

December 2006

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<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2006/437>

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Evaluating Qualitative Research: Education of the Guard

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ABSTRACT

Despite a well-established tradition within the information systems discipline and wider management investigations, researchers are frequently required to remind if not educate reviewers as to how qualitative research should be evaluated. This paper reviews and discusses criteria that have been proposed for grounded theory, ethnographic, confessional, post-modern, and interpretive and positivist case studies.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Research Methods.

INTRODUCTION

While it is widely recognized that documentation of the methodologies and techniques used to conduct qualitative research are important, many researchers find that reviews of their work can be inconsistent. Quantitative research related to management disciplines rarely toils to establish its foundations or reinforce assumptions except when establishing new techniques. With the exception of a few well-cited examples, qualitative research lacks consistently applied evaluation criteria and its validity and veracity is rarely accorded the privilege of a self-evident truth. Instead, qualitative researchers are frequently required to explain relevant criteria, and also identify how their papers satisfy them. Acknowledging that qualitative research must demonstrate validity and robustness to establish and maintain legitimacy, this paper reviews and discusses evaluation criteria that have been applied to various forms of qualitative research. The paper proceeds as follows: The first section introduces and positions qualitative research; followed by a discussion of criteria that have been applied. The paper concludes with a summary of the ways and means of qualitative research evaluation.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

It is commonly accepted that the set of rules or procedures that are employed by a researcher when discovering knowledge are prescribed by their epistemology and ontology. This however is not always the case. Even though quantitative methods (which are mainly concerned with counting and statistics such as “scores” and “probabilities”) have replication, prediction and generalizability objectives and typically fall exclusively within a positivist purview, the same is not true of qualitative research. Involving data such as interviews, documents and participant observation qualitative research seeks to understand and explain social phenomena through non-statistical modes of data collection and analysis (Myers 1997). Although frequently focused on a broad phenomenological understanding rather than testing, validation and prediction of *a priori* theory; a clear distinction between qualitative methodology and interpretive stance is not always possible. Following Klein and Myers (1999), research is considered positivist if there are formal propositions, quantifiable measures of variable, hypothesis testing and the drawing of inferences from a representative sample to a stated population. Interpretive research on the other hand assumes that our knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions such as a language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools and other artefacts and does not typically seek positivist objectives. The next section of this paper introduces criteria that have been suggested or evaluated for qualitative research, and exemplars of each type. We have selected a ‘particular case of the possible’ with respect to exemplars of qualitative research – seeking this to be the beginning of a conversation within the academy, rather than a concluding statement.

Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced grounded theory as an inductive methodology that closely ties empirical observation with theory building to discover theory from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Eisenhardt 1989). Different from other qualitative methods in that it is explicitly emergent, a premise of grounded theory is that to produce accurate and useful results, the complexities of the organizational context have to be incorporated into an understanding of the phenomenon rather than be simplified or ignored (Pettigrew 1990). Grounded theorists do not test a hypothesis but set out to find what

theory accounts for observed phenomena by developing a “a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations of data” (Martin and Turner 1986:141).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that judgements can be applied to the analysis and development of data and theory along the contour of the adequacy and the empirical grounding of the research, see Table 1.

Adequacy of Grounded Research:	Empirical grounding:
<p>(1) How and on what grounds was the original sample selected?</p> <p>(2) What major thematic coding categories emerged?</p> <p>(3) What were some of the events, or actions (indicators) that pointed to some of the major categories?</p> <p>(4) On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? Was the data collection guided by theoretical formulations and did the categories prove to be representative?</p> <p>(5) How were the hypotheses formulated and validated and do they relate to the conceptualization?</p> <p>(6) Were there inconsistencies between the hypotheses and the observations? If so, how were they explained or hypotheses modified?</p> <p>(7) How and why was the core category selected? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made? Was data collection sudden or gradual; difficult or easy?</p>	<p>(1) Does the research generate concepts?</p> <p>(2) Are the concepts systematically related?</p> <p>(3) Are there many conceptual linkages and well developed categories? Do the categories have conceptual density?</p> <p>(4) Is variation built into the theory?</p> <p>(5) Are the conditions under which variation can be found built into the study and explained?</p> <p>(6) Does the research take a process view into account?</p> <p>(7) Do the theoretical findings seem significant, and to what extent?</p> <p>(8) Will the theory stand the test of time and become part of the discussions and ideas exchanged among relevant social and professional groups?</p>

Table 1. Evaluating Grounded Research

With respect to the validity, reliability and credibility of the data (Miles and Huberman 1994), Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that methods such as triangulation, negative case analysis, and testing for rival hypotheses can be applied to judge fairness and rigor of a research project. Strauss and Corbin (1998) provide the caveat that the authors are required to identify the strengths and limitations of their work, suggesting its merits must be judged by those that engage it. Weick (1995; 1995b) extends this concept, arguing that the onus is upon the *reader* to judge credibility and the extent to which the research satisfies its objective of description, explanation, or prediction (Weick 1995).

Because a grounded theory approach has been used, in some cases incorrectly, by many as a generic synonym for any kind of inductive reasoning (Langley 1999), many qualitative exemplars in IS research draw upon, and can be evaluated using, the criteria listed above. One such example is Montealegre and Keil’s (2000) grounded case study De-escalating Information Technology Projects lessons from the Denver International Airport. Although the authors do not explicitly answer all of these questions directly they do provide sufficient information for the reader to judge the adequacy, empirical grounding, data and theory of the research

Ethnographic Research

Usually associated with “thick description” (Geertz 1973), ethnographic research has its philosophic roots in symbolic anthropology (Prasad 1997) and involves naturalistic, immersive and in-depth data gathering. Concerned with plausibility of accounts, cultural context and the immersion of the reader; ethnography belongs to an endogenic or “native view paradigm” (Prasad 1997) where ethnographers make cultural inferences from what people say, the way that they act and the artefacts that they use (Spradley 1979). There is however, much variation in the ontological perspective of the ethnographer, and

attention must be paid to the distinction between the *emic* and the *etic* (Harris 1976). The *emic* approach relies on analyses based in intrinsic distinctions – ones particular to that culture, in contrast to the *etic* analysis, relying on external distinctions.

Because ethnography requires a commitment to a plausible account it should be judged on its ability to offer convincing explanations of action in a particular culture and aim for insight over prediction. Three criteria that Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) suggest should be applied to ethnographic accounts are authenticity, plausibility and criticality.

	Definition	Strategies
<i>Authenticity</i>	Authenticity describes the ability of the text to convey the vitality of everyday life encountered by the researcher in the field and emphasizes being genuine to the experience. Authenticity appeals to readers to accept that the researcher was indeed present in the field.	Strategies include particularizing everyday life, delineating the relationship between the researcher and organization members, and analysis of data making clear the qualification of personal biases
<i>Plausibility</i>	Plausibility begs the reader to ask if the story makes sense, and if so asks for acceptance that the findings make a distinctive contribution to issues of common concern.	This is accomplished through strategies that normalize unorthodox methodologies, recruit the reader, legitimate atypical situations, build dramatic anticipation and differentiate findings.
<i>Criticality</i>	Criticality is the ability of the text to actively disturb a reader’s ideas and beliefs and to become provocative by re-examining the taken for granted assumptions.	The goal and tactic becomes carving out “room” for reflexivity, and the examination of differences and new possibilities

Table 2. Evaluating Ethnography

Ethnographic texts implicitly recognise that readers interpret texts actively by disclosing meanings in light of their own background. “Meaning does not lie out there” objectively and independently in the text waiting for the reader but develops in the reading process (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993). Readers however do not necessarily find the same meaning as the author (Ricoeur 1976). Geertz (1988) discusses this point further, suggesting that ethnographic accounts (indeed he might argue an even wider array of research forms) are as much a construct of the data, as they are a construct of the rhetoric and disposition of the author and the reader.

Having found that authenticity and plausibility are both essential to good ethnographies, Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) note Davis’ (1971) caution that simply being interesting or cited are not necessarily indications of good research or theory. As such, when reading ethnographies, two questions to keep in mind are: *the extent to which the reader believes that the findings are credible*; and, *how readers convince themselves that the author’s interpretations are credible*. These two criterion are difficult hurdles made higher by publication length constraints that can preclude extensive discussion (from our experience and conversation with journal editors it would seem that material that addresses and supports credibility is often deleted in the final round of revisions once the reviewers are satisfied). However, an example of research that succeed in this area is Barley’s (1996) study of technology use and adaptation of technology in hospitals.

Confessional Research

A specialized form of ethnography that is both self-reflexive and revealing (van Maanen 1988; Behar 1996), confessional research in information systems is represented by Schultze’s (2000) account of knowledge workers in which she adds criteria of self-revealing writing and the interlacing of actual ethnographic material and confessional content. Self-revealing writing exposes details that allow the reader to understand the writer’s particular circumstances within the ethnographic content. Confessional content typically includes both positive and less than flattering details of the author, together with demographic and cultural details in order to allow the reader to determine the author’s intellectual transition during the study and the reader understand the ethnography’s content and to juxtapose the positions of the practitioner and the academic.

Confessional research has occasionally been criticized as being too auto-biographical and indulgent (Chin et al. 2001). While these charges are equally applicable to all research they are more often directed at confessional work because the author selectively chooses which aspects of themselves to reveal. Although all research is subject to this latency, because the

'revealing' is always partial and never complete, the charge remains in that the author themselves may not be able to determine (or want to reveal) which characteristics, experience or factors lead to their particular point of view.

Post Modern

It is difficult to assign a precise definition to the label post modern because it does not have a unified theory or even a coherent set of positions (Kilduff and Mehra 1997) (indeed, postmodernism is eclectic and rejects the concepts of paradigmatic consensus (Weick 1983)). Instead postmodernism is a broad term that has been interpreted in a number of different ways. Often associated with works of Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, post modernism has colloquially come to describe the taken-for-granted nature that follows the modern age and a growing disrespect for universal laws.

Although frequently criticized as unintelligible (Thompson 1993) or misunderstood as an enterprise that calls for the end of scientific knowledge, post modernists accept Kuhn's (1970) belief that an increase in knowledge is accompanied by an increase in ignorance. For postmodernists, the aim of science is not generalizability (Giddens 1984) but to go beyond systematic critique and take up Kant's "dare to know" perspective and to discover "how we have become what we are today?" (Chan 2000). Asking large questions that deal with broad issues, post modernists frequently offer new forms of theory and generative ideas designed to unseat conventional assumptions and open new alternatives for action. (Gergen and Thatchenkery 1996).

Because postmodernism implicitly acknowledges that "no method grants privileged access to truth and that all research approaches are embodied in cultural practice" (Kilduff and Mehra 1997), postmodernism is informed by and yet ambivalent towards classic techniques making evaluation less straightforward and formulaic than traditional writing. Richardson (2000) for example notes that triangulation, a methodological staple where researchers deploy different methods - such as interviews, census data, and documents - to validate findings carries the same domain assumptions and presumes that there is a "fixed point" or "object" that can be triangulated. Recognising the post modernist view that there are more than "three sides" from which to approach the world, she replaces the imagery of the rigid fixed two-dimensional triangle with a crystal and notes that there are an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi dimensionalities, and angles of approach. Richardson offers contributions, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact and expression as criteria for review (see Table 3).

Given Richardson's criteria, it is less likely that consensus on exemplary postmodern texts can be achieved. However, two well cited papers in information systems are Kilduff's (1993) deconstruction of March and Simon's (1958) Organizations and Avgerou's (2000) application of institutional theory in an informational systems context. The authors explore archetype's of management principles that often are unquestioned, and open up the "black box" systems, so that one might peer in and question the appropriateness of assumptions and allows for reconsideration of the conclusions that have been based on such theoretical mainstays of the academy.

Contribution	Does the research contribute to understanding of social life? Does the author demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective and how has it informed the construction of the text?
Aesthetic merit	Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses and is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
Reflexivity	Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism? How did the author come to write the text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold him- or her-self accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?
Impact	Does the text affect the reader emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move the reader to want to write, try new research practices or to action?
Expression of a reality	Does the text embody a fleshed out embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true" - a credible account of a cultural, social, individual or communal sense of the real?

Table 3. Evaluating Post-Modern Research

Case Studies

Case study research is an expansive term (Cavaye 1996) but is an inductive approach that directly relates empirical data to theory development (Markus and Robey 1988; Eisenhardt 1989) and has been described as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon

and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 1994). Case-study research is well suited to organizational rather than technical issues (Eisenhardt 1989) because it typically combines data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observation and consists of single studies that can be used to measure constructs in order to provide a discrete phenomenal picture, or longitudinal studies that focus on the process in depth (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). Exemplars of case-study information systems research include Barley’s (1996) study of the introduction of technology in the workplace, Montealegre and Keil’s (2000) development of a process model of escalating commitment to technological implementation at the Denver airport, and Orlikowski’s (1996) model of change at a software development firm.

Embodying the philosophy that to truly understand how and why events play out over time they must be examined directly (Mintzberg 1979), case-study research adapts to the reality that change is often inherently multilevel (Markus and Robey 1988; House, Rousseau and Thomas-Hunt 1995), and accommodates the many unidentified variables that are excluded in the traditional methods of experimental research.

Both positivist and interpretive researchers have used a case study approach although, as may be expected, the criteria used to evaluate each are different.

Positivist Case Studies

Case study research have such a long history and have been so well established by positivists that not only is it accepted as a valid methodology but some degree of consensus exists (Klein and Myers 1999). Yin (1994) for example provides criteria of significance, completeness, alternative perspectives, sufficient evidence and engaging construction that are hallmarks of exemplary case studies. More recently, Christie, Rowe, Perry, and Chamand (2000) have suggested that integration of prior theory, use of single or multiple sites, construct validity, confirmability, internal validity / credibility, external validity / transferability, and reliability / dependability (collectively referred to as integrity) can be used for assessment. Although any taxonomy is open to question of arbitrariness and categorization is not mutually exclusive, collectively these two sets of criteria are grouped into conceptual themes based upon the extent to which they deal with theory, rigor, validity, and construction. This grouping is illustrated in Table 1, Conceptual Evaluation of Qualitative Research.

	Theory	Rigor	Validity	Construction
Christie, Rowe, Perry and Chamand (2000)				
Identification of Prior Theory	*			
Use of Single or Multiple Sites	*	*		
Construct Validity	*	*	*	
Confirmability		*		
Internal Validity / Credibility	*		*	
External Validity / Transferability	*	*	*	
Reliability / Dependability		*	*	
Yin (1994)				
Significance	*			
Completeness		*		
Alternative Perspective	*			
Sufficient Evidence		*	*	*
Engaging Construction				*

Table 4. Conceptual Evaluation of Positivist Case Research

Theory

This categorization includes measurements that describe and discuss the use and representation of theory and is present in both Christie et al (2000) and Yin’s (1994) criteria. Christie et al (2000) note that case study research should be evaluated on the basis to which it incorporates and explains prior theory, the theoretical justification for the number of cases studied, and how well the constructs used in the research link the internal analysis to prior theory and generalize to broader theory. Yin (1994) similarly notes that a case study is significant if the underlying issues are theoretically, practically or nationally important, and the case study identifies alternative theoretical perspectives.

Rigor

This category deals with the methodological precision of the research and is included in five of Christie *et al*'s (2000) criteria and two of those specified by Yin (1994). In Christie *et al* (2000), rigor is prescribed through the use of multiple cases to provide triangulation of data sources. Construct validity is provided through the use of structured interview processes and care of recording, transcribing and interpreting the data. Confirmability exists through development of a record of data collection and informants reviewing draft reports and findings of the research. External validity / transferability and reliability is provided by development of interview protocols and procedures for coding and analysis. Yin (1994) specifies methodological rigor through completeness and sufficient evidence. Completeness gives explicit attention to the case boundaries at the onset, expends exhaustive effort in collecting the relevant evidence, and abstains from artificial conditions that constrain data collection. Sufficient evidence not only requires that the researcher be able to convince the reader that the field work was actually conducted and that the researcher acted thoughtfully and became steeped in the issues, but also requires presentation of the most compelling evidence so that a reader can reach an independent judgment regarding the merits of the analysis and to avoidance of biased material that supports single conclusions.

An ideal case study is one where multiple sites as well as multiple examples within each case are used and interviews are conducted across organizational hierarchy and cultures. Structured interview techniques should be used and interviews mechanically recorded. Member checks should be conducted and findings reviewed with key informants. Although sites may be solicited on a basis that is convenient for the researcher, this is not ideal and the research should not be artificially constrained. The research should begin before the start of the phenomena under considered and extend beyond its observable termination. "Good" case research should provide a detailed chronology and the author demonstrate the desire to immerse themselves and avoid artificial constraints. Balancing the need to be succinct and the need to maintain the confidentiality and accurate portrayal of each participant, quotations, (if used) should be provided in context and unedited.

Validity

This categorization deals with the extent to which the research actually studies the area that it was intended to study. It includes Yin's (1994) criterion of sufficient evidence and four of Christie *et al*'s (2000) criteria. Although the criterion of sufficient evidence notes that exemplary case studies judiciously and effectively present the most compelling evidence so that a reader may make an independent judgment, it does not mean that the evidence should be presented in a biased manner. Rather both supporting and challenging data should be included and in displaying the evidence, physical validity, or ensuring a chain of evidence, should be attended. Christie *et al*'s (2000) criteria that are included in this conceptual grouping are: construct validity, internal validity / credibility, external credibility / transferability, and reliability / dependability. Construct validity is established by developing constructs from the literature, reviewing multiple sources of evidence, having key external informants review draft case study reports, structured interviews and maintaining the chain of evidence from collection to final conclusions.

Construction

In addition to the three conceptual groups described earlier, Yin (1994) further suggests that an important criterion for the evaluation of positivist case studies is composition. Arguing that many case studies are "lengthy, cumbersome to read and boring" he proposes that case studies should be engaging and states "a good manuscript is one that 'seduces' the eye. If you read such as manuscript your eye will not want to leave the page, but will continue to read paragraph after paragraph, page after page, until exhaustion sets in" (Yin 1994 p:144). While the extent to which this standard is met is ultimately perhaps idiosyncratic, the reader rather than the author makes a determination. Reviewers should ask if they believe that the case is not only complete and accurate but also interesting. In choosing which elements of evidence were presented, the objective should be to balance between being concise and providing sufficient background to allow the reader to determine context and to let the participant text speak directly to the reader.

Two examples of case studies that satisfy these four forms of criteria are Markus (1983) classic study of power and politics in MIS implementations and Keil's (1995) study of project escalation.

Interpretive Case Studies

In stark contrast to positivist case studies, Klein and Myers (1999) suggested that not only are the criteria used for positivist case studies inapplicable to interpretive work, but that some may believe that because interpretive work is emergent that standards themselves are inappropriate. However, having made this observation, Klein and Myers further opine that it is better to have some standards than none. Further arguing, such absence increases the risk that qualitative work might be inappropriately judged. While not presented as definitive criteria *per se*, Klein and Myers do state that none should be

arbitrarily excluded although they do note that many authors may conform to normative pressures and write up their research as if they were unobtrusive and objective. The principles are: hermeneutics, contextualization, interaction, abstraction and generalization, dialogical reasoning, interactions and suspicion.

Hermeneutics

This meta-principle reflects that understanding is holistic and achieved by iterating between considering the interdependent meaning of parts and the whole that they form. Although there are no detailed and explicit guidelines for the hermeneutic method (Gadamer 1989) and various disparate and contrasting hermeneutic theories exist (Thompson 1981), hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of understanding (Arnold and Fischer 1994) where rather than treating knowledge as biases and prejudices are to be held in abeyance so that they do not influence the study (a process known as bracketing), they are instead necessary conditions of any understanding (Prasad 2002) and a distinction is made between legitimate prejudices that make understanding possible and those that hinder or lead to misunderstanding.

Contextualization

This principle recognizes that there is an inevitable difference in understanding between the interpreter and the author of a text that is created by the historical distances between them. The research challenge is not so much to cover up the differences but to surface it. This requires critical reflection of the social and historical background so that the reader can see how differences have emerged. This engenders the possibility to understand that although research is a moving target, idiographic and nomothetic generalizations are still possible.

Interaction

This principle recognizes that data are “not like rocks waiting to be picked up” but result from an interaction between the researcher and the subjects (a relationship that Spradley (1980) notes can range in intimacy and familiarity) and that the researcher should critically describe how the data were socially constructed through the interaction.

Abstractions and Generalization

This requires that retelling of idiographic details should be done through theory. This means that the validity of the cases does not depend upon the representativeness of cases in a statistical sense but on the plausibility and cogency of the logical reasoning used in describing the results from the cases and in drawing conclusions from them. Four types of generalizations may be made from interpretive case studies: development of concepts, generation of theory, the drawing of specific implications and rich insight.

Dialogical Reasoning

This principle relates to the hermeneutic principle of knowledge and alternative explanations through possible contradictions between the theoretical preconceptions guiding the research design and actual findings (the story which the data tell) with subsequent cycles of revision. In contrast with the positivist research tradition where prejudice is seen as a source of bias and a hindrance to true knowledge – objectivity is best attained if a social scientist adopts a value-free position, interpretive researchers distinguish between true prejudices and false ones that are misunderstood.

Multiple Interpretations

Well-designed interpretive case studies are sensitive to possible differences in interpretations among the participants and are typically expressed in multiple narratives or stories of the same sequence of events under study. Similar to Richardson's (2000) concept of a prism where what you see depends upon from where you view, this principle reflects that multiple witnesses see independent events and requires that the researcher examine the influences that the social context has upon the actors under study by seeking out and documenting multiple viewpoints along with the reasons for them.

Suspicion

Interpretive case study researchers, in addition to their own biases and prejudices, must also be aware of possible biases and systemic distortions in the narratives collected from participants.

As was the case with positivist case studies, there are many examples of well written interpretive case studies. Indeed, not only will choosing from the myriad of possibilities may well tell more of the author's beliefs and biases than the state of the field but selecting from the individual or joint corpus of some of the outstanding interpretive researchers poses challenges.

However, among recent work, Schultze and Orlikowski's (2004) in-depth study of internet self serve technology is an excellent example.

	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Confessional	Postmodernism	Positivist Case Studies	Interpretive Case Studies
Adequacy	*					
Empirical Grounding	*					
Data	*					
Theory	*	*	*	*	*	*
Authenticity		*	*	*		
Criticality		*	*			
Plausibility		*	*			
Self-Revealing		*				
Interlaced confessional content		*				
Contribution			*	*	*	*
Aesthetic Merit			*	*	*	*
Reflexivity			*	*	*	*
Impact			*	*	*	*
Expression of Reality			*	*	*	*
Rigor			*	*	*	*
Validity			*	*	*	*
Construction			*	*	*	*
Hermeneutics			*	*	*	*
Contextualization			*	*	*	*
Abstraction / Generalization (concept development, theory generation, implications, insight)			*	*	*	*
Dialogical Reasoning			*	*	*	*
Multiple Interpretations			*	*	*	*
Suspicion			*	*	*	*

Table 5. Summary of Evaluation Criteria

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Although the debate regarding the validity and usefulness of qualitative research has lessened, very often quantitative research is privileged in that it neither needs to justify its use nor its methodology (McLuskie 2003). Preparation of this paper was sparked by two recent situations. The first directed one of the authors to explicitly tell readers the criteria under which a qualitative paper should be evaluated and how the submitted work compared against those criteria. The second involved a reviewer's application of positivist criteria to the author's post modern work. While these incidents are perhaps not representative of the broader community, both authors long for the day that qualitative research needs no introduction.

Pickard and Dixon (2004) suggest, "research findings are themselves partly the construction of the research process." (p. 181; see also Geertz, 1988). This begs the question of the relation of research evaluation, the conclusions that are drawn from the process of research (and publication) and the construction of cumulative knowledge upon these conclusions. Klein and Myers (1999) emphasize the importance of standards, for they exist such that we can recognise good qualitative work where we see it. But, as an Academy we must ask ourselves what standards should apply? A question posed over 2000 years ago, still has much relevance (though perhaps not as dark): *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Who guards the guards? In other words, should we not approach qualitative work as something evaluated, or 'watched' within its own right? An author would not submit a predictive paper to the Journal of Critical Studies, regardless of the quality of the article, it may not be judged fairly against the rubric of evaluation one might apply to that journal. Why then are inappropriate measures of assessment so often applied within our own academy?

The application of appropriate standards should be the focus of the academy, after all, our search is to increase our base of knowledge and our breadth of perspective not limit it. You might judge a chocolate along a paradigm of bitter and sweet but it would be inappropriate to judge a chair in this fashion – comfortable or not might be more suited. While this is an extreme example, it makes a simple point – judge something by appropriate measures for itself not something else. Both in reference disciplines upon which management scholars rely and within the academy itself there is a rich resource of qualitative literature; that provides sufficient basis for 'trusting' evaluation criteria that is appropriate for the research in question. We need not say, "Why didn't you tell me if the chair tasted bitter?" or "Was the chocolate comfortable?" Similarly, as an

academy we should have the confidence to encourage the rich tradition of qualitative work, and recognize it as developed and appropriate a means of inquiry as the experimental and survey based research.

The alternative is an unpleasant one. If we chose to have a blind eye to what might be appropriate means to evaluate various forms of research, are we discounting such works unfairly? If we continue to have poorly chosen criteria for research, will truly innovative studies and papers be turned away and remain unpublished because it did not meet certain evaluation criteria that was not appropriate in the first place? Have we already rejected work that should have been published it because we evaluated it from the wrong perspective? Moving forward in the discussion, might the academy be wise to consider the representation that diverse research perspectives should have on journal editorial boards or as journal editors (or guest editors), for example. Not only to encourage the development of work in different traditions, but to ensure that it will be evaluated as it should be.

We think that it is indeed better to have the correct standards correctly applied than no standards or inconsistent application. While the standards discussed here are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive, it is hoped that their greater dissemination and discussion will improve the body of knowledge.

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