Although Agar refers in particular to ethnographers, most of the remarks seem to apply also to other groups of researchers relying on qualitative methods.

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[1]Note: Page numbers followed by "n" refer to notes.

M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3