



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Jarzabkowski, P., Langley, A. & Nigam, A. (2021). Navigating the tensions of quality in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, 19(1), pp. 70-80. doi: 10.1177/1476127020985094

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/25620/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127020985094>

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Navigating the Tensions of Quality in Qualitative Research

Paula Jarzabkowski,
The Business School (formerly Cass), City University
Paula.Jarzabkowski.1@city.ac.uk

Ann Langley,
HEC Montréal
ann.langley@hec.ca

Amit Nigam,
The Business School (formerly Cass), City University
Amit.Nigam.1@city.ac.uk

Please cite as: Jarzabkowski, P., A. Langley, A. Nigam. 2021. Navigating the tensions of
quality in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*. 19.1:70-80

Abstract

In this essay that serves to introduce the Solapbox Forum on quality in qualitative research, we argue that achieving quality involves a process of navigating the tensions between structure and creativity, and between accountability and professionalism. Guidelines for achieving quality such as those offered in this forum or elsewhere should not therefore be seen as absolute standards, templates or checklists to be strictly followed, but rather as toolkits that can assist in navigating the tensions involved in participating in and developing the qualitative research craft as a community of scholars, reviewers and editors.

As Pratt (2009) suggested in a well-read *Academy of Management Journal* editorial, in doing, writing up, reviewing and editing qualitative research, organizational scholars have often struggled to understand and assess quality in part because there are no obvious ‘rules.’ While this openness can create a sense of freedom, it can also generate insecurity and the desire for guidance. Over the years, much guidance has now become available, in terms of both methodology texts (e.g., Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) and handbooks (Cassell, Cunliffe, & Grandy, 2017; Mir & Jain, 2017), but also articles that illustrate quality qualitative research, or propose approaches to achieving it (Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle, & Locke, 2008). However, the problem is that scholars, in their search for guidance, can look to these texts, ground-breaking papers and methodological articles as ‘precedents’ or hard and fast ‘rule-books’ for doing quality research. This guidance has then become normalized as templates and checklists that people can perceive of as requirements for doing or judging ‘quality,’ even though this might never have been the authors’ original intentions.

Of course, guidance and insight from experienced and reflexive colleagues about how to work towards achieving high-quality qualitative research can be extremely helpful, and the current special So!apbox Forum on quality in qualitative research aims to offer this. Yet it is important not to see this Forum as a call for standardization. Specifically, we are not in the business of offering lists of criteria that authors, reviewers and editors can “check off.” Indeed we see efforts at standardizing the hallmarks of quality as potentially in tension with the creativity (Lê & Schmid, 2020), pluralism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), and generativity (Carlsen & Dutton, 2011) of qualitative inquiry grounded in the field experiences and interpretations of the researcher (Watson, 2011), from which quality in qualitative research emerges. The problem is that more or better-specified rules will not increase quality in this sense. Rules are neither a proxy of nor a substitute for quality. While

there are certainly some stronger and some weaker ways to conduct and write up qualitative research, the rigid application of a checklist may simply bypass the interpretive point of quality, and be insufficient to substantiate it. Worse, it could even obscure the pursuit of quality in qualitative research.

In this editorial to the special So!apbox Forum on quality in qualitative research we therefore argue for the need for authors, reviewers and editors to navigate the ongoing tensions between offering and following guidelines (which can be perceived as imposing normative rules for substantiating quality), and leaving space for scholars to get on with doing quality through their own creative hunches grounded in rich data and careful analysis. Rather than leaving scholars at the abyss between order and chaos, we discuss some specific oppositions that come into play in navigating the process of both demonstrating and doing quality in qualitative research. We then reflect on our own experiences as authors, reviewers, and editors in navigating these tensions. Finally, we introduce the papers for this So!apbox Forum, which provide insights on doing quality from the perspective of design, conduct, analysis, writing and editing of qualitative research. Importantly, these authors share their thoughts on what worked for them and what they learnt, providing guidance without imposing rules.

Navigating Tensions at Three Levels

The essential tension in thinking about quality is that, while scholars, reviewers and editors seek guidance that can provide a structure for doing and judging qualitative research, more rules and rule adherence does not necessarily improve quality, and may sometimes even detract from it. Embedded in this broad tension are a few more specific tensions. We label and describe each of these tensions to provide insight into the challenges of doing and judging quality in qualitative research. This comes with two caveats. First, for

each tension, neither one pole nor the other offers a 'correct' answer. Rather, good qualitative research involves negotiating between the poles. Second, we lay out these tensions in terms of a 'toolkit' for navigating quality, rather than as yet another checklist. We suggest that the navigation of these tensions plays out at three levels: in the conduct of individual pieces of research; in the enactment of the publication system for evaluating quality within our profession; and in the trajectories of individual scholars as they pursue their own journeys with qualitative research.

Conducting individual studies: Between structure and creativity

In the conduct of a piece of research, scholars must navigate the tension between the structures by which research will be evaluated when presented to others and their own creativity in uncovering 'what is interesting here.' There are some well-known structures for validating the conduct of qualitative research, from the four criteria for trustworthiness of data and analysis associated with naturalistic modes of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), to approaches for showing how codes and themes emerge from within those data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Clarity and transparency (structure) in explaining these processes is essential to provide confidence in the research.

At the same time these processes cannot be viewed as formulaic; no qualitative researcher ever 'coded' their way to interesting findings (Langley, 1999). Rather, coding itself both emerges from, and feeds into a creative process of discovery (Klag & Langley, 2013; Locke, Feldman, & Golden-Biddle, 2020; Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008) whose elements can never be perfectly foreseen ahead of time or even perfectly articulated after the fact. Creativity requires a certain amount of 'freewheeling,' 'serendipity,' and 'detachment,' but at the same time, there is also a need for deep engagement with the data, and a need to backtrack from the creative hunch, leaning on the deep structures of

coding and thematic analysis to examine, for the researcher who was immersed in that context, whether those hunches hold when exposed to more formal analytic techniques (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010; Klag & Langley, 2013). The quality of the individual piece of research comes from the iterative process of rendering creativity credible through the structure of its presentation, but never substituting structure for creativity.

The System for Appraising Quality: Between Accountability and Professionalism

As social scientists we all – scholars, reviewers and editors – have a professional responsibility to ensure the quality of research that we declare publishable. Accountability means documenting and justifying actions and decisions based on some standard. Implicit is that the standard is trustworthy, and adherence to a standard would hence produce trustworthy research. Accountability is rooted in part in the logic of science, specifically the idea that standards for doing research, backed up by evidence, result in better research. On the one hand, this view is consistent with the transparency that is valued generally in science. The flip side is that this can also lead to formulaic research; mechanically applying the structures and templates of those standards, without critical thought or judgment (see also Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016).

Yet the notion of professionalism is grounded in the point that professionals need – and can be trusted – to have space for judgment and discretion (Mintzberg, 1979). And that their training, ethics, and public service ethos ensures that they will exercise judgment and discretion appropriately. This is believed to be the only way to do work that is abstract and complex, because by its very nature it cannot be standardized (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 2001). The flip side of this is that such judgement might be prone to either abuse or to sloppiness that cannot be backed up by evidence or meet the standards of science. Here, negotiation of the tensions between trusting in accountability and trusting in

professionalism needs to be grounded in respect for the many years of doctoral training that our scholars have, and the multiple iterations through which their papers usually pass at conferences and workshops prior to even reaching peer review. Essentially, while the standards of the profession must be applied, they cannot be the only point of call. We do need to trust in the professionalism of our system of training scholars. Note that, contrary to what one might think, this is certainly not only the case for qualitative research. The scientific enterprise (whether quantitative or qualitative) is always built to some degree on trust in scientific training, scholarly ethics, and responsibility. In turn, the standards of accountability that we hold each other to in reviewing and editing research build understanding of what professionalism in doing and presenting research means.

Establishing a developmental journey: Training wheels vs. crutches

Navigating between the requirements of conducting individual pieces of research and the system within which those pieces of research are evaluated is the responsibility of the researcher. Researchers are on different development journeys, in part attributable to their maturity (longevity) within the system, and in part due to their own confidence to freewheel, and to be professional in applying structures that render that freewheeling accountable to the standards of our profession. While longevity in a system can provide the confidence to exercise judgement, we do not conflate duration of time with judgement, since longevity can also equate with embeddedness, while newcomers may well be the ones who have the greatest scope to propose novelty.

Overall, we suggest that all researchers are on a development journey in which the structures and standards that provide our profession with accountability are the ‘training wheels’ supporting balance in every individual piece of research whilst also avoiding use of these structures and standards as crutches to simply prop up the conduct of that research.

In doing so, scholars can ideally extend the boundaries of what is possible in any individual piece of research, in ways that ensure that our profession, and our professionalism continue to evolve.

In this sense, recent writings in the methods literature that discuss ways in which scholars may reach beyond narrow ‘templates,’ to innovate while demonstrating accountability and professionalism in qualitative research reporting are offering inspiration for many of us (Harley & Cornelissen, 2020; Lê & Schmid, 2020; Locke et al., 2020; Pratt, Kaplan, & Whittington, 2020; Pratt, Sonenshein, & Feldman, 2019). Innovative qualitative scholars do of course need to justify what they are doing (and thus demonstrate accountability), but they should be able to do so *in their own terms*, by explaining precisely how their approaches can offer trustworthy and novel inferences and insights, and not simply by following a recipe, a rulebook, a checklist, or by ritually citing any particular ‘authority’ in the field. In other words, while methods articles such as those presented in the present So!apbox Forum certainly offer wonderful sources of inspiration and of course, we *do* sincerely hope that they will be cited for that reason, they should not be seen as a source of ‘truth’ or the one best way. Rather they offer elements of what might seen as an evolving ‘cultural toolkit’ (Swidler, 1986) for qualitative researchers working in the areas of strategy and organization theory. We propose them as a resource that can contribute, along with other resources published in *Strategic Organization* and elsewhere, to the ongoing development of a vibrant and dynamic professional and scholarly community able to build on and enrich each others’ innovations, and to mutually construct what it means to accomplish high quality work, without closing down novelty.

Building a Toolkit for Authors, Reviewers, and Editors

Before presenting the particular set of articles we selected for the forum, we draw on some of our own personal experiences in navigating the tensions we described above as authors, reviewers and editors to suggest elements that might form part of a toolkit for ensuring quality in qualitative research, where we take quality to mean enabling creativity, innovation and discovery while simultaneously promoting rigor and accountability. We take a more personalized perspective in this section. As an author, Paula Jarzabkowski contributes reflections on the experience of developing and defending a novel approach to presenting and analysing qualitative data. Representing the reviewer, Amit Nigam offers a perspective on the challenges of being a “lucky” reviewer in a system of appraisal without hard and fast rules, where judgment plays an important role. Finally, Ann Langley offers some perspectives on the editorial role in developing quality qualitative research.

Paula: One view of the author’s toolkit

An author needs to navigate the above tensions when leaving the beaten path (freewheeling) of presenting qualitative research by paying attention to the structures through which confidence in the professionalism of the author is built. In my global, team-based ethnography of the global reinsurance industry over three years, we were covering new ground methodologically (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Cabantous, 2015). This gave opportunities for novel theorizing but also generated challenges as there were no precedents in management studies and templates would not have served us well in finding or presenting novelty. Our first team publication foray was grounded in a subsection of our data on Lloyd’s of London, for which three of us shadowed 26 underwriters from when they entered their offices in the early morning, following them throughout their trading day, including lunches, dinners, drinks, and late evenings in the office, over 180 days. While this

gave us very deep knowledge, the challenge was how to render such extensive data vivid in theoretically-compelling findings. We finally settled on a very novel method, synthesizing across all of the data to present a single composite narrative of 'A Day in the Life' of a fictionalized underwriter Tim, to show how underwriters, habitually, in their everyday practice, balance the conflicting-yet-complementary logics of a communal marketplace (Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015).

My aim here is not to explain the analytic method we developed for composite narratives, which we have done elsewhere (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Lê, 2014), but rather to expose our navigation of the tensions that such creativity generated for us. We were convinced that this was the best way to show 'how things happened' in a theoretically-compelling way. And indeed, our reviewers seemed to enjoy our 'Day in the Life'. As one reviewer noted, "I find the use of the detailed account of a typical day of a Lloyds' reinsurer a clever and effective way of organizing the data for the benefit of the reader". Yet they were concerned about whether this was a credible method, representative of our data, and how they could be confident about our attributions of what we observed. We were challenged by reviewers, with comments such as "Why use this approach?", suggestions to use a more familiar way of presenting findings, and requests to confirm if our method was one particular type (template) or another. At this point, we could have reverted to a more standard analysis. However, reading between the lines, we felt that reviewers were genuinely compelled by our composite narrative – that was where they could believe in the novelty of our findings – but also concerned to uphold the standards of the profession when faced with something that did not conform to existing structures. We therefore navigated tensions by presenting an even more detailed composite narrative, at the same time as adopting the reviewers' suggestions for structure in terms of "more illustrative" tables and

deeper explanations of our second order analysis. The result was both emphasis of our creative method and also upholding the commonly understood and respected standards of the profession.

During the above process, we generated our own toolkit for pushing methodological boundaries, following our analytic convictions, and also demonstrating professionalism and accountability to reviewers. Is that toolkit a template? Well, it has become a familiar practice for us, both in using composite narratives (e.g., Spee, Jarzabkowski, & Smets, 2016), and also in bringing together practices across multiple different actors to explain complex global phenomena such as competitive market dynamics through detailed explanations of instances such as the trading of a deal (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Bednarek, 2018). However, none of these are the same approach, or follow a checklist in order to ‘play it safe’. Rather, our toolkit stems from our learning about how to render both the creativity from which novel contributions emerge and also our adherence to professional standards visible to readers. While our composite narrative approach does provide an option to other authors, it is at best one possible tool in their own toolkit, to be drawn upon only if it serves their own creative hunches and enables them to navigate these tensions in making their own contributions.

Amit: One view of the reviewer’s toolkit

Reviewers play two different but important roles in our publishing system. They are both *Custodians* for quality (which sometimes necessarily means being barrier to entry) but also *Sherpas*, guiding people on the path to quality and helping them get up and down the mountain safely. As a reviewer it is worth remembering that every published paper is published, in part, because of luck. This is, in part, the luck of getting reviewers who are willing to be Sherpas, who can understand what you are trying to do and work with you to

get from your current paper to a strong, and publishable manuscript, without imposing strict rules. If you are a reviewer for us at *Strategic Organization* or for any other journal for that matter, our hope is that by keeping this in mind, and remembering your own luck in publishing your qualitative work, you might acquire a sense of empathy and a motivation to be the 'lucky' reviewer for others.

Here are a few pointers that can help you to be that lucky reviewer. The first is really trying to understand where the author is coming from, and the paper *they* are trying to write, and then to write a review that will help them write the best possible version of that paper. This might also mean guiding an author to frame a paper in a way that fits with what you see in the data presented or pushing them to document and clarify their analysis and reasoning. It does not mean, however, imposing your preferred theoretical framing on a paper when it may not be a demonstrably better fit with the data. Overall, it means pointing the author towards whatever is most interesting and novel in the paper, not simply listing its 'faults.' Finally, it involves internalizing a reviewer's version of Kant's categorical imperative. This involves asking yourself: "If the logic behind my comments and final judgment were to become a universal law in reviewing, would the result be that no papers in strategic organization (or some other theoretical space) could ever be published again. So, for example, to cite one of my (Amit's) more painful experiences, do not recommend rejection of an institutional theory paper because it is consistent with structuration theory, and hence not novel, because if that principle were made a universal law, no institutional theory paper would ever be published again.

This main point, for reviewers, comes with a corollary for authors. While every published paper was published, in part, because of luck. It does not hold that every rejected paper was simply unlucky. One useful thing to keep in mind as an author is that you want, as

much as possible, to reduce information asymmetries. You know why you made the judgments that moved from the data you collected through your analysis, to a proposed theoretical framing and contribution. The reviewer, however, cannot see this process, and fully understand why you wrote the paper you did. This means writing a paper that helps walk the reader (i.e. the reviewer) through the judgments you made, in collecting data, analysing it, and linking it to a particular body of theory and theoretical contribution. You need to do this in a way that the link between your theory, study design, and the data you show is as clear and evident as possible. This can maximize the possibility that a reviewer who is disposed to be a 'lucky' reviewer will see what you are trying to do and be able to help you get there.

Ann: One view of the editor's toolkit

As a long-time 'qualitative' specialist on *Strategic Organization's* editorial team (joined recently by Amit and Paula), my purpose in this commentary is unashamedly instrumental: to offer insight into some fundamental basics we look for in qualitative research at the journal, and to encourage you as readers to submit your work to us. We are genuinely enthusiastic about publishing high-quality qualitative research at the intersection of strategy and organization theory, as evidenced in our published archive and in the present So!apbox Forum. We are also fully open to innovative contributions. Yet we also do, unfortunately, reject papers (sometimes even at the desk reject stage) and it might be useful to authors to understand when and why that happens. We do not use hard and fast rules, but there are nevertheless three things you can add to your toolkit to ensure that your paper passes the initial editorial screening, and beyond.

The first thing is as simple as this: You must show us that you have 'enough' qualitative data to offer a credibly rich empirical story. The notion of 'enough' is not about

having a specific number of interviews, or observations, or cases, but simply about having the depth of material necessary for the type of research design you are adopting and the type of analysis you want to conduct. Large numbers of interviews, for example, may not always be a good indicator of quality if the mix of informants is such that it is impossible to triangulate data on specific issues or cases. On the other hand, a relatively smaller number might be sufficient if they provide you with complete coverage of an issue for a single case, and you are aiming to do very fine-grained analysis (Langley, 2017).

Second, not only *having data*, but also *showing data* is crucially important; a couple of quotes here and there will not do. Showing your data is part of accountability, but also enriches understanding by bringing readers into your research setting, so that they can see and feel to some degree what you saw and felt. We know that space constraints can be problematic, so at *Strategic Organization*, we deliberately allow for that for qualitative manuscripts. So, take the space and show us what you have – 15,000 words on a first submission is fine for a rich qualitative study. A qualitative paper with under 9000 words is likely to seem thin. One strategy for showing data without overloading the reader is to use tabular displays (see Charlotte Cloutier and Davide Ravasi's essay in this issue). If there is too much data, we can always put some of it into an online supplement. Also, note that what we need to see may not only be interview quotations, but observations as well if you have them. While scholars often struggle with showing direct ethnographic data because it does not take the form of direct quotes, Jarzabkowski et al (2014) offer some useful advice to overcome this concern.

Finally, you need to both *show* your data and also *interpret* it; in other words, articulate a contribution that *couples* the data to theory. This can be tricky, because you need to keep your interpretation strongly connected to the data but also to rise above it to

say something that will be of value outside the specific situation(s) you studied. In doing this, scholars must beware of two problematic extremes that stimulate unease among editors and reviewers. The first is staying so close to your data that all you end up with is a banal idiosyncratic description. The second is rising so far into the stratosphere of abstraction that you may have good data and brilliant theory, but no connection between them. There is no infallible recipe for achieving the sweet spot of data-theory coupling, but some have offered ideas on how to stimulate theoretical insight and discovery (Eisenhardt, 1989; Klag & Langley, 2013; Locke et al., 2008). These sources may be helpful, as we hope might the some of the articles in this So!apbox Forum (e.g., Cloutier & Ravasi; Eisenhardt; Corley et al.). Ultimately, that sweet spot lies at the very nexus of the tensions we have been describing throughout this editorial, where rigor and imagination meet.

Introducing the Papers

The above author, reviewer and editor viewpoints are intended to help strengthen the toolkit for navigating the tensions involved in doing and evaluating quality in qualitative research. We now turn to the papers in this forum for further insights. Our aim in this forum was not to solicit further checklists and templates, but rather to invite these authors to share their experiences, bringing the wisdom of their learning-from-doing, and explaining how others might learn from those experiences. The essays cluster well to the different stages of navigating the tensions of quality in designing, conducting, analysing, writing up and editing qualitative research that are relevant to our experiences as authors, reviewers and editors. Many of the essays also offer not just one way of thinking about the particular challenges addressed, but a rich repertoire of possibilities.

The first essay by Shenghui Ma, David Seidl and Terry McNulty entitled “Challenges and Practices of Interviewing Business Elites” examines the conduct of research with a

group of actors who, for reasons of time constraints, power and status, knowledgeability, public visibility, can be challenging to interview. For example, elites may perceive or try to use the interview as a chance for impression management. At the same time, because of their elite position, data from such participants can be particularly insightful in providing novel viewpoints that are not usually available. Focussing on the issue of gathering rich and authentic data as the key hallmark of quality, Ma, Seidl and McNulty draw on their own experiences to propose some strategies for minimising the potential constraints on data gathering, whilst also maximising the opportunities to gain valuable insights that elites can offer. In doing so, they provide a varied set of techniques that will be valuable for scholars in conducting all types of interviews but particularly those with elites.

Saouré Kouamé and Feng Liu's essay "Capturing emotions in qualitative strategic organization research" brings together two scholars who have independently studied the role of emotions in strategy processes. The authors draw on their own and others' experiences to offer insight into different ways of using qualitative data to capture and analyse emotions that build on different ontological assumptions. Strategic and organizational decision processes are likely to be deeply affected by the emotions of people who engage in them. Moreover, the fluid and complex nature of emotions in organizational settings suggests opportunities, but also challenges for qualitative research. The authors identify these challenges and suggest ways of overcoming them. They offer guidelines (not 'rules') for rigorously coding emotions depending on the purpose of the study, and they look towards future opportunities that include the mobilization of multi-modal methods.

The essay by Charlotte Cloutier and Davide Ravasi entitled "Using tables to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research" draws on the authors' own experiences using tables in their qualitative work, as well as observation of the use of tables in recently published

work, to offer insights into the different ways tables can be used. Key to their essay is the idea that tables are not just tools for communicating work to editors, reviewers and readers. They are also tools that can help with the analytical process. They note that tables allow researchers to organize and make sense of their own data in ways that facilitate the creative and analytical process. Tables can also be disciplining devices that can help researchers reassure *themselves* about the trustworthiness of their work. However, they note, explicitly, that the table types they present “should be viewed as tools, not templates.” Instead, they consistently emphasize the message that tables can enable the imaginative and analytical process of doing good quality work, and that it is a researchers’ own imagination that defines the limits of how they can structure or use tables in the research process.

With Hans Berends and Fleur Deken’s essay “Composing qualitative process research,” we move from data analysis and display to the writing process itself, specifically for studies that aim to describe and theorize about temporally evolving organizational processes. The perennial challenge that the authors address concerns how to intertwine empirical narratives and theoretical stories in such a way that the reader is able to clearly see the all-important coupling between data and theory that we emphasized earlier, but at the same time, avoid the impression that the theoretical story is imposed on the data. By using the metaphor of the novel, and comparing the Agatha Christie whodunit where the solution (i.e., or theoretical model) only emerges at the end with a Gabriel Garcia Márquez’ novella in which the dénouement is foreshadowed in the very first sentence, Berends and Deken engagingly explore the advantages and drawbacks of different modes of writing.

The essay by Kathleen Eisenhardt, entitled “What is the Eisenhardt method, really?”, is a fascinating look back on a foundational methodology paper that has often been cited and used as a possible template for qualitative research design, but as Eisenhardt suggests,

perhaps in ways that did not always reflect her intent. In a rare and insightful reflection on her 1989 *Academy of Management Review* paper on using qualitative cases studies to build theory, Eisenhardt articulates her thinking at the time of writing the paper and considers how her multiple-case method has evolved over time. She also emphasizes what the method is not, despite how others may have understood and represented it. This essay re-establishes the author's own voice on a seminal methodological piece that has been central to the development and legitimation of qualitative research in our field. At the same time, the paper renews understanding of the rich possibilities of case study research designs aimed at theory building, and provides important insights for all of us about valuing structure to provide guidance whilst avoiding narrowly defined templates, checklists and rules, and remaining open to creative opportunities.

Kevin Corley, Tima Bansal and Haitao Yu's reflection, "An editorial perspective on judging the quality of inductive research when the methodological straightjacket is loosened" focuses on the process of engagement between authors and editors, rather than on the attributes of an individual piece of research. The authors reflect on and imagine the type of editorial process that might enable authors and editors to navigate the tensions – structure vs. creativity, accountability vs. professionalism, crutches vs. training wheels—that we highlight above. They emphasize that we must do more than appoint qualitative editors and assign qualitative reviewers to truly realize the creative potential of qualitative research. Rather, we have to reimagine the process of publishing qualitative work. Key in their essay is imagining a process for retaining the authors' creativity and voice, while channeling this creativity and voice into manuscripts that can traverse the review process, and ultimately speak to and impact readers and the research community. They draw on four

exemplars from their own experience, that can help us collectively imagine what a different editorial and review process might look like.

Conclusion

In this editorial and special So!apbox Forum of *Strategic Organization* on “Navigating the Tensions of Quality in Qualitative Research”, we have argued that achieving quality in qualitative research is not simply a question of following precisely defined rules, checklists and templates. Rather, we note that, in our collective efforts as social scientists in the strategy and organization theory communities, our aim should be to promote, endorse and support the creativity and novelty from which quality in qualitative research arises, whilst also ensuring we have adequate toolkits with which to navigate the tensions that this occasions with our needs to engage in and provide evidence of rigorous, and ethical research procedures. We trust that our own insights as authors, reviewers and editors, and those of the authors in this forum will help you to develop and extend your own toolkit as you join in the qualitative research craft.

References

- Abbott, A. 1988. *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Carlsen, A., & Dutton, J. E. 2011. *Research alive: Exploring generative moments in doing qualitative research*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Cassell, C., Cunliffe, A. L., & Grandy, G. 2017. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Golden-Biddle, K., & Locke, K. 2008. Working with pluralism: Determining quality in qualitative research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 11(3): 419-429.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532-550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., Graebner, M. E., & Sonenshein, S. 2016. Grand challenges and inductive methods: Rigor without rigor mortis: Academy of Management Briarcliff Manor, NY.
- Friedson, E. 2001. *Professionalism, the Third Logic: On the Practice of Knowledge*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. 2013. Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1): 15-31.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Harley, B., & Cornelissen, J. 2020. Rigor With or Without Templates? The Pursuit of Methodological Rigor in Qualitative Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, Published online before print, .
- Jarzabkowski, P., Bednarek, R., & Cabantous, L. 2015. Conducting global team-based ethnography: Methodological challenges and practical methods. *Human Relations*, 68(1): 3-33.
- Jarzabkowski, P., Bednarek, R., & Lê, J. K. 2014. Producing persuasive findings: Demystifying ethnographic textwork in strategy and organization research. *Strategic Organization*, 12(4): 274-287.
- Jarzabkowski, P. and Bednarek, R., 2018. Toward a social practice theory of relational competing. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(3), pp.794-829.
- Ketokivi, M., & Mantere, S. 2010. Two strategies for inductive reasoning in organizational research. *Academy of management review*, 35(2): 315-333.
- Klag, M., & Langley, A. 2013. Approaching the conceptual leap in qualitative research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 15(2): 149-166.
- Langley, A. 1999. Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management review*, 24(4): 691-710.
- Langley, A. 2017. Blind Alleys and Untold Stories in Qualitative Research. In R. Mir, & S. Jain (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies*: 465-477. London: Routledge.
- Lê, J. K., & Schmid, T. 2020. The practice of innovating research methods. *Organizational Research Methods*, Published online ahead of print: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428120935498>.
- Locke, K., Feldman, M., & Golden-Biddle, K. 2020. Coding Practices and Iterativity: Beyond Templates for Analyzing Qualitative Data. *Organizational Research Methods*, Published online before print: .

- Locke, K., Golden-Biddle, K., & Feldman, M. S. 2008. Perspective-making doubt generative: Rethinking the role of doubt in the research process. *Organization Science*, 19(6): 907-918.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mintzberg, H. 1979. *The Structuring of Organizations* Engle-wood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Mir, R., & Jain, S. 2017. *The Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Pratt, M. G. 2009. From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5): 856-862.
- Pratt, M. G., Kaplan, S., & Whittington, R. 2020. Editorial essay: The tumult over transparency: Decoupling transparency from replication in establishing trustworthy qualitative research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(1): 1-19.
- Pratt, M. G., Sonenshein, S., & Feldman, M. S. 2019. Moving beyond templates: A bricolage approach to conducting trustworthy qualitative research. *Organizational Research Methods*: 1094428120927466.
- Smets, M., Jarzabkowski, P., Burke, G. T., & Spee, P. 2015. Reinsurance trading in Lloyd's of London: Balancing conflicting-yet-complementary logics in practice. *Academy of management journal*, 58(3): 932-970.
- Spee, P., Jarzabkowski, P., & Smets, M. 2016. The influence of routine interdependence and skillful accomplishment on the coordination of standardizing and customizing. *Organization Science*, 27(3): 759-781.
- Swidler, A. 1986. Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51(2): 273-286.
- Watson, T. J. 2011. Ethnography, reality, and truth: the vital need for studies of 'how things work' in organizations and management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(1): 202-217.