

FOREWORD

GUEST EDITOR

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Reflexivity in Research: The Role of the Researcher, the Research Process, and the Nature of “Facts” in the Study of Organizations

The production of knowledge and scientific “facts” has lately gained growing attention in scientific discussions and also in the study of organizations. From one point of angle, organization studies are even more apt to this pondering, because organizations cannot be perceived directly, experienced as such, but only through tough theory and conceptualizations. The many lenses of seeing organizations are evident and have a profound impact on how we approach them, how we form the study design and not at least, which kind of study results we gain.

The whole field of organizations study is therefore highly determined by earlier knowl-

edge, metaphors and concepts. This call for papers is inspired by some recent developments in the field, especially “Reflexivity in Organization and Management Theory: A Study of the Production of the Research ‘Subject’”, by C. Hardy, N. Phillips and S. Clegg, *Human Relations*, May 2001, and “The Problem of Experience in the Study of Organizations”, by L. Sandelands and V. Srivatsan, *Organization Studies*, 1993, 14/1. These articles explore the questions interestingly, pointing the many levels of reflexivity and grasping it something broader than the researcher’s ability or duty. Moreover, the position of the researcher in the study process is focused, and the

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whole process where the studies get done are seen in the vain of complex interactional relations where the subject of the research in fact gets done, and is not there 'as such'.

Over the past 10–15 years business economics research has experienced a rise in approaches labeled qualitative. This is the case at least in the Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe. Many of these studies share similar challenges and opportunities: the position of the researcher in the research process, the special features of data gathering and, even more importantly, the analysis and interpretations of the data in the search for new understanding and contributions to the field. The study of organizations and management differs in some aspect from other disciplines even if they are part of social sciences. For instance, there are certain special features of data collected in business organization environments. Positioning oneself as a researcher in the study, sometimes being part of field one studies himself/herself, as well as various ethical considerations are everyday life questions are faced by researchers during the process of research.

Because qualitative studies do not usually start from a strict theory or model, reflexivity on the researcher's part is required from the very beginning. The qualitative approach has sometimes been criticized for not being able to add to the knowledge in the studied field and ending up with isolated bits of knowledge and pieces of understanding. Foremost it is easy to reply to these doubts. For instance we can say that the aim of this research usually is to outline contextual knowledge and overrid the requirements of generalizations, and that the subjectivity of the researcher is not a threat but a necessary starting point for a good social science based analysis. However, I think that continu-

ous self-reflection is needed also in using qualitative research methodology and some of the critics should be taken seriously. For instance, without any methodological knowledge the researcher might be attracted to use qualitative research as a tool and do its data analysis in naïve ways. Questioning one's own knowledge creation basics is part of good research practice.

In many US journals of management the majority of work is done using the quantitative approach, but more and more take in also qualitative good research papers. Moreover, the polarity of quantitative and qualitative does not exist in a pure form but many ways is a simplification. This has always been the tradition in business case studies, which use several kinds of data and its analysis, qualitative as well as quantitative. The main aim is to understand the 'case' however it is restricted, and it is not just the use or non-use of numbers that differentiates research. The whole research process is important, starting from covering data collection, and ending to analysis and interpretation using also earlier theory.

In this special issue welcomed are insights in this broad field of reflexivity in research, and invited were especially the following topics:

- Position of the researcher in the research process
- Reflexivity and the production of the research subject
- Subjectivity, rich data and analysis
- The research community and the legitimization process of the study
- Companies as sources of data in the study of organizations
- Study process overview
- Using in-depth interviews
- Interviews, types of interviews and how to use them well

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- Researcher as a learner in the study process
- The challenge of theory building
- Methodological questions beyond the study process
- Studying diversity: ethical questions and reflexivity
- Multidisciplinary insights on reflexivity
- Case studies
- Combined use of qualitative and quantitative data in the study

In this issue we have six papers that all approach reflexivity and cover the presented questions, the way or another. Firstly, there is an article by Alf Rehn 'On the Economy of Research: Gifts, Contributions, and Commodities in Organization Studies', which covers the nature of academic work analyzing its economic nature and suggesting that we can also see it in the eyes of a 'gift economy'. The article overbridges the difficult questions of what is social in research work, what is subjectivity in research process and how contributions are in fact something beyond gifts. He outlines a post-moralizing social science, on which greater awareness of the ideological underpinnings of our actions and their political spheres is acquired, and therefore asks the broad spheres of reflexivity in our academic doings.

Secondly, Heidi Keso, Hanna Lehtimäki and Tarja Pietiläinen write on 'Engaging in Reflective Acts – Sharing experiences on reflexivity in empirical qualitative research', which article presents the experimental narrative of reflexivity in qualitative research. Even if academic works are often joint contributions, we seldom ask how they come as they are. The social processes and the processes of theoretical decision-making are of importance when we develop our work methods and try to understand

academic work as shared reflection. Researchers who are in the middle of field work with 'hands-in-mud' certainly benefit thinking over how their work actually gets done.

While we see that research is based on social, not 'only' individual construction inside the academia, we end up to questions like what is the researcher's role in the collective as well as how her or his professional identity becomes shaped. This is a question of working styles but even more importantly, has also to do with how we shape knowledge and what we understand by 'contributing'. What is our position when we gather data and analyze it within the academia? Ph.D. Student Annukka Tapani is joining these issues with her article 'Is Being a Researcher Some Kind of Role-playing – a Reflective paper on Researcher's Professional Growth'. Researchers' working processes are multiple, and this paper outlines, referring to earlier work by Eriksson and Tranquist, four different roles of the researcher: the tourist, the spy, the missionary and the prisoner. These are used in the paper more as analytical heuristic to explore the research process and the construction of one's identity as a researcher, than something that are real alternatives of the researcher.

Tomi J. Kallio is writing about theoretical academic work and compares it to qualitative empirical research. He discusses the important themes that are often neglected in the research process like the selection of literature, the logic of argumentation and the crossing of different stratum of theories. How the author of a theoretical research convinces the readers by step-by-step building of the interpretation, and how any theory in fact is dependent on its historical context, the era legitimizes some kind of gaining of knowledge and not the other kind. Among the interesting details of the article is the finding

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that theory in ancient times meant 'an outsider observer who had no interests to participate the actions he saw': a Greek citizen that was sent to another city's religious ceremony and was obliged to report what he saw later to his own city servants, is the real origin of the concept of theory.

How within a discipline the dialogue goes on and how reflection helps theory to transform is the question in Paula Kyrö's article on 'The dynamics of scientific inquiry in entrepreneurship research – from revolutionary development to transitional dialogue'. Arguing that contribution is framed differently after Kuhn but also lately, she brings entrepreneurship research under exploration in terms of change and development. Disciplinary explorations in this field of methodology appraisal are rare, so this is a welcomed piece of work. Saying 'it is not obvious, however, that the explanations and accordingly the dynamics of scientific inquiry they represent offer universal solutions, but rather strictly context bound solutions to contemporary problems' she also comes together with ideas of the earlier work by Tomi Kallio.

Rebecca Piekkari and Catherine Welch are writing on 'Reflections on using qualitative research methods in international business.

Based on a key note speech at the Doctoral Conference on Qualitative research Methods, this paper also shows the living debate in the field. The authors discuss how interviewing corporate elites is different compared to other interviews, and how language boundaries that are not only technical questions are covered. Also the use of case-study methodology and its nature as a research strategy is discussed especially in the context of international business focus. This paper discusses field-work problems and how to overbridge them, and shows explicitly that good theory is gained only through concrete steps and careful thinking of what we do.

In the process of making this special issue the comments through the blind reviews have been of crucial help, and I wish to acknowledge the researchers: professor Juha Näsi, Ph.D. (Econ.) Anni Paalumäki, Emeritus professor Raimo Nurmi, Professor Anna-Maija Lämsä, Adjunct Professor Seija Mahlamäki-Kultanen, Ph.D. (Econ.) Niina Koivunen and Ph.D. (Econ.) Anneli Juutilainen. I am grateful to Lappeenranta University of Technology that supported me by a sabbatical period that I spent in Auckland University in 2005, where the idea to the call for papers of this issue first came. ■