

REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH: THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER, THE RESEARCH PROCESS, AND THE NATURE OF FACTS IN THE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONS

The nature of the production of knowledge and scientific “fact” has received growing attention in the study of organizations. Organizations cannot be perceived directly, experienced as such and, therefore, come to be understood through theory and conceptualization. The whole field of organizational research is highly determined by antecedent knowledge, metaphors and concepts. This call for papers is inspired by emergent developments in the field, and notably by two recent articles: “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. Both of the papers, in different ways, contribute to a broader understanding of knowledge production and reflexivity.

Over the past 10-15 years qualitative approaches to research in organizations and management have become increasingly popular. at least this is the case in Europe and there is evidence of a broader coalition of interests in qualitative work across the international management academy. Many of these studies share similar concerns albeit at a range of different levels of analysis and with different means of conceptualization: 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 knowledge. Positioning oneself as researcher in the study, the special nature of the data and various ethical considerations are everyday questions to be dealt with by researchers during the process of research. Attitudes to these issues have changed considerably over the past twenty five years as

has the acceptability of various qualitative approaches.

Because qualitative studies do not usually start from a strict theory or model, reflexivity on the researcher's part is an essential part of the research process. Indeed, 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. The subjectivity of the researcher is sometimes seen more as a threat than an opportunity for the outcome. Moreover, the polarity of quantitative and qualitative is something of myth since it is the extent to which interpretation is an acknowledged part of knowledge production which sometimes appears to characterize the distinction. Study designs such as case studies may use several kinds of data and analysis, qualitative as well as quantitative. However, it is not just the use or non-use of numerical analysis that differentiates research. It is the whole research process covering data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the trajectory of theoretical development.

In this special issue we welcomed submissions dealing with questions like:

- o Reflexivity and the “production” of the research “subject”
- o Position of the researcher in the research process
- o Auto-ethnography
- o Voyeurism and the researcher
- o Subjectivity, honesty and disclosure
- o Subjectivity and selectivity in the presentation of findings
- o The interpretative framework of research
- o The research community and legitimization of research
- o The production of “community in research”
- o Evaluation by peers
- o Researcher as ingénue

- o Theory development as “production”
- o The role of epistemology
- o The manipulation of findings

In this issue we have seven papers that all approach reflexivity and cover the presented questions, the way or another.

Iiris Aaltio’s article discusses the meaning of newness in research in the times when science have become more and more fragmentary by nature. Social science is based on writing and emerging texts. The context where they become live is social and historical, and not innocent in due to power. Writing research reports is political by nature but so is also reading them. Nowadays when subjectivity is grown into social science, seen in methodology and method choices, pure analysis of an empirical data get less and less impact. When social science publications are based more and more to collaboration and joint work, individual subjectivity gets compensated by inter-subjectivity in writing because of co-authored texts.

Becoming a researcher with the right to access science text publishing is not only professional but more and more narrative by nature, including a person’s credibility, biographical notes and wider understanding of his or her background. Personality and social context of a researcher are perhaps becoming more important than they used to be and that makes the impact of the individual researcher stronger, at the scientific career it is important to administer one’s reputation, image and “social frames”. Gatekeepers of science and administrative processes that they guide form criteria according to which researchers are selected and promoted further, on who passes the gate of becoming a knowledge holder in the future.

Secondly, Heather Höpfl takes issue with the way in which reflection has been valorized. Drawing on Lacoue-Labarthe (1989) who argues that in the face of the tragic one can only “attempt to circumscribe it theoretically” (1989: 117), she argues for a reassessment of the use of reflection. Lacoue-Labarthes is saying that when the object is elevated to the

status of *subject of speculation*, it is mortified by *insight*. His analysis suggests that the object of the speculation is mortified by that speculation: annihilated by reflection. As in the story of Medusa slain by her own reflection. Consequently, the paper deals with issues of the frame, liminality and definition. Höpfl draws on blindness and seeing, blindness and reflection. She also writes about the body, flesh, about the resistance that is in the touch, in the recovery of the physical as counterpoints to the passivity of reflection.

Heidi Keso, Hanna Lehtimäki and Tarja Pietiläinen write and narratize on “Engaging in Reflective Acts - Sharing experiences on reflexivity in empirical qualitative research”. The article presents the experimental narrative of reflexivity in a joint qualitative research process. Even if academic works are often joint contributions, it is seldom asked how they come as they are after the joint collaboration. The social processes including sharing experiences and the processes of theoretical decision-making are of value, when making of work methods and in trying to understand academic work as a shared reflection. Researchers who are in the middle of field work certainly benefit thinking over how their work actually gets organized, constructed and done.

The 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 there political spheres is acquired, and therefore asks the broad spheres of reflectivity in our academic doings.

Charalambos Tskeris and Nicos Katrivesis write about “Ethical Reflexivity and Epistemological Weakness”, about the ethical nature of reflexivity. They write that reflexivity is a contingent chance and not a fixed or black-boxed model. Fruitful pluralist maximization of both ethical and cognitive possibilities, the way “it would be otherwise” clause of radical intellectual inquiry remains central, as they end.

Annuikka Tapani’s paper we could describe as a one with “hands in the mud” state. She reflects her researcher identification, its process and nature while working with the Ph.D., in her article “Is Being a Researcher Some Kind of Role-playing – a Reflective paper on Researcher’s Professional Growth”. While seeing that research is based on social identity construction inside the academia, we end up to questions like what is the researcher’s role in the collective as well as how a personal professional identity inside academia becomes shaped. This is a question of working styles but even more importantly, has also to do with how knowledge is shaped and what we understand by contributing. The forming and shaping of researcher identity when one gathers data and analyze it within

the academia is discussed 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 and reflect the research process and the construction of one’s identity as a researcher, than something that are real alternatives of the researcher to make a choice between. In her work Tapani shows out how the researcher starts with the idea of contributing to the Truth and finds oneself as a novice, finding one’s way out of the, in George Mead’s words, “Generalized other” towards “I, the owner of the process and her life”.

We feel grateful for reviewers and the authors who have taken part of this process and hope that writing and discussion on these issues will continue. Among all, research is contributing to welfare of people who are the actors, to the community where they work. Writing and contributing happens in the frame of emotions and reflections, and the more reflective the processes of gate-keeping are, the better the results.

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Iiris Aaltio & Heather J. Hopfl, Guest Editors.

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