PUBLISHING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN *ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT DISCOVERIES*

Academy of Management Discoveries (*AMD*), the Academy of Management's newest journal, was founded for the purpose of providing a publication outlet for management and organizational scholars who have done empirical research that focuses on interesting and important phenomena that are not adequately predicted or explained by existing theories or conceptual frameworks.

This is the fourth in a series of editorials from members of the founding editorial team of *AMD*, each of which has been designed to provide you with a perspective on writing or reviewing empirical research for *AMD*. In this editorial, we focus on the use of qualitative methods to facilitate the discovery of interesting and potentially important phenomena, concepts, or relationships in the organizational sciences. Our purpose in presenting this editorial is not to replicate the excellent articles or books that have been written elsewhere about how to do qualitative research in the organizational sciences (e.g., Gioia, Carley, & Hamilton, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Pratt, 2008, 2009; Van Maanen, 1979), but rather to focus specifically on the publication of research based on qualitative methods in *AMD*.

In this editorial, we have three primary goals. First, we want to convey that *AMD* is open to publishing research based on a broad range of qualitative approaches in terms of philosophical stands, methods, and reporting. To do so, we briefly acknowledge the array of available qualitative methods and the different assumptions associated with such methods. Second, we illustrate how *AMD*'s focus on discoveries and its existence as an online journal make it particularly well suited for the publication of research using various qualitative methods. The online nature of the journal provides authors with an array of interesting opportunities for thinking about how to best present the findings of their qualitative work to readers. We also provide some illustrations of how qualitative methods have already been used in *AMD* articles to make discoveries. Third, we seek to offer some guidelines to assist researchers in structuring their papers in ways that will be consistent with *AMD*'s mission.

AMD WELCOMES A VARIETY OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

Generally, qualitative methods are used to capture and describe the depth, richness, and complexity of phenomena. The many types of qualitative research designs and methods include:

- Ethnography, which originates from the field of anthropology, is used to describe characteristics of culture within groups, communities, and organizations. Researchers in this tradition try to access the perspectives and understandings of members through "participant observation" (working alongside members), observations and field notes (creating a database of firsthand accounts and descriptions), and interviews (which may take the form of casual conversations).
- Discourse analysis, which has roots in the field of linguistics, is used to explicate the forms and functions of semiotic events such as written words, spoken dialogue, and visual texts. One type of discourse analysis is content analysis, which has been used by management scholars as a method for examining language and its effects on individual and organizational outcomes.
- Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, which emerged from the field of sociology, examine the methods that people use to produce and understand the social order of everyday activity.
- Phenomenology involves a philosophical commitment to privileging the uniqueness of an individual's lived situation and provides a first-person point of view.
- Archival and historical methods employ the practices of historians in describing past events, toward accounting for the present and anticipating the future.
- Structured interviews and focus groups, which are especially popular in the field of management, are designed to increase the reliability and credibility of qualitative data, as research subjects provide comparable and contrasting responses to the same interview questions.

These approaches (and others not listed) play out in a wide variety of ways as researchers adapt their methods to fit the questions at hand, the sites available for study, and their own particular interests and preferences (Locke, 2011). Differences in the use of methods may also stem from differences at the philosophical level about the nature of reality. A watershed distinction within the social sciences is whether researchers assume a positivistic or a constructionist perspective in doing qualitative

research. These two philosophical stands differ in their basic assumptions about the nature of reality, and about the relationship between the researcher and the object being researched. It is important to bear in mind these differences as they filter through research designs and methods.

Researchers who adopt a positivist approach regard reality as something that exists "out there" in the world, and they use research methods as tools for discovering and dissecting it. In this view, social realities are akin to the physical world: something that exists independent of our research about it, something that is governed by cause-and-effect relationships, something that may be hidden from our view only because we need better tools for finding it—like a better microscope. Thus, qualitative researchers in the positivist tradition emphasize objective descriptions and explanations of reality, and aim at understanding why and how a phenomenon occurs.

In contrast, researchers who adopt a constructionist approach regard reality as something that people create or accomplish through behavior and interaction. In this view, social reality does not exist independent of our research about it, so researchers must be vigilant and reflective about how their methods help to constitute the very "objects" of their study. Thus, qualitative researchers in the constructivist tradition emphasize subjective interpretations of reality, and go in search of meaning (and its making), rather than natural law.

Although these two traditions lie at the ends of a continuum, a swollen middle combines elements of them in different ways. For instance, subjective interpretations of reality may be analyzed using positivist analytical techniques of the kinds Miles and Huberman (1994) proposed. *AMD* welcomes contributions rooted in any of these philosophical traditions.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND *AMD*

There are at least two key features of *AMD* that make it particularly well suited for publishing qualitative research. First, qualitative methods are especially useful for surfacing new phenomena, which is precisely what *AMD* has been commissioned to publish. There are a variety of ways that qualitative researchers can discover new phenomena or relationships of potential interest in the field. Sometimes qualitative researchers begin in a rather unmotivated way. They enter an organization to observe its people, practices and processes, not entirely sure what they are looking for, not necessarily driven by particular theories or hypotheses, but with an educated expectation that they will locate phenomena worth investigating and explicating (induction). Through careful observation, note taking, and coding of their encounters, they may make discoveries of new phenomena or of new relationships between variables. Other times, qualitative researchers know what they are looking for in a general sense and they use observations, interviews, and allied methods to discover it and document it more fully (abduction). In the course of working abductively, researchers may discover something that is under specified theoretically, or something that is new or unexpected. Less frequently, researchers use qualitative methods to answer research questions or test hypotheses (deduction), with discoveries then triggered by surprising or contradictory findings.

Relatedly, because *AMD* is interested in research that contributes to our understanding of new or poorly understood phenomena, *AMD* welcomes qualitative research that takes either an "emic" or an "etic" perspective on the topic under consideration. Emic refers to research that takes the subject's view or the participant's perspective, which contrasts with the etic understandings of researchers whose theories and hypotheses impose a researcher's perspective on the objects of study (Pike, 1966). Although *AMD* is open to qualitative research using either an emic or an etic perspective, we acknowledge that *AMD* is a natural home for emic understandings that offer an alternative view to existing theoretical models, and allow us to discover participants' understandings of organizational situations.

A second key feature of *AMD* is that it is an online journal. As such, *AMD* allows qualitative authors to be liberated from the constraints of traditional paper publications. Qualitative research often involves voluminous data sets that are not easily shared or distilled in traditional paper-based publications (e.g., observations and field notes, interviews and their transcriptions, autobiographical data and diaries, etc.). Similarly, visual and graphic forms of data (such as artifacts, photographs, audio, and video recordings) may be difficult to put into print. In an online publication such as *AMD*, researchers can share more of the data and evidence to support their research findings. Moreover, there is an important qualitative difference between reading about a particular phenomenon and experiencing it firsthand. With *AMD*, the "readers" can see photographs, play with dynamic models, listen to audio recordings, watch video clips, and so forth. Thus, online publication has ontological advantages for social scientists, who have traditionally focused on discourse (talk and text) and have too often overlooked visible aspects of organizational activity, including:

- Materiality (objects, artifacts, and tools)
- Embodiment (the human body is often at the center of organizational work)
- Spatiotemporality (activity unfolds through time and space)
- Multimodality (work is usually an orchestration of talk, text, graphs, gestures, facial expressions, embodied maneuvers within built spaces, etc.)

When multiple modalities are employed in presenting research findings, readers can more easily touch and be touched by phenomena that provide evidence for research findings and discoveries. *AMD* has a team of media editors who work with authors after the acceptance of their papers to find creative and engaging ways to present the results of their work to readers. The goal is to enable readers to not only read about the research findings but also experience the phenomenon being studied using multimodal tools.

In the next few sections, we provide a few specific examples of how different qualitative methods were used to make discoveries that have recently been published in *AMD*. We focus first on describing the method briefly, and then turn to the article that featured that method and show how the method was used to make a discovery. We also discuss how the online nature of *AMD* creates opportunities for qualitative researchers to enrich their modes of data presentation and showcase their findings in new ways.

Structured Interviews

Structured interviews allow us as researchers to hear how participants describe situations; thereby helping us to see into their world (i.e., to understand their perceptions, interpretations, thoughts, and emotions) and to discover phenomena that we might not see if we relied on other methods such as observations, surveys, or laboratory studies. Interviewees may also use rich, evocative language for describing the situations they are dealing with, which can help us as researchers to discover aspects of a phenomenon to which we might not be paying attention.

In an example of qualitative research based on structured interviews and published in *AMD*, Rockmann and Pratt (2015) interviewed individuals from an organization that allows its employees to choose whether to work onsite or off-site. Their initial (etic) intent was to understand how people who spend various amounts of time working outside the office experience distributed work. However, as the interviews progressed, the authors discovered that, independent of how much time employees worked off-site, the workers experienced working onsite as being very similar to working off-site. Having gained this (emic) insight, Rockmann and Pratt re-focused

their research question to understand how people make decisions regarding whether to work onsite or off-site. Their findings suggested a contagion effect. The expectation that others won't be at the office makes onsite work less attractive which in turn intensifies the choice to work off-site. The authors followed up their qualitative study with two quantitative studies based on surveys to employees of the same organization. Exploration of the data yielded results consistent with the qualitative discoveries. Rather than developing a full theoretical model to explain the findings, Rockmann and Pratt discussed the insights that emerge from their discovery, and their implications for new research on off-site work.

When research based on structured interviews is published in *AMD*, authors have options for how to convey the richness of the phenomenon that they are discovering (e.g., the sights, the sounds, and the emotions). For example, with the permission of the subject, one might be able to let the reader hear (or see) how the person spoke about their experiences or, in the case of the "lonely" onsite office described in the research above, one could add pictures or video of what the lonely onsite workplace looks like. As a complement to our articles, we provide links to interviews with the authors, which give the authors a chance to explain why they did the research and how it unfolded (see http://video.aom.org/ait3sgc1). Publications in AMD also include video abstracts of articles, which succinctly illustrate the study's main findings. (To see the video abstract for the Rockmann and Pratt article, click here.)

Observational Methods

Qualitative research studies that are based on observational methods are also extremely well suited for making discoveries because they allow us to see the world as it is seen by its inhabitants and to observe how they interact in their environment. Through observation, we can discover the effects of physical space on interactions, how props are used as well as the flow or temporal sequences of interactions, and appreciate the subtleties of tones of voice and nonverbal expressions.

For example, Steve Barley's observations of sales activity at car dealerships, which was published in the inaugural issue of *AMD*, allowed him to "see" the effects of the Internet on the temporal sequences of the interactions between the salesmen and customers, including the 'tone" of those encounters (Barley, 2015). Barley used a dramaturgical analysis, which allowed him to think about the car dealership as a stage on which a set of actors interact. Observing the interactions and their tone allowed him to see that technology-mediated interactions may actually be a very helpful beginning to what otherwise might be

unpleasant and conflicted interpersonal relationships. This finding runs counter to the commonly accepted belief that technology-mediated interactions are inferior to face-to-face interactions. In his author interview, Barley discusses how this discovery emerged from a project that had a different purpose when it began (http://video.aom.org/6zwtpvbn). (To see the video abstract of Barley's article, click here.)

Ethnography

Ethnography is a mainstay of qualitative research that often leads to insights and discoveries as researchers try to access the cultural experiences and understandings of organizational members. Ethnographers try to shed theoretical blinders and avoid premature conclusions through methods that first immerse them in organizational activities.

For example, Hatch, Schultz, and Skov (2015) used ethnographic methods for an article that appeared in the inaugural issue of *AMD*. The authors captured the "top and middle managers' experiences and understandings" through participant observation, observation and field notes, and ethnographic interviews, including conversations with a key informant who eventually became a coauthor of the article. The authors came to focus on the relationship between organizational identity and organizational culture during an extended period of organizational change. They found things to be much more complicated than existing theories portrayed. Shaping a new organizational identity implied deep changes for the organizational culture—or at least that was the experience and perspective of some managers, who affected or altered the course of change efforts within the organization. The article includes hyperlinks to other websites about the organization, including a promotional video on YouTube that gives readers a firsthand taste of the organizational identity and culture (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t82E3e14Nfg). (To see a video abstract of the Hatch, Schultz, and Skov article, click here.)

GUIDELINES FOR GETTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN *AMD*

Although *AMD* does not require qualitative studies to adhere to any particular philosophical or methodological perspective, nor do we intend for our reviewers to force existing theoretical frameworks onto such papers, we recognize that authors may want some guidelines regarding paper formats that are reflective of *AMD*'s mission. We offer here four such guidelines for qualitative pieces.

First, as we do of any researcher, we expect qualitative analysts to explain why their work matters. Stating who, what, where, when, why, and how is necessary but not sufficient. It is also necessary to explain why the discovery matters, how pervasive the phenomenon might be, and why it is important to address it. In other words, we expect authors to answer the so-called "so what?" question.

Second, we encourage authors to be authentic in their reporting of research. As highlighted in the FTE on quantitative discoveries (Bamberger & Ang, 2016), *AMD* strives for authenticity in the ways we report and describe research findings. The research process—and especially so in the case of qualitative research—often does not proceed in a linear manner, and we believe that it is good to tell the research story as it happened. For instance, researchers may start off their inquiry driven by a broad research question only to find out that the truly interesting question is another one that emerges from the data, as happened to Rockmann and Pratt (2015). We encourage authors to be authentic in reporting the *search and re-search* process that led to their findings.

Third, we expect authors to use rigorous analytic tools that are consistent with their philosophical assumptions and methodological principles. Qualitative researchers have an obligation to make a convincing empirical case that the patterns, typologies, processes, and other regularities that they report characterize the context under study, and that their findings and interpretations are warranted by their data. Although we expect authors to be convincing about the rigor of their methods and data gathering, we do not believe that authors need to be restricted to "established templates" (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Thus, we welcome insightful qualitative studies that fall outside so-called "established templates." Consistent with the journal's mission, papers suitable for *AMD* use qualitative data analysis in service of describing and diagnosing phenomena.

Finally, the "back end" or discussion section is very important to *AMD* papers as that is where authors can highlight how their research contributes to the field. Henry Mintzberg (1979) speaks of the discovery process as detective work followed by a creative leap. Detective work is an untidy process through which the researcher tracks down patterns and consistencies: "one searches through a phenomenon looking for order, following one lead to another" (Mintzberg, 1979: 584). The creative leap allows one to generalize beyond one's data, and to generate theories. At *AMD* we expect authors to present the evidence found through their detective work, and to suggest directions that the creative leap might take. Although we do not expect qualitative researchers to explain in the form of propositions why people act or interpret the world the way they do, we do expect researchers to draw conceptual and/or practical implications from their

findings for how we approach future research and/or practice.

CONCLUSION

Our intent in writing this editorial note has been threefold. First, we wanted to convey the journal's openness to a broad range of qualitative approaches in terms of philosophical traditions, methods, and reporting. Second, we sought to explain how *AMD*'s mission and online presentation format afford qualitative researchers some exciting possibilities for showcasing their work. We also provided some illustrations of papers based on qualitative methods that have already been published in *AMD*. Finally, we wanted to propose guidelines to assist researchers in structuring their papers in ways consistent with the *AMD* mission.

We hope that this brief discussion of qualitative research and how it fits the mission of *AMD* has been helpful to authors considering this journal as a potential publication outlet for their qualitative research studies.

Africa Arino
IESE Business School, University of Navarra

Curtis LeBaron
Marriott School of Management, Brigham Young University

Frances J. Milliken
Stern School of Business, New York University

REFERENCES

Bamberger, P., & Ang, S. 2016. The quantitative discovery. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 2: 1–6.

Barley, S. R. 2015. Why the internet makes buying a car less loathsome: How technologies change role relations. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 1: 5–35.

Gioia, D. A., Carley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. 2012. Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16: 15–31.

Hatch, M. J., Schultz, M., & Skov, M.-A. 2015. Organizational identity and culture in the context of managed change: Transformation in the Carlsberg Group, 2009-2013. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 1: 58–90.

Langley, A., & Abdallah, C. 2011. Templates and turns in qualitative studies of strategy and management. *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management*, 6: 201–235.

Locke, K. 2011. Field research practice in management and organization studies: Reclaiming its tradition of discovery. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 5: 613–652.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mintzberg, H. 1979. An emerging strategy of "direct" research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24: 582–589.

Pike, K. 1966. Etic and emic standpoints for the description of behavior. In A. G. Smith (Ed.), *Communication and culture: Readings in the codes of human interaction*, 152–163. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Pratt, M. G. 2008. Fitting oval pegs into round holes: Tensions in evaluating and publishing qualitative research in top-tier North American journals. *Organizational Research Methods*, 11: 481–509.

Pratt, M. G. 2009. For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52: 856–862.

Rockmann, K. W., & Pratt, M. G. 2015. Contagious offsite work and the lonely office: The unintended consequences of distributed work. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 1: 150–164.

Van Maanen, J. 1979. The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24: 539–550.