

## Working Paper Series

No. **102/2014-15**

### **Qualitative Research is No Research Examining the Allegations**



**TAPMI Library  
TWP 102 / 2014-15**

**Qualitative Research is No Research  
Examining the Allegations**

**By**

**Sushanta Kumar Sarma**  
*Assistant Professor*  
**T. A. PAI Management Institute (TAPMI),**  
**Manipal 576104, Karnataka, INDIA**  
Email: [sushanta@tapmi.edu.in](mailto:sushanta@tapmi.edu.in)

**TAPMI Working Paper No. TWP 102/2014-15**



**T. A. PAI Management Institute  
Manipal – 576104, Karnataka**

## Qualitative Research is No Research: Examining the Allegations

**Abstract:** “Would you like to continue doing qualitative research only? - this question, asked during many job interviews for faculty recruitment, reveals a deep rooted perception about the credibility of qualitative research. Skepticisms like this are stemmed from a number of claims made on the quality of qualitative research and qualitative researcher. The paper pursues most widely leveled allegations against qualitative research and its advocates, to examine the soundness of such allegations. Many of these allegations exist because of the lack of understanding of paradigmatic differences between qualitative and quantitative research, and due to dearth of competent qualitative researchers. The paper diagnoses the premises for such allegations and illustrates guidelines to address them.

**Keywords:** qualitative research, qualitative rigor, trustworthiness,

### Introduction

In the context of Indian management education, it may not be an exaggeration to state that the contribution of qualitative researchers has been lagging in building scholarship. While qualitative researchers from reputed universities in the country have made remarkable contribution in sociology, history, political science, etc., they have remained ‘invisible’ in organizational and management research. In management education, qualitative researchers are often compelled to face a hostile audience with a positivist epistemological stand. Qualitative research is alleged to be merely story telling; full of anecdotes and personal impressions of researchers. Moreover, qualitative research is labeled as unscientific because its findings cannot often be generalized (Bailey et al., 1999). Allegations of these natures have stifled the growth of qualitative research within management education. Consequently, they have given rise to the notion that qualitative research and researchers are of inferior quality. Much of the stigma attached to qualitative research arises due to a skewed assessment model. The benchmark designed for quantitative research is often applied to evaluate qualitative research which invariably ignores the differences in philosophical worldviews between these two approaches. As a result, opinions on qualitative research are formed with half-baked information.

In-depth discussions on the epistemological and ontological differences between these two approaches are beyond the scope of the paper (for details see Guba and Lincoln 1994). Rather this paper picks on one allegation and several related aspects questioning the credibility of qualitative research. The allegation and related aspects are sourced from the personal reflection of the author about many conversations with both qualitative as well as quantitative early career researchers and doctoral students. The author calls them

allegations because these are assertions made by sections of the research community based on their opinions, influenced by their exposure and faith in a certain paradigm, and not necessarily provided with any proof. Accordingly this paper is concerned with two practical questions: How valid are the bases of such allegation? And what can be done to counter this allegation?

### **Qualitative research has no rigor; its all ram kahaani**

This is an allegation experienced first-hand by one of this author's colleagues during a job interview with one of the prestigious health management institutes. As part of the job interview, my friend presented his research work before the faculty of the institute. The moment he announced his research design as «case study», the immediate reaction from the audience was, «This is all *ram kahaani*.» To put it in perspective, *ram kahaani* is a sarcastic way of indicating a long-drawn personal tale of suffering which is most often implied to be exaggerated. In essence, by calling the case study *ram kahaani*, the interviewer tried to equate it with mere story-telling, something that is devoid of scientific rigor. The other implication of perceiving qualitative research as *ram kahaani* is that «anything goes» in qualitative research (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003) and that they contain nothing but personal impressions, whims and fancies of the researchers (Mays & Pope, 1995).

Why is qualitative research considered as not being «scientific» and «rigorous»? The author searched for work in general critiquing qualitative research to understand the basis for such allegations. Interestingly, we could find hardly any scholarly work critiquing qualitative research. We found that most research dealing with the quality issues in qualitative research (Cho & Trent, 2006; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Guba, 1981; Hammersley, 2007; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Krefting, 1991; Mays & Pope, 1995; Merrick, 1999; Payne & Williams, 2005; Clive Seale & Silverman, 1997) are in defense of the qualitative approach rather than in critique of the same. The only exception were some textbooks on social research methods that highlighted «limitations» of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Even these limitations were presented as reflections of opinions about qualitative research and no citations to scholarly work were made while discussing them. These findings strengthen our apprehensions that the critique of qualitative research is merely allegations reflecting a widely accepted mindset and without any «scientific» evidence.

But then the question remains, why is qualitative research being perceived as non-scientific and without rigor? (Mays & Pope, 1995; Clive Seale & Silverman, 1997) The answer to this question lies in our understanding of the terms ‘scientific method’ and ‘rigor’. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the scientific method is defined as ‘a method or procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses’. So, for any method to be considered as scientific, it should be systematic, should focus on exactness and measurement, and should be able to examine or test predictions. The method which does not match these characteristics is to be then considered as non-scientific. Compared to these attributes of a scientific method, qualitative approach is subjective (no question of exactness), does not involve any measurement of variables and generally does not test any hypotheses.

The term ‘rigorous’ is closely associated with the scientific method. All scientific methods are considered to be rigorous because of their focus on thoroughness and fixation with accuracy. On examination of these attributes with a qualitative approach one gets the impression that qualitative research is too vague (very little specificity is involved), rarely focused on accuracy and highly flexible. Qualitative research is seen as lacking the rigor pertinent to truly scientific work because it uses interview transcripts, verbal reports, notes etc., which are often projected as ‘soft data’. In contrast, quantitative research is considered as rigorous as it involves direct manipulation, objective measurement, and statistical testing of hypothesis (Packer, 2011). Qualitative research does not involve any statistical modeling and so the extreme severity of mathematization is remarkably missing from the qualitative method. Within a positivist paradigm, where there is often a ‘physics envy’ (Thomas & Wilson, 2011) with a resulting obsession towards emulation of quantitative methods associated with natural science like physics; this lack of use of mathematics often adds up to the notion that qualitative researchers hardly give any real treatment to the data.

Qualitative research is considered to be too subjective, as difficult to replicate and not generalizable (Bryman, 2012). Be it conferences or recruitment seminars in business schools, the integrity of qualitative research has always been challenged. One comment is often heard that the validity or truth value of claims or observations in qualitative work are impossible to establish (Jessor, 1996). Qualitative research is generally considered to be a second-class science and of poor standard. Some typical questions faced by

qualitative researchers are, öHow can you generalize from a small, non-random sample?ö; öIf somebody else did this study, would they get the same results?ö; öHow do you know that the researcher was not biased and just found what he or she expected to findö (Merriam, 1995:51).

Qualitative research is considered to be subjective because findings in qualitative research are often perceived to be products of unsystematic views of the researcher about what is significant and what is not. Unlike in quantitative research where the ødata speaks for itselfø in qualitative research the distinction between objective analysis of data and researchersø own impression about the data is sometimes seen to be blurred. Since it is viewed as unsystematic and often depends upon the impression of the researcher, qualitative research is considered to be difficult to replicate. Qualitative research is often done with a small number of participants in a certain organization or locality. The sample size in qualitative research is generally not taken as a ørepresentative sampleø of any population. So it is generally difficulty to establish how the findings can be applicable to a different setting.

Another reason that researchers sometimes call qualitative research as *ram kahaani* is because it seems to many that in qualitative research øanything goesø The view of øanything goesø or øepistemological anarchismø introduced by Feyerabend (1993) argues that strict scientific method does not help scientific progress rather it is actually some amount of ad-hoc postulates which break the rule that ensure scientific progress. In a sense these ad-hoc postulates defy the typical rationalistic model of theory building. Some qualitative researchers use this view of anarchism to avoid sound justification for their action, thereby raising doubts about the rigor within the research. In the name of post-modernism, attempts are made to justify much poor quality research in which öthe maxim øanything goesø is used not as a complaint but as a recommendationö (C. Seale, 2004, p. 107). Positivist researchers sometimes find that there is lack of justification for methods used in qualitative research and consequently that no prototype has been followed while conducting the research. It becomes difficult to establish what the researcher actually *did* and how he or she arrived at the conclusion of the research (Bryman, 2012). It appears that qualitative researchers simply put a label to a method adopted by them based on convenience and personal whims and fancies.

Hence the allegation of ‘anything goes’ arises from the perception that qualitative research does not have a well-defined prototype. Prototype is the blueprint of the research connecting the research question to data collection and analysis. Unlike quantitative research, which is usually carried out with a well-defined prototype, qualitative research sometimes struggles to put a cohesive design that establishes the relationship among research question, research methods and desired results. This apparent arbitrariness in qualitative research approach feeds the popular myth of qualitative research as being the weakest form of research design.

### **Understanding the qualitative-quantitative differences**

Qualitative research is a mix of three interconnected aspects—ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative researchers approach the world with a set of ideas (ontology) focusing on a set of questions (epistemology) and then examine (methodology) the question in a certain way. The way data has been treated and analyzed in qualitative research are often been criticized by their opponents mainly researchers rooted in natural science. The allegations discussed above about qualitative approach being unscientific, devoid of rigor, and guided by whims and fancies of researchers are primarily directed towards the methodology in qualitative research. But does qualitative research have no rigor as suggested by the above discussed allegations?

The assumption underlying this allegation is that quantitative approach is better abled compared to qualitative approaches to ensure rigor in their findings (Mays & Pope, 1995). Social scientists have often argued that the science is not about methodologies but about the way of posing a question. In fact one of the greatest methodological fallacies in social research is the belief that science is a particular set of techniques. On the other hand, more than a set of techniques, science is a state of mind, or attitude, and the organizational conditions allowing that attitude to be expressed (Dingwall, 1992). All research, both quantitative and qualitative, to be qualified as scientific inquiry—should pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically, should be linked to relevant theory, should use methods that permit direct investigations of the questions, should provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning to rule out counter-interpretations, should replicate and generalize findings across studies and should disclose research data and methods to enable and encourage professional scrutiny and critique—(Packer, 2011, p. 17).

The debate surrounding the non-scientific methodologies of qualitative research is misplaced. To appreciate the qualitative approach one needs to change the lenses of scrutiny i.e. there is a need to change the paradigm. Qualitative research operates in a paradigm, which is distinctly different from that of quantitative research. While quantitative research is highly influenced by logical positivism, qualitative research has been shaped through the influences of different paradigms like postpositivism, constructivism, feminism, Marxism etc. This paradigmatic difference also explains the difference between the two approaches. Qualitative research stresses on the value-laden nature of inquiry and emphasizes on questions of how social experiences are created and given meaning. Contrary to this, the quantitative approach emphasizes on measurement of causal relationships between variables, and conducts the inquiry within a value-free framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are useful in their own ways and it is unreasonable to compare the two under a similar set of parameters.

Some amount of subjectivity exists in all kinds of research. Kuhn (1996) proposed that every science operates within a paradigm where researchers share similar ontological and epistemological commitments. Such commitments demand a kind of *tacit knowing* that makes a certain way of looking at the world possible (Packer, 2011). The logical positivists also use such tacit knowing as they deal objectively with their research context. Apart from tacit knowing, subjectivity is involved in deciding on the techniques for studying objectively. Quantitative researchers claim to make a rational decision about choosing a methodology in their research project. But this is true only to a certain extent. There are other powerful reasons like celebrated epistemological positions, what other social scientist are doing in terms of choosing methods, research funding and publishing opportunities, etc. which influence the choice of a methodology (Oakley, 1999).

The allegations that *anything goes* in qualitative research and hence it is subjective, also requires scrutiny from a different paradigm apt for qualitative approach. In case of qualitative research, the notion of subjectivity is embedded in the very definition of qualitative research. Qualitative research is defined as *multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2). By definition, qualitative research is multimethod; it means there is no one single best technique to investigate a research setting. Qualitative research uses approaches, methods and techniques from ethnography, phenomenology, cultural studies, feminism, etc. These

methods bring in their own disciplinary history and multiple meanings. Such multiplicity in method makes it difficult to develop a single framework for assessing reliability, validity and other quality issues in research work. In absence of any uniform assessment criteria, qualitative techniques appear to be highly subjective to positivist researchers.

Qualitative research is interpretivist in nature and carried out to capture the meaning given by individuals to its surroundings. Qualitative researcher approaches the empirical reality as multiple realities constructed by the perceivers and attaches meaning to these realities. For the researcher to understand the complexities of multiple realities entangled in the perception and meaning-making process of the individual, it becomes imperative to remain inseparable from the individual's experience of that reality (Bradley, 1993). These uses of multiple meaning and multiple realities in qualitative research make it difficult for the findings of such research work to remain applicable in different settings. Qualitative research is highly contextual and so the issue of ensuring generalizability becomes marginally irrelevant in the discipline of qualitative research. This is not to argue that findings from qualitative research can never be generalized; rather the purpose of these researches is not focused entirely on developing generalizable findings.

### Countering the allegations

Qualitative research acknowledges that the human element involved in research and researcher is treated as an instrument of data collection. The major contribution of qualitative research is "not only to acknowledge the researcher's influence/involvement in making meaning but also to attempt to delineate steps or checks that bound, or at least make visible, this influence" (Merrick, 1999). The acknowledgement that multiple truths exist and reality is a subjective construction of the perceiver is the strength of qualitative research. Ironically positivist researchers see this strength of qualitative research as a major weakness and allege that the qualitative research process is without any quality. So how do we assess the quality in a qualitative work?

There are two issues related to assessment of quality in qualitative research. First the models used to assess quantitative research are rarely relevant to qualitative research and not all qualitative research can be assessed with the same strategies (Krefting, 1991). We have already reported in the previous section on the paradigmatic difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Because of such differences the commonly used

framework of reliability, validity and generalizability in quantitative approach largely remain irrelevant in case of qualitative work. By definition qualitative research is multimethod and borrows techniques from different traditions. Under such circumstances, is a single set of qualitative criteria possible? to assess the quality of qualitative work (Hammersley, 2007). Since qualitative research is a combination of several traditions, and philosophical stands, it is often argued that it is not desirable to have a single set of criteria to assess a good qualitative research work (Pratt, 2009).

But considering resistance against qualitative research and demands for explicit criteria to do systematic reviewing of qualitative work, many qualitative researchers (Guba, 1981; Hammersley, 2007; Y. S. Lincoln & Guba, 2006), have laid out guidelines to ensure rigor in qualitative work. The basic strategy to ensure rigor is systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation and communication (Mays & Pope, 1995). With these guidelines qualitative researchers have made attempt to establish the trustworthiness of their research work to the critique. The two premises of the allegation about qualitative research being ram kahani first, there is no methodological rigor and hence no truth value in findings and second anything goes are countered by qualitative researchers as they laid down some guidelines for qualitative researchers. In the following sections we discuss these guidelines that are evolved from practices followed by many qualitative researchers in their respective traditions.

### ***Countering the 'lack of truth value or trustworthiness' in qualitative research***

Reliability, internal validity, generalizability and objectivity are some of the important criteria to assess the truthfulness of any positivist research work. These criteria make sense in case of quantitative research as they arise from the positivist research tradition only. Y S Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that these criteria are inappropriate for evaluating research that is conducted within a naturalistic paradigm. There is an acknowledgement of the fact that researchers need alternative models suiting qualitative design to ensure rigor (Krefting, 1991). Qualitative researchers (Guba, 1981; Kirk & Miller, 1986) have proposed model for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative work. Among these models, we will be discussing Guba's model because it is relatively well developed and has been extensively used by researchers in recent years. According to Guba (1981), qualitative researchers should address four major concerns related to trustworthiness, which are truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. These

concerns or aspects along with their parallel terms in both quantitative and qualitative research are shown in Table 1

**Table 1: Aspects of Trustworthiness and Their Parallel in Quantitative and Qualitative Research**

Aspect/Concerns	Terms in quantitative research	Terms in qualitative research
Truth Value (How can one establish the truthfulness of findings?)	Internal Validity	Credibility
Applicability (How can one determine the degree to which the findings may have applicability to other contexts?)	External Validity Generalizability	Transferability
Consistency (How can one determine whether the findings would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with subjects in the same context?)	Reliability	Dependability
Neutrality (How can one establish the degree to which findings are a function of solely of subjects and condition of inquiry and not of biases, interest and so on of the researcher?)	Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: Guba, 1981

For qualitative research to gain credibility, it should adhere to data collection procedures that are well defined and accepted across the community of researchers. Prolonged engagement (Lincoln and Guba, 2006) at the site of research can also lend credibility to research findings by developing contextual familiarity of the researcher. It helps when the qualitative researcher explicitly describes the ways in which he or she developed contextual familiarity of the research site. Professional background of the researcher can also add to the credibility of research findings. Triangulation of data through the use of various sources of data collection is crucial for credibility of qualitative research. Many qualitative researchers customarily adopt multiple sources of data collection without making explicit the reasons behind multiple sources. It is important to communicate to the audience the significance of multiple sources of data collection and how they contribute to the overall truthfulness of the research findings.

Unlike in a quantitative research, the findings from qualitative research often deal with a specific set of participants and specific environment. Hence, it is difficult to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other situations and population. In fact, many qualitative researchers are against the need for generalizability of the findings. Creswell (1997) argues that the idea of generalizability holds little meaning for most qualitative researcher (p.63). However, a contrasting view is also offered by other qualitative

researchers (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2009). Their argument is that although a case is unique it still may be a fit within a broader group. Hence, the prospect of transferability need not be neglected. These scholars argue that even if the researcher does not directly make the inferences on transferability, the practitioners may find that their situations are similar to that described in the study and may relate the findings to their own situations. Thus, in qualitative research, the transferability is primarily decided by the reader of the study, and not by the researcher.

The changing nature of phenomenon studied under qualitative study makes the issue of reliability problematic. Human nature is not static and the subject of study under any naturalistic inquiry is not stable over a period of time. Hence, it is not possible to find the similar findings by various researchers even if they study the same phenomenon over a different period of time. In qualitative research, the credibility to a large extent ensures dependability (Erlandson, 1993; Nelson, 2008). Measures like overlapping of methods (interviews and field visits to collect data) ensure credibility of findings, which in turn takes care of the dependability of the study. Some direct measures, like developing a protocol of the research design detailing sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods, enhance the transparency and subsequent dependability of the study. Such detailed description of protocol increases the likelihood of anyone following the prototype model under the context depicted within the study to find similar results.

In order to establish quality in qualitative research, steps should also be taken to ensure that research findings are the result of experiences and ideas of informants, and not of the preferences of the researcher. Triangulation can ensure confirmability and reduce the effect of researcher's bias. A detailed methodological description can enable scrutinizers to understand the adherence to research practices and acceptability of findings. Practices like ‘audit trail’ allows readers to trace the course of data analysis by showing how data leading to formation of findings are gathered and processed during the course of research work.

### *Countering ‘anything goes’ in qualitative research*

The apparent arbitrariness in qualitative methodologies is due to lack of explicit rationale for data collection and analysis. The link between abstraction of ideas proposed and empirical observations based on which such abstractions are proposed, needs to be made explicit to the audience so as to present the study as a systematic investigation. Richard

and Morse (2013) have pointed out that the qualitative method is actually endowed with two principles ó *methodological purposiveness* and *methodological congruence* (see the works of Jain and Sharma (2013), Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), and Lok (2010) for example) which deals with the issue of establishing the link between research question, data collection, and analysis.

Methodological purposiveness, the first principle, explains how a particular research purpose and question lead researchers to certain data source and analysis. Table 2 gives an example of methodological purposiveness relating choice of designs, data sources, and technique of analysis with research question. The principle of methodological purposiveness is an extension of the issue of «transparency» in writing. In methodological purposiveness, the focus is on being transparent in presenting the research design by showing linkages among various components of the design. The second principle, methodological congruence, refers to the ability of the researcher to think in a way that fit the investigation, method, and analysis. For example, if the researcher is working with a «grounded theory» design, then she must be able to think as a grounded theorist. This way, the researcher can use the same set of data (e.g., interview scripts) and same set of technique (e.g., coding) to come up with a different set of findings (e.g., Typology).

**Table 2: Methodological Purposiveness**

Research questions	Methods that may be appropriate	Likely data sources	Analysis technique
Questions about the meaning (what is the meaning off ..?) and about the core or essence of phenomena or experience	Phenomenology	Audiotaped, in-depth conversations; phenomenological literature, art, films.	Theme-ing, memoing and reflective writing
Observational questions (What are the behavioral patterns of ..?) and descriptive questions about values, beliefs, and practices of a cultural group (What is going on here?)	Ethnography	Participant observation, field notes, unstructured or structured interviews, documents, records, photographs, focus groups	Thick description, rereading notes, storing information and coding by topics, storing, coding, recording field notes and diagramming to show patterns and processes
Process questions about changing experience over time or its stages and phrases (What is the process of becoming..?) or understanding questions (What are the dimensions of this experience..?)	Grounded Theory	Interviews, participant and nonparticipant observations, conversations recorded in diaries and field notes, comparative instances, personal experiences	Theoretical sensitivity, developing concepts, coding at categories, open coding for theory generation, focused memoing,

Questions seek to explain some present circumstances (öwhyö and öhowö some social phenomenon works)	Case Study	Documentation, archival records, interviews, observations-direct and participant, artifacts	Pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, Logic models, cross-case synthesis, coding etc.
---	------------	---	---

Adopted from Richards and Morse (2013) and Yin (2009)

To summarize, the perception related to rigor in qualitative research is a stereotyped notion generated from looking at the works of half-baked qualitative researchers. In the language of quantitative research, these works are not the →representative sample← of the whole gamut of qualitative work done in management research. Qualitative research(van der Meer, Spowart, & Hart, 2013) in its original form does address the issue of rigor as evident in qualitative work published in top ranked journals (Binder, 2007; Swan, Bresnen, Robertson, Newell, & Dopson, 2010). To do statistical analysis, one requires training; similarly qualitative data analysis also demands systematic training and hand-holding support to early career qualitative researchers (van der Meer et al., 2013). In absence of good quality training on qualitative research, we have many ill-trained qualitative researchers struggling to produce good quality work. The allegation of →ram kahaani← can be countered once these researchers get support in writing and conducting qualitative research.

## Conclusion

This paper has given an overview of a major allegation against the authenticity of qualitative research. The allegations discussed in the paper are directed at the practices adopted in qualitative research and ventured into some popular myths about qualitative work. Apart from the examining the truthfulness in these allegations, this paper also explores alternative guidelines to counter these allegations. While the credibility of qualitative research is always scrutinized, to obviate the relevance of qualitative research is also inconceivable. The superiority of quantitative research over qualitative research and vice-versa is determined by the purpose of the research.

Written from the perspective based on personal reflections and insights arising out of the experiences from communicating with other researchers in management schools, this paper does not claim to hold a dispassionate view on the topic. This work has a few limitations → the allegations discussed are not sourced after a →scientific← method of selection; rather these are picked up because of their frequent recurrence in the

conversations of author with colleagues. Secondly, this paper is an expression of a *work-in-progress* idea which requires further deliberations before being crystalized for making any inference.

This paper, by no means, discourages management scholars to take up qualitative research. Rather, the attempt is to draw attention to certain hindrances pertinent to qualitative research. Management scholarship should get rid of the tendency to look at quantitative and qualitative research as rivals. Not only they are not rivals, rather they complement each other. They enjoy a *constructive complementarity* with each other. These approaches originate from two different epistemological stands and are useful in addressing questions of different nature. Qualitative research can fight these popular allegations only when it enjoys a large-scale acceptance, which should come from both academia and business. It is heartening to see qualitative research methods gaining ground in addressing business problems. Areas related to consumer market research have started using qualitative methods like ethnography to understand the decision making process of the consumer. Corporate giants like Unilever have floated qualitative research programmes to better understand the customer. But, so far, these research undertakings by business organizations are restricted to qualitative techniques only. A more welcome change will be felt when such qualitative research findings are expanded to the larger debate of theory development in management.

For qualitative research to have growing significance in academia and business, professional research bodies need to be formed for its promotion. The *strategy-as-practice* group is an interesting example of how promotion of a research community can help in promoting research in certain direction (Bell & Thorpe, 2013). Research in strategy had been dominated by positivist oriented publications till the emergence of the strategy-as-practice group promoting interpretive research. The group starting in 2003 began promoting their research agenda through publishing *special issues* in various high-ranked journals. They conducted tracks, symposia and workshops at reputed management conferences and encouraged doctoral students to take up research in strategy-as-practice domain. They established a website which acts as repository of resources and a discussion space for researchers. The group also published several handbooks and in last ten years the group has been able to put together an influential research community by developing a strong identity. For promotion of qualitative research in business schools of India, there is a need for similar efforts.

Creating a data base comprising of all the qualitative data collected during various research works can be the first step towards building a comprehensive knowledge base in the qualitative domain<sup>ii</sup>. The data collected through field works, interviews, focus group discussions, and various other methods under different qualitative projects can be part of a larger database on qualitative research similar to quantitative data base like [indiastat.com](http://indiastat.com). Such a database will be made accessible to any researcher interested in pursuing a qualitative study. Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data are rarely reused by researchers other than the one who collects the data. Such a database will make it easy for the researcher community to reuse the qualitative data for different projects. Finally, the purpose of research is to unveil the truth; the truth beyond the idea of exactness can only be explored when the personal interpretation of social actions is valued adequately. Such interpretations can only be valued through a qualitative approach. So, the challenge remains before qualitative researcher is to make a clear case for usefulness of qualitative approaches in management research.

## References

- Antaki, C., Billig, M., Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (2003). Discourse analysis means doing analysis: A critique of six analytic shortcomings. *Discourse Analysis Online*
- Bell, E., & Thorpe, R. (2013). *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Management Research*: SAGE Publications.
- Binder, A. (2007). For love and money: Organizations' creative responses to multiple environmental logics. *Theory and society*, 36(6), 547-571.
- Bradley, J. (1993). Methodological issues and practices in qualitative research. *The Library Quarterly*, 431-449.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*: OUP Oxford.
- Cho, J., & Trent, A. (2006). Validity in qualitative research revisited. *Qualitative Research*, 6(3), 319-340.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*: Sage Publications.
- Dingwall, R. (1992). Don't mind him he's from Barcelona: qualitative methods in health studies. *Researching health care: designs, dilemmas, disciplines*. London: Tavistock/Routledge, 161-175.
- Erlandson, D. A. (1993). *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods*: SAGE Publications.

- Feyerabend, P. K. (1993). *Against Method*: Verso.
- 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. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *ECTJ*, 29(2), 75-91. Hammersley, M. (2007). The issue of quality in qualitative research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 30(3), 287-305.
- Jain, S., & Sharma, D. (2013). Institutional Logic Migration and Industry Evolution in Emerging Economies: The Case of Telephony in India. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 7(3), 252-271.
- Jessor, R. (1996). Ethnographic methods in contemporary perspective. *Ethnography and human development: Context and meaning in social inquiry*, 3-14.
- Kirk, J., & Miller, M. L. (1986). *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*: SAGE Publications.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in Qualitative Research: The Assessment of Trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: University of Chicago Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*: SAGE Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2006). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park [u.a.]: Sage Publ.
- Lok, J. (2010). Institutional logics as identity projects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(6), 1305-1335.
- Mays, N., & Pope, C. (1995). Qualitative Research: Rigour and qualitative research. *BMJ*, 311(6997), 109-112.
- Merrick, E. (1999). An exploration of quality in qualitative research. *Using qualitative methods in psychology*, 25-36.
- Nelson, A. M. (2008). Addressing the threat of evidence-based practice to qualitative inquiry through increasing attention to quality: A discussion paper. *International journal of nursing studies*, 45(2), 316-322.
- Oakley, A. (1999). Paradigm wars: some thoughts on a personal and public trajectory. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2(3), 247-254.
- Packer, M. J. (2011). *The science of qualitative research*: Cambridge University Press New York.

- Payne, G., & Williams, M. (2005). Generalization in qualitative research. *Sociology*, 39(2), 295-314.
- 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.
- Seale, C. (2004). *Qualitative Research Practice*: SAGE Publications.
- Seale, C., & Silverman, D. (1997). Ensuring rigour in qualitative research. *The European Journal of Public Health*, 7(4), 379-384.
- Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50(1), 35-67.
- Swan, J., Bresnen, M., Robertson, M., Newell, S., & Dopson, S. (2010). When Policy meets Practice: Colliding Logics and the Challenges of Mode 2 Initiatives in the Translation of Academic Knowledge. *Organization Studies*, 31(9-10), 1311-1340.
- Thomas, H., & Wilson, A. D. (2011). Physics Envy, Cognitive Legitimacy or Practical Relevance: Dilemmas in the Evolution of Management Research in the UK. *British Journal of Management*, 22(3), 443-456.
- van der Meer, J., Spowart, L., & Hart, S. (2013). We Need Support Too! Providing Postgraduate Peer Support. *The Student Engagement Handbook: Practice in Higher Education*, 313.

---

<sup>i</sup> Prof. Ajith Kumar has coined these terms during our discussion on this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> Prof. Vidyanand Jha of IIMC has shared this interesting idea during one of our interactions at IRMA.

## About The Author:



**Sushanta Kumar Sarma**

**Assistant Professor**

Area: Human Resource Management

Education: PGDM, FPRM (IRMA), PhD

Email: sushanta@tapmi.edu.in

Telephone: +91-820-2701048

### Teaching

Organizational Behavior, Organizational Theory.

### Professional Activities

Prof. Sarma holds a doctoral degree (FPRM) from Institute of Rural Management Anand (Res topic: Theorization of Competing Logics in Emerging Organizational Field). Prior to joining the Fellow Programme, he has worked for five years in non-profit sector with organizations of national repute like CAPART, SEWA-Lucknow and PRADAN

### Research

Competing Institutional logics, Institutional work, Organizational identity as theorization strategy, Microfinance.

### Publications

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2011), "NGO Transformation: Institutional Entrepreneurship in Indian Microfinance" Business Strategy Series (Emerald Publications), 12(4):167-176.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar and Ishan Agrawal (2010), "Social Science Research in Vernacular Languages", Economic and Political Weekly, XLV(43):36-40.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2009), "Rural Credit and Microfinance Regulation: Scope and Issues ", The microFINANCE REVIEW, (BIRD Publication) 1(1):142-155.

### Book Reviews:

"The Institutional Logic Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure, and Process", by P.H. Thornton, W. Ocasio, and M. Lounsbury, Oxford University Press, 2012, in Organization Studies (in press).

"Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organization" by Thomas B Lawrence, Roy Suddaby, and Bernard Leca (Eds) in South Asian Journal of Management (forthcoming).

"Why Doesn't Microfinance Work? The Destructive Rise of Local Neoliberalism" by Milford Bateman, published in Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers, 36(4):168-170, 2011.

## Cases

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2010), "Weaving Strength with Suta", in Subsistence to Sustainable: The Power of Aggregation in Agriculture, Pp.43-54. Access Development Services: New Delhi.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar and Madhavi Mehta (2010), "People's Education and Development Organization"- a case on organization culture. Used as a teaching case in the course "Understanding Organization" at IRMA.

## Consultancy Assignments:

Conducted training need assessment for SEWA, Ahmedabad as a part of IRMA team for the project, "Assessing and Enhancing Managerial Effectiveness of Selected SEWA Bank Functionaries" in August, 2010.

Worked as a Sociologist and Gender Specialist in formulation mission of "Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Programme in mid-Gangetic plains of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Priyadarshini)" for International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), from 17th June to 31st July, 2006.

"Reconfiguring SGSY: A Limited Scope Study" was conducted and presented jointly with Trust Consulting, Lucknow in state level workshop on "Empowering Livelihoods: State Policy, Private Initiative & Civil Society Action" at Lucknow from 22nd-23rd September, 2005.

## Conference Presentations:

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2012), "Changes haven't Changed Us: Identity Protection as a Response to Institutional Complexity". Paper accepted for presentation at PDW, "Organizational Institutionalism", 28th EGOS Colloquium, 2-7 July, 2012, Helsinki, Finland.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2011), "Organizational Strategies Against Multiple Logics", Paper presented at Annual Convention of NAOP, 12-14 December, 2011, IRMA, Anand.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2011), "Theorizing Transformation of NGO-MFIs in Indian microfinance sector". Paper presented at 27th EGOS Colloquium, 6-9 July, 2011, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar and Ishan Agrawal (2011), "Commons for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP): Excluded from Policy". Paper presented at the 13th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) 2011 at Hyderabad, India on 10-14 January, 2011.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2010), "NGO Transformation: Institutional Entrepreneurship in Indian Microfinance". Paper presented at the International Conference for Strategy and Organization (ICSO), 2010 organized by Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Ghaziabad, India on 14-15 May, 2010.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar (2010), "Effect of Formalization on Performance of MFIs". Paper presented in the 3rd Doctoral Colloquium organized by Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA), India on 8-9 January, 2010.

Sarma, Sushanta Kumar and Ishan Agrawal (2009), "Social Science Research in Vernacular Languages: Challenges and Opportunities". Paper presented in 30th Anniversary Conference of Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) at IRMA, Anand, India on 15-16 December, 2009.

**Awards:**

Selected for travel grant under Young Professional Award by International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to participate in the 13th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) 2011 at Hyderabad, India on January 10-14, 2011.

His case study 'Weaving Strength with Suta' was selected as the third best entry for publication in the compendium of top 10 case studies under Sitaram Rao Livelihoods India - Case Study Competition, 2010. The event was organized under the aegis of India Livelihood Summit, November 17-18, 2010 and was hosted by Access Development Services.