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Convincing Qualitative Research: What Constitutes Persuasive Writing?

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Abstract

We review ontological, epistemological, and methodological concerns in writing up research, distilled from selected inductive studies published in leading academic journals. From this analysis of practices emerges the following categorization, (a) rhetoric, (b) craftsmanship, (c) authenticity, (d) reflexivity, and (e) imagination, which informs the writing up of appealing and convincing qualitative research. We give examples and propose actionable writing heuristics. We offer reflections and recommendations on how qualitative research writing could be improved and its diffusion accelerated.

Keywords

qualitative research, induction, rhetoric, epistemology, ontology, authenticity, reflexivity, imagination

> Half-convinced writers trying to half-convince readers of their [the writers'] half convictions would not on the face of it seem an especially favorable situation for the production of works of very much power.
>
> —Clifford Geertz (1988)

Qualitative research is critical to social sciences and to the understanding of both organizational behavior and behavior in organizations. Over the past decades, qualitative (exploratory) research has expanded in management science in hitherto unimaginable ways, paying substantial heed to methodological pluralism (Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle, & Locke, 2008; Jehn & Jonsen, 2010;

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Johnson & Duberley, 2015; see also Cortina, Aguinis, & DeShon, 2017, regarding methodological pluralism in psychology).[1] Scholarly journals have widened their editorial policies to encourage social constructionist (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) research endeavors and opened their editorial boards to experts in ethnographic (Van Maanen, 1988), interpretive (Denzin, 1997), inductive/abductive (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010), grounded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), narrative (Goodall, 2010), (post)structural (Giddens, 1984), postmodernist (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), sense-making (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995), discursive (Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2000), and/or creative (Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Perry, 2007) approaches to inquiry. Moreover, many journals explicitly call for more qualitative contributions (Bansal & Corley, 2011, 2012) and launch special issues for this very purpose.[2]

Once a chronic victim of institutionalized discrimination (Symon, Buehring, Johnson, & Cassell, 2008), the "poor cousin" of the "red-headed stepchild" of inquiry (see Smith, Madden, & Plowman, 2014) is finally taking her rightful place at the adults' table, and we are fortunate today to be working in a climate of relative methodological plurality. Many forms of inquiring, knowing, and sharing cohabit alongside each other, and increasingly qualified reviewers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) are receptive to "honest subjectivity" and creative craftsmanship (Cunliffe, 2011). Moreover, scholars can today access a myriad of helpful articles, blogs, books, and studies with recommendations on implicit and explicit criteria used by editors and reviewers of qualitative manuscripts (e.g., Czarniawska, 2008; Geertz, 1988; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012; Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008; McGaughey, 2004; Patton, 1990; Pope, Mays, & Popay, 2007; Savall, Zardet, Bonnet, & Peron, 2008; Symon, Cassell, & Dickson, 2000; Webb, 2003). Such criteria, namely (a) contribution to theory, (b) novelty, (c) transparency, (d) well-articulated methods, and (e) good writing, are mostly shared by both authors and reviewers (Pratt, 2008, pp. 486-488).[3]

Some challenges and tensions have been pointed out, however, such as (a) how to develop new theory while staying firmly embedded in extant theory, (b) the need for detail and transparency on methods, journey, and original data while adhering to standard journal formats, (c) how to provide enough data to permit readers to draw their own conclusions and yet provide interpretation, and (d) the reviewers' evaluation of the story (lessons) authors try to convey (Pratt, 2008). Recommendations include stylish writing, precise craft and creativity, and the navigation of the tension between communicating and impressing (Sword, 2012). Rich case stories (Burgelman, 1996) and/or detailed storytelling (Boje, 2002; Czarniawska, 2004; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylors, 2013; Weick, 1977, 1995) can help scholars make cognitive and affective sense, and create a compelling context. Daft (1983) proposes to embrace nonlinearity and dwell in poetry, emotion, room for error, and surprise. Cloutier (2016) sees academic writing as a social activity performed at the intersection of several practices: thinking, talking, drawing, and reading. Bansal and Corley (2012) ask for no less than a "unique and inspiring story" (p. 511), and Cunliffe (2010) claims that textual validity is also about "imagination as a means of interrogating the relationship between individuals and the world" (p. 231).

On Writing

Writing is perceived as central to qualitative research: how the story is experienced, (de)constructed, and proposed—and how it is in turn received and interpreted by the reader. While traditional quantitative (confirmatory) methods use confidence intervals, significance levels, Cronbach alphas, bootstrapping, and other psychometric reliability scores as "built-in safeguards for warranting claims" (Barley, 2006, p. 19), qualitative work often consists of "mere" text. So, what makes good scientific writing? This is what this study sets out to investigate. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), in their inquiry on what makes ethnographic work appealing, purport that a good criterion to judge texts is the ability to "convince." They break down *convincing* along three dimensions that are authenticity, plausibility, and criticality. Research should convince its audience that it is substantive, trustworthy, and purposeful, that it will contribute to the advancement of a field of knowledge, but also that the author is capable of conducting a qualitative inquiry (Lindsay, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Odena, 2013).

Moreover, in a narration from an interpretative perspective of science, writers *and* readers interact and interpret the proposed accounts. Such interpretations create a "fundamental asymmetry" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p. 596) between reader and text and thus a degree of independence from the writer. Writing is a way of knowing, a "method of inquiry" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Texts are invitations to readers to participate actively in this process of knowing, to combine propositions and interpretations at hand with separate assertions from their own world (Black, Freeman, & Johnson-Laird, 1986) and thus come to learn and to grow by questioning many taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs about that world. Writing is therefore not just "mopping up" (Richardson, 1994, p. 516) once the research is done. Writing *is* researching. Such writing practice can be learned from theorists of fields that have a head start over management science in terms of the construction and interpretation of texts that deal with contextually grounded social experiences from the perspective of the actors and their sense making: literary criticism (e.g., Booth, 1961), philosophy (Melles, 2008; Rorty, 1982), anthropology (Geertz, 1973), linguistics (Iser, 1978), and psychology (Black et al., 1986). Convincing emerges not only from *what* message a text conveys, but also from *how* it conveys the message, that is, how it is crafted.

In this study, we examine some works of management and organizational scholars who have published their exploratory research in fine journals. Specifically, we explore the following questions: How did they convince? How did they deal with the tensions between expanding iterative methods, daring creative tools, and yet conform to "genre constraints" (Barley, 2006, p. 19)? How did they share their rich micro moments of insights, playfulness, and logics of action (Holt & den Hond, 2013), while convincing in terms of scientific rigor? How are their methods, thought processes, labels, and assumptions made transparent and plausible to the reader? What can we learn from them? We strive to make a contribution by illuminating emerging criteria, conventions, templates, and patterns of qualitative inquiry, and by selecting and examining specific studies from which we believe many scholars can learn. We purport that qualitative research can be narrated with creativity and imagination, in line with its epistemological stance, and still be considered meaningful and academically rigorous by reviewers and scholars.

To substantiate this claim, we first present a synthesis of seminal qualitative scholarly work published during recent years, and highlight principal stratagems that authors deploy to convince, in terms of both substance and scientific rigor. Grounded in this synthesis, we frame a categorization scheme of *convincing writing*, that is, parameters on which readers can engage with a given research text. For each of these, we present examples and a set of concrete, actionable writing heuristics and strategies that scholars might find helpful when they work toward bringing compelling qualitative studies into the zeitgeist of management and organizational science.

In Search of Meaning, Patterns, and Inspiration

Our long-standing passion for qualitative research, our own practical dabbling, some helpful reviewers, and finally three independent literature reviews on qualitative research in the 1990s and 2000s have yielded our sample of inductive studies that made it—between 2009 and mid-2015—into the following academic outlets: *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies*, and *Strategic Management Journal.* Our sampling rationales were to examine generalist management journals that accept a variety of research approaches. These journals are considered "leading" both by the academic community and in terms of the *Financial Times* ranking of business schools.[4]

How did these studies convince? We set out to understand how these authors articulated their practices, observations, and insights (Gephart, 2004) in a manner that reassured reviewers of both the scienticity and the noteworthiness of their contributions. We scanned through their studies for logics, patterns, perhaps standards, strong stories, and creative, generative, and candid gestures. This was challenging because what we were looking for could often not be captured in simple keywords. Ultimately, what inspires, motivates, and triggers insight is in the eyes of the beholder, in this case ours. We each independently pulled out compelling narratives, research designs, and visualizations. We organized our findings in different manners, and compared them. We shared, negotiated, and eventually converged on a "sample within the sample" of 29 studies, which for a variety of reasons touched us, caught our attention, and could help answer our research questions (Table 1).

The studies at hand represent a broad spectrum of ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches, ranging from ethnographic narratives to grounded, coded aggregations and pragmatic case study approaches; from personalized to very neutral, "realist" writing styles; from conservative linear designs to works with large degrees of structural and methodological independence. However, they display one common characteristic: a masterly way in which they negotiate the many fields of tension and the dilemmas of qualitative research (see Pratt, 2008). We believe most authors, rather than seeing dilemmas or dichotomies (which would imply either/or choices), perceived opportunities and saw dimensions, continua of possibility on which one could discourse, negotiate, and navigate, all to progress and to find an optimal balance between different epistemic, processual, narrative, and/or technical determinants. We reorganized our sample several times, striving to find a suitable aggregation logic to the emerging writing (and reviewing) conventions. We took individual notes and memos (some coded, some narrative, some schemata) and shared them; we asked some of our doctoral students to do the same. We then collectively de-/re-/co-constructed them and eventually identified five continua that had likely informed the substantive contributions of the papers at hand—and their acceptance:

A confident, clear, and candid rhetoric. Different narrative styles (from highly personalized to visual, to realist) that elegantly combine both journey and resulting theory; tangible, plausible bridges between first-order voices from the field and rigorous second-order conceptualization; enthralling and genuine, albeit "conceptually-mediated" (Van Maanen, 1988) accounts of the social experience at hand.

A solid and transparent methodological craftsmanship. Adhesion to canons (e.g., in the basic flow from introduction to problem statement, methods, data, discussion, and conclusion) on the one hand, and deviation from them on the other hand; liberties taken with methods and tools, namely in many creative ways that data and its interpretation is iterated, framed, and displayed.

A compelling, lively authenticity and energy. Energy in narrating the meanders of (particularized moments in) the everyday realities encountered in the field and conveying both the rich cognitive and emotional process of immersion *and* the synthetically substantiated theories—and elegantly oscillates between them.

A strong reflexivity. Reflexivity in terms of the writing as a cognitive process designed to reflect and relate to the readers' worlds, yet asymmetrical enough to attract the audience's full attention and scrutiny, and even go as far as pushing it to self-reflect and reexamine taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs.

A touch of imagination, *some brave abductive leaps*. A trust in one's mind, instincts, and intuition to trigger generative, insightful moments; the sagaciousness to understand and value such moments not merely as introspectively satisfactory, but as *data* in their own right, and, conjectured from them, novel sketches of seeing and organizing the world.

Table 1. Selective Sample of Qualitative Studies in Leading Journals (2009-2015): Remarkable Characteristics and Actionable Heuristics.

Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"Understanding Shifting Power Relations . . ." *Levina & Orlikowski 2009*	*AMJ*	Agar, 1980; Schwartzman, 1989; Van Maanen, 1979; Levina, 2001	In-depth qualitative study; ethnography; critical genre analysis; structuration theory	*Craftsmanship*: Consequent timeline/phased approach *Authenticity:* Generous genre purpose and form tables make a lively introduction for readers unfamiliar with the field at hand, management consulting (Tables 1-3) *Reflexivity:* The emerging differences ("espoused" and "enacted") leading to analytical differentiation are explained and documented; a model (p. 697): of social dynamics leading to power change, including conditions, actions and multilevel consequences Genre analysis is proposed as a method for studying power relations
"Exploitation-Exploration Tensions . . ." *Andriopoulos & Lewis 2009*	*Org Sci*	Yin, 1994; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989; Forster, 1994; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Van Maanen, 1979; Cohen, 1960	Comparative case study	*Rhetoric:* The data analysis provides transparency on four stages coding process, bridging the understanding from field to conceptual language *Craftsmanship:* Clear figures detailing first-order concepts, second-order concepts, and aggregate dimensions (with corresponding paradox) *Imagination:* A table (a clever mix of interviews, archival material, and observation across cases) summarizes the data structure
"Transitional Identity as a Facilitator . . ." *Clark et al. 2010*	*ASQ*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998;Van Maanen, 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Gioia et al., 1994	Interpretive, grounded theory; real-time, longitudinal, exploratory case study; naturalistic inquiry	*Rhetoric:* Findings bridge well between a classic Gioia overview table and lively supporting quotes from the field in which the second-order themes are grounded *Craftsmanship*: Methodology tightly and well described; an emergent model of identity change (during a merger) toward an "outcome" of shared identity and a process model framework make good grounds for future research *Imagination:* Interesting timeline of transitional identity evolution

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Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"The Role of Fairness . . ." *Ariño & Ring 2010*	*SMJ*	Pentland, 1999; Gibbert, Ruigrok & Wicki, 2008; Yin, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994	Qualitative longitudinal case (process study but not labeled as such)	*Craftsmanship and authenticity*: An exciting and refreshingly candid narration explains events and establishes relationships between events, actions, and actors in the formation process of partnerships over time The integrated framework on the emergent process and its propositions are particularly well-conceived to serve for further inquiry
"Micro-Institutional Affordances . . ." *Van Dijk et al. 2011*	*Org St*	Strauss, 1987; Vaughan, 1992; Locke, 2001; Eisenhardt, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Huber & Power, 1985; Suchman, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pettigrew, 1990	Qualitative, inductive approach Iterative comparison and systematic coding along innovation trajectories	*Craftsmanship:* The final aggregation level is very clear (Figure 1); it is the type of tangible integrated framework that facilitates further research *Authenticity:* Iteration between concept, empirical quotes and definition (Table 3) is lively and clinically precise. The reader can follow the researcher's interpretation logic Idem for the relationship between crises, affordances, and strategic responses (Table 4). *Reflexivity:* Aggregation choices and implementation of great precision, the reader can engage with, reflect upon, and trust the proposed theory
"The Dialectical Sense of Humour . . ." *Korczynski 2011*	*Org St*	Willis, 2000; Holmes, 2000; Gold, 1958; Ditton, 1977	Participant-observation ethnography	*Rhetoric and authenticity:* Permanent and rich iteration between respondent quotes, interpretation thereof, and theory in the write-up *Imagination:* Authors have elaborated a taxonomy of forms of humor at the workplace in discussion form
"How Middle Managers' . . ." *Huy 2011*	*SMJ*	Bartunek, 1984; Gioia & Chittipedi, 1991; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007	None	*Rhetoric:* A no-complex, lively writing style in the first person. Rather than explicitly draw on a known methodology, this researcher simply tells his story in a longitudinal case study; very clear and transparent connection between first-order original quotes and second-order aggregation steps along three tables *Reflexivity:* Why the question at hand needs holistic study, many epistemological reflections, and how they led to methodological decisions, triangulations, etc.

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Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"The Implementation . . ." *Moschieri 2011*	*SMJ*	Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001; Suddaby, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Weick, 1979	Inductive, embedded design with three units of analysis; fine-grained intensive case study	*Authenticity and rhetoric:* Candid and clear about actual research process (e.g., literature review ex post) and write-up (start with literature review) *Craftsmanship:* Three precise grids of analysis: within-case, fine-grained, and cross-case; displays that—and up to where—inductive method can be comparative; very actionable propositions *Reflexivity:* Discussion builds proposition after proposition, iteratively grounded in the aggregation process, intertwined by precise original respondent quotes and extant theory; this makes reflective, stimulating, and engaged reading
"Rotating Leadership . . ." *Davis & Eisenhardt 2011*	*ASQ*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994	Cross-case analysis	*Craftsmanship:* Precise evidence tables of outcome (innovation performance); precision-making pattern assessment, including time separated phases; clear theoretical model *Imagination:* Creative sampling of types collaborations between partners with diverse antecedents of superior collaboration performance
"Transcending Socialization . . ." *Michel 2011*	*ASQ*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990; Siggelkow, 2007; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Locke, 2001; Jehn, 1997; Spradley, 1979; Weiss, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967	Ethnographic case study design	*Craftsmanship and imagination*: Creative within-case contrasting approach; participants drawing diagrams; actionable evidence tables (also) divided into time periods and a dynamic model that facilitates further research
"Why and How Will a Group . . ." *Pandza 2011*	*JMS*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Siggelkow, 2007; Langley, 1999	Inductive theory-building approach	*Craftsmanship:* Precise overview of data analysis and conceptualization *Imagination:* A graph (p. 1022) makes the researcher at work very transparent: you see from it the continuous interplay between emerging concepts and data

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Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"From Common to Uncommon Knowledge . . ." *Nag & Gioia 2012*	*AMJ*	Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Lee, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corley & Gioia, 2011; Dubin, 1978	Interpretive research approach Grounded model Naturalistic inquiry Constant comparison techniques	*Craftsmanship:* In-depth pathway analysis (Figure 3, A, B, C) and explication of the linkages gravitating around the last and most interesting aggregated dimension (uncommon knowledge use) from data structure table and the dynamic framework *Reflexivity:* A precise processual view of how structured managerial knowledge is linked to subsequent cognitive and behavioral activities that constitute micro-processes underlying organizational competencies; post hoc analysis of pathways' effects on innovation outcomes
"'Hippies on the Third Floor' . . ." *Wright et al. 2012*	*Org St*	Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004; Grant, Putnam, & Hardy, 2011; Wetherell & Potter, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Brown, 2001; Gergen, 1994	Qualitative social constructivist method	*Rhetoric*: Clear description of emergence of narrative identity genres: achievement, transformation, epiphany, and sacrifice *Authenticity:* Constant narrative interplay between respondent quotes and interpretation leading to a typology of identities: green change agent, rational manager, heroic self, and committed activist, and to evidence of dynamic shifts between identities to craft a coherent sense of self
"Wielding the Willow . . ." Wright & Zammuto 2013	*AMJ*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Jick, 1979	Longitudinal archival study Single case study	*Craftsmanship:* Process-based understanding of institutional change by integrating bottom-up and top-down processual mechanisms; actionable multilevel process model of institutional change, combined with a timeline *Reflexivity:* Detailed and precise narrative of institutional mechanisms and contrasting logics *Imagination:* A (rare) example of a creative desk study without field work
"Coerced Practice Implementation . . ." *Canato et al. 2013*	*AMJ*	Huber & Power, 1985; Miller et al., 1997; Pettigrew, 1990; Langley, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994; Ansari et al., 2010	Longitudinal case study	*Craftsmanship:* Precise temporal structure of data (phases) *Authenticity:* Historic context well described; data collection and coding builds on existing knowledge, well-adapted during the process *Imagination*: Many diverse sources of practices used for model(s) of cultural change (pp. 1744, 1746)

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Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"Collective Engagement in Creative Tasks . . ." *Harvey & Kou 2013*	*ASQ*	Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Langley, 1999; Mohr, 1982; Rescher, 1996	Inductive qualitative Process analysis	*Craftsmanship*: Strong staged analysis using a "Gioia boilerplate" overview table in Stage 1; visual (meeting) maps for Stages 2 and 3 *Reflexivity*: Modes and sequences, tied to the "outcome" of ideas; a well-argued model of idea generation in group creative processes, alternative to existing conceptions
"Commodifying the Commodifiers . . ." *O'Mahoney et al. 2013*	*JMS*	Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Suddaby, 2006; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001; Van Maanen et al., 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010	Qualitative, grounded theory approach	*Rhetoric and craftsmanship:* The reader is led through the aggregation process in a very transparent way: text and a table detail open coding process leading descriptive coding scheme, second-order themes analysis, flows into a theory selection approach The "codification-abstraction-translation" process is detailed within the table
"Blind Dates and Arranged Marriages . . ." *Paquin & Howard-Grenville 2013*	*Org St*	Yin, 2009; Halinen & Törnroos, 2005; Parkhe et al., 2006; Langley, 1999; Eisenhardt, 1989; Patton, 2001	Embedded case design Longitudinal observation Process study	*Authenticity:* Network level, growth, structure, composition, and size are measured and combined with the user observation data to yield: • A landscape of network orchestration actions, outcomes and evolution over time • The interplay of network orchestration to shape structures and outcomes and in turn further network orchestration *Imagination:* This study innovates in that it combines longitudinal qualitative process observation with (partly quantitative) network analysis tools (mapping, snapshots)
"Let's Dance! Elastic . . ." *Harrison & Rouse 2014*	*AMJ*	Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2009; Amabile, 1982; Pettigrew, 1990	Inductive, qualitative study using grounded theory	*Imagination:* A prime example of creative use of an extreme case (setting), where emerging findings generate insights and theoretical interpretations can speak to other areas and situations (e.g., innovation teams); data collection and analysis precisely depicted in table (p. 1263); visually appealing "outcome" model of elastic coordination in creative work

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Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"Functions of Dysfunction . . ." *Ashforth & Reingen 2014*	*ASQ*	Locke, 2001; Charmaz, 2006; Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994	Ethnography Qualitative inquiry Constant comparative method	*Craftsmanship and reflexivity*: Intriguing process model (for organizational duality) entailing: • Three interrelated boxes labeled by the research questions; • Three distinct interrelated levels: individual, group, and organizational
"Gender in Academic Networking . . ." *Brink & Benschop 2014*	*JMS*	Van Maanen et al., 2007; Silverman, 2006; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007	Abductive reasoning	*Craftsmanship:* Clear and detailed visualization (Figure 1, p. 470) of the coding scheme in the vein of Gioia et al. (2013) *Authenticity:* The authors explain with great precision how they went back and forth from their empirical data to the literature
"Local Venturing as Compassion . . ." *Shepherd & Williams 2014*	*JMS*	Gersick, 1988; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Dey, 2007; Gioia et al., 1994, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pratt et al., 2006; Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1979; Isabella, 1990	Inductive theory-building research	*Rhetoric:* The methodology is rolled out in a concise and coherent manner *Craftsmanship*: Data collection over a long period of time is well presented in text and coherent graphs; data table (p. 961) is well-conceived: within four different columns over one page, the authors detail and argue their aggregation levels *Authenticity:* Rich data analysis section, with step-by-step process description (first-order codes and theoretical dimensions well detailed)
"The Mutual Constitution of Persons and Organizations . . ." *Michel 2014*	*Org Sci*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Jick, 1979; Yin, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1996; Locke, 2001; Spradley, 1979; Glaser, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994	Grounded theory-building approach Ethnography	*Authenticity:* Full details about the coding procedure: with triangulated data, the author first identified "themes," analyzing data, and writing memos to understand the data abstractly; triangulation is richly and clearly described in table form (p. 1089)
"The Temporality of Power . . ." *Costas & Grey 2014*	*Org St*	Silverman, 2006; Spradley, 1979	Exploratory empirical study Participant observation	*Rhetoric:* A long and precise theoretical introduction, nearly half the paper; little structure throughout the paper; generally a strong emphasis on compelling narrative, with rich, regular respondent quotes. No tables, figures, objectivization, or other organization of data to prove rigorousness; a "pure" narrative theory *Reflexivity:* A conceptual discussion dissects relationship between temporality and power

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"Discourse Revisited . . ." *Paroutis & Heracleous 2013*	*SMJ*	Grant, 2003; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Jarzabkowsli et al., 2009; Laamanen & Wallin, 2009: Pettigrew, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990	Exploratory-oriented method; phenomenology; hermeneutics; grounded theory	*Craftsmanship:* A savvy mix of different qualitative tools/methods; focused, 2-step phases: changing emphasis over time, and institutional work performed during that time, these two lines of analysis are then connected for patterns to emerge. Visualized in tables that connect precisely with the discussion *Authenticity:* Rationale for tools at every step is very well chiseled out *Imagination:* Methods are intertwined in a smart way to respond, at every aggregation level, to the emerging research interrogation: interviews, a longitudinal within-firm case study (extreme situation), archives, ethnographic observation
"From Core to Periphery . . ." *Lipparini et al. 2014*	*SMJ*	Eisenhardt, 1989; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005; Kumar, Stern, & Anderson, 1993; Leonard-Barton, 1990; Langley, 1999	Multiple case inductive study (a process study [Langley] not described as such)	*Rhetoric:* Well-narrated large-scale and detailed highly recursive process approach to investigate knowledge emergence and dynamics in an industry setting *Craftsmanship:* Move from single case, in pairs, to cross-cases to challenge identified patterns and render them robust *Imagination:* Excellent, unusual graphics to display knowledge flows between firms
"Weathering a Meta-Level Identity Crisis . . ." *Patvardhan et al. 2015*	*AMJ*	Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Spradley, 1979; Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Langley, 1999; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Burgelman, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985	Longitudinal Grounded theory	*Craftsmanship:* Methodology parsimoniously and precisely positioned *Authenticity:* Good timeline overview of events; clear distinction between crisis and its prologue throughout the paper *Imagination:* Grounded model interacts smartly between the dynamics of collective and member level
"When Times Collide . . ." *Reinecke & Ansari 2015*	*AMJ*	Zilber, 2002; Van Maanen, 1979; Langley et al., 2013; Gephart, 1978, 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989; Pratt et al., 2006; Fine & Deegan, 1996; Blumer, 1954; Hernes, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin, 1997; Lok & de Rond, 2013	Inductive, qualitative process approach Ethnography	*Reflexivity:* Clear and rich discussion that touches upon a wide multilevel context *Imagination:* A time-view perspective (clock time and process time) grounded in culture used consequently throughout the paper, including how they contrast and consolidate in a well-drawn theorizing process-model of ambi-temporality (p. 637)

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Table 1. (continued)

Title Cue and Citation	Journal	Key Methodology Studies/Scholars Referenced	Authors' Naming of Analysis	Remarkable Elements/Heuristics in the Write-up
"Dynamic Decision Making . . ." *Smith 2014*	*AMJ*	Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 1984; Leonard-Barton, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1989; Jick, 1979; Miller et al., 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Gioia et al., 2013; Langley, 1999, 2007; Locke et al., 2008; Maitlis, 2005; Huff, 1990; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985	Case comparisons Analytical techniques (stages from Gioia et al., 2013)	*Rhetoric:* Bold use of terms (e.g., "bitch", respondent quote, first line) gets attention and transmits energy and authenticity *Craftsmanship:* Data analysis is rich and trust-building, with highly precise overview table (p. 1598); the overview table and data supporting interpretations (of second-order themes) flow logically and plausibly into a dynamic decision-making model (p. 1606)

The common denominator in our sample is thus an ability to communicate beyond a fundamentalist either–or logic in the evoked qualitative research writing. To perceive and express these fields of tension not as constraints, but as spaces of possibility on which to oscillate and find a purposeful hermeneutic balance between objectivity and subjectivity; conformity to formal research standards and structures and creativity faithfulness to the real, iterative process; process and theory; personalized narration and more neutral, realist posture, and so forth. These five writing practices—and the interplay inside and across them—were the essence from which the authors built their substantive contribution—and gained the engagement, and ultimately the conviction of reviewers and readers.

We now briefly comment on our sample as a whole. We then address the aforementioned categorization scheme of convincing writing, sharing findings for each, and follow up with a set of actionable heuristics in dedicated tables. These practices, while presented separately, are not mutually exclusive. They have a distinctive conceptual character, but they are also overlapping and interrelated, and authors may use similar writing tactics to gain in authenticity, reflexivity, or novelty. For example, the transparent and precise way some scholars deal with their translation of field (first-order) voices into theoretical (second-order) language, is a matter of rhetoric, but also of authenticity, in that the reader will or will not engage with proposed aggregation and translation and consider them plausible, and finally of methodological craftsmanship. A lively account of a field situation helps to convince in terms of authenticity, of "having been there," but of course that same disarming "conceptually-mediated" (Van Maanen, 1988) liveliness, is a testimony of and call for reflexivity—and imagination. What incites reflexivity is in turn only a small step away from imagining new, other possible selves, futures, and realities. Our understanding for now is that the practices might be interconnected by epistemological and methodological *craftsmanship*. We frame these and their principal relationships in Figure 1.

Convincing Writing: How Those Who Made It, Did It

Approaches in our sample vary greatly to include many forms of narratives, process models, iterations (between concepts, quotes, and definitions), temporal perspectives, aggregation levels, decision-making patterns, further research instigators, pathway analyses, taxonomies, theorizing and framing, contrasting logics, historic contexts, network analyses, a wide array of graphic displays, mixing of tools and methods, extreme cases, multilevel analyses, diverse forms of triangulations, data tables, textual theory building, and well-documented coding and data structuring procedures. Many authors adopted a classical linear design, along a description of field, research interest, and theoretical foundations, then explicit or implicit references of methods, data collection practice and analytical steps, and some form of theory, illustrated through framing figures and tables. Constructivist articles are distinctly longer: They contain extensive explanations (legitimizations) of philosophical underpinning and process and propose many original quotes when linking raw data to constructs, concepts, and contexts. Many studies do not expatiate on their epistemological or theoretical underpinning at all. Only few authors explicitly position themselves as performing their analysis from a constructivist stance. We now present the five categories of persuasive writing practices, each with some examples, and substantiate some of the observed tactics and heuristics in an actionable way. We noticed that many of the papers in our sample (Table 1) excelled in *several* of these five categories.

Rhetoric

All published studies convince through their rhetoric. Rhetoric is the expertise of discourse, the capability to inform, persuade, and engage one's audience. Whenever scholars frame ideas for a dedicated readership, they engage in rhetoric. Techniques to use and understand rhetoric are

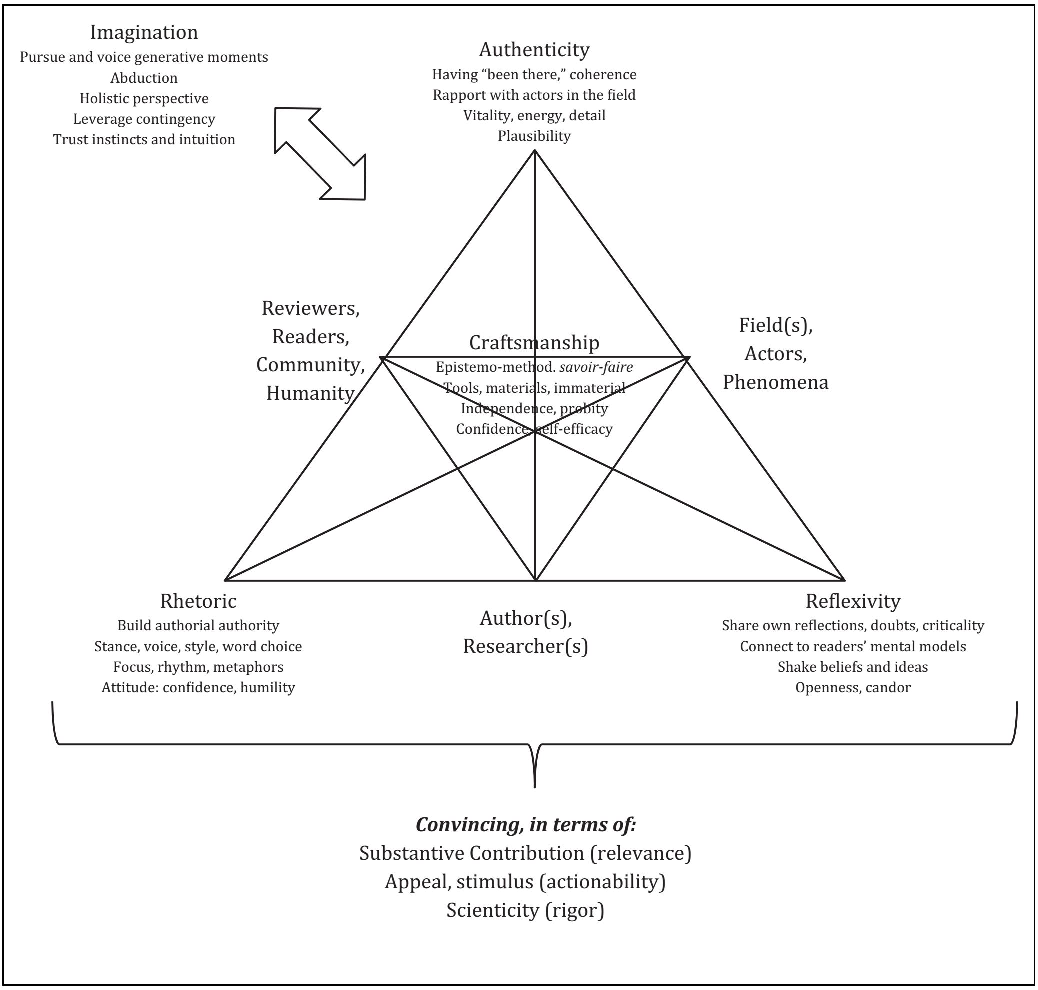

Figure 1. Five characteristics of convincing writing and their interplay.

manifold and include speech analysis, persuasive appeals (e.g., pathos), puns, canons, tropes, figures of speech, and medium (McLuhan, 1964). One key tension seems to be between the rigorous "normalized" way of writing (e.g., second-order or aggregated themes), and a conscious narrative personal identity that may persuade the reader that there is a real foundation for what was written, as opposed to simple manipulation or paralogizing of the data or not mentioning deviant cases or crucial information.

In our sample, heuristic choices of convincing through rhetoric include the following:

1. An explicit awareness of the centrality of rhetoric. This includes a conscious and explicated writing effort in terms of storytelling, vocabulary, syntax, style, rhythm, energy, attitude, and so on. Also, titles and subtitles go well beyond the mere identification of subject and content: Every word is handpicked to convey—as a tag line in an advertisement—the phenomena under study in their full richness, complexity, and cultural identity. Dealing with length emerges as a key competency. The authors have managed to be lively, while synthesizing the data to minimize the repetitions and redundancies that can come with iteration.

2. A coherent posture and engagement. This coherence emerges in terms of a chosen epistemological stance, role of the researcher, and/or corresponding voice, style, vocabulary, visualization choices, and methodological and theoretical claims. Paradigmatic awareness also concerns all interactions with the actors in the field and understanding the paradigms embedded in the empirical conversations and texts (Rostron, 2014). Both Paquin and Howard-Grenville (2013), in their network orchestration study, and C. Wright, Nyberg, and Grant (2012), on identity genres, convince (despite their picturesque, emotional titles) with a radically conceptual style, using traditional language, such as "we analyze," "we focus on," precise methodological indications "embedded case design," "theoretical sampling," and a factual presentation of findings, albeit peppered with vivid and precise field quotes. In contrast, Costas and Grey (2014), on the temporality of power, use a more *conversational narrative*, like "what if, instead, they are imagining . . . " and "our ideas are inspired by . . . ." All studies deploy *strong quantification heuristics*, such as "amounting to over 1,000 pages of transcript," "37 days in the field," interviews "between 50-120 minutes," and "transcribed within two weeks," to convey rigor and process control.
3. Specific techniques and heuristics that bridge between conflicting and opposing goals. These techniques include novelty and familiarity, journey and theorizing, qualitative phrasing to the fullest and concessions to perceived-to-be traditional, nonexploratory, reviewers. For example, both Michel (2011, organizational change) and W. K. Smith (2014, dynamic decision making) combine a refreshingly noncomplex, bold, and energetic first-person narrative on the one hand, with many pages of highly detailed, matter-of-fact, clinically argued explanations on the methodology adopted on the other.[5]
4. A presentation of theory in a coherent, plausible, and practical manner. This presentation stimulates readers to build and/or test it further. Theories can be narratives or framed and visualized. In either case, the reader engages and adds to the theorizing process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Geertz, 1973) and through this engagement decides whether to trust it, even though "how, precisely, . . . and in what fashion are far from clear" (Van Maanen, Sørensen, & Mitchell, 2007, p. 1153). But, we conjecture with some confidence that writers benefit from simulating this virtual conversation, or co-construction with the reader, in that they anticipate it. Noninvolved peers (or other stakeholders, e.g., practitioners) could read their texts and discuss them. Many authors report on such tactics under the overall terms of triangulation and member checking. Narratives have strong sense-making power and convey authenticity; visually framed theoretical contributions (integrated frameworks, process models, figures, maps, etc.) act as boundary objects (Thompson, 2005) that fit into the epistemic parameters of a larger audience. Many studies have paid great attention to the visual presentation of their theories in an actionable, usable way. The medium is also the message (McLuhan, 1964). Some opportunism is not only allowed but also imperative if one has something of relevance to say.

The authors' vocabulary implies an exploratory approach (since the sample was chosen on these grounds), but diverse rhetorical concessions to the mainstream order of writing are illuminated: reassuring adjectives such as "tangible," "robust," "grounded" to demonstrate rigor; "surprising," "remarkable" to show noteworthy deviation from extant theory; presence in the field "*extended* to," "more than" *n* months, to express the intensity of the field immersion; and quantifying terms like "nearly all," "mostly," "significantly," "exhaustive," "correlate" to address the statistical mind (see also Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). Up to eight pages of clinically detailed explanation and quantification of method (number of hours, transcript pages) and abundant use of known terms such as "theoretical saturation," "open/axial coding," "triangulation" (Star & Griesemer, 1989) were used to bridge between their abductive approach and a context perceived as essentially positivist. Authors did include the self in their interpretative accounts, but none went as far as the strongly personal styles and nonlinearity of journeys in earlier seminal studies, such as Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) account of the homeless or Van Maanen's (1988) tales of the field. Further common grounds are a compelling introductory section and a capacity to sustain a narrative tension as they build up a plot with their data, derive from it an explanation, and conclude with a powerful theoretical narrative (e.g., see how Ariño & Ring's, 2010, storytelling intertwines data, process contingencies, and theory narratives in an enthralling and precise manner).

There are key moments when the scholar needs to establish authority for the reviewer, and later the reader. This authority is not established through measurable validity and reliability parameters, but by sharing one's analysis of the many research and rhetorical decisions all along the process (e.g., Jonsen et al., 2013), starting with the discovery of the research story. This is a both a skill, and a very personal process and validation of choices where peers can bring clarity to the writing and monitor bias. Narrative researchers must make such precise choices. They need to determine whether storytelling is an appropriate ontology, to find out what they seek to know, and which, among available generic storytelling paradigms, narrativist, living story, materialist, interpretivist, abstractionist, and practice (Rosile et al., 2013, p. 560), best fits the research interest and context. Narratives in our sample were essentially of two, mostly intertwined paradigms: practice and interpretivist.

For practical referencing, we have summarized the most powerful rhetorical heuristics of convincing in a table (Table 2).

Craftsmanship

By epistemological and methodological craftsmanship, we mean first and foremost the conceptual and technical expertise of the methods and tools applied, and their interplay, as they are presented to the reader. Trust in methodological soundness and rigor is typically intimated through compliance with defined validity and reliability criteria and a design along structures such as introduction, theoretical underpinning, methods, data aggregation, theoretical discussion, and so on. In qualitative research, more subtly and for lack of objectively measurable criteria, the work needs to convince more holistically, as a balanced ensemble of method, epistemological stance, research intent, journey sharing, rhythm, and language, but also empathy, honesty, criticality, and independence. One key tension seems to be between reassuring the reader that the process is properly executed (Knorr-Cetina, 1981) and the methodology mastered and the relatively small text space "allowed" to explain this convincingly. In other words, how much space should be dedicated to describing the methodology and process? This varies from journal to journal, and it is perhaps driven more by journal norms than author choices. See also the previous section on rhetoric, items 3 and 4.

The studies that we examined could not be more different, and yet they all have this tight fit and inner coherence between culture, structure, process, and substance. Elements of convincing through craftsmanship include the following:

1. A masterly epistemological and methodological savoir faire. Paroutis and Heracleous's (2013) study on discourse in our sample displays such savoir faire. Following a self-designed four-stage approach that draws from exploratory research, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, and intertwining it creatively with a savvy mix of tools in a double-loop parallel analysis that is eventually connected for patterns to emerge, they manage to knit a cloth of precision, beauty, and substance. In a sense, they demonstrate the need to master methodologies to juggle them, to deviate from them, with such confidence, and end up with something the reader experiences as "right," as convincing. The rhetoric is finely chiseled,

Table 2. Convincing with Rhetoric.

Rhetorical Choices	What Emerges From Our Sample	Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Awareness of rhetoric as central to convincing	• Huy (2011) tells a story in a longitudinal case study. • Costas and Grey (2014) explore the story of the existing literature on disciplinary power in professional service firms.	• Tell a substantiated story, i.e., to combine both the journey and the substance (result); choice of storytelling paradigm (Rosile, Boje et al., 2009). • Create a "conceptually-mediated analysis of social experience. • Build "authorial authority" (Geertz, 1988) to show that you have been there, have gotten your hands dirty, and therefore can be trusted.
Stance choice, researcher posture (identity)	• Some papers raise the epistemological and ontological stance in line with the research intent (see Reinecke & Ansari, 2015).	• Address explicitly the epistemological stance and develop a narrative identity (C. Wright et al., 2012) that fits your stance, your personality, and the research intent. • Formulate precisely and coherently the style, vocabulary, methods, and theoretical claims.
Voice choice	• Most papers in our sample use passive voice to focus on the action. • Some papers offer a clear and visual representations through mapping (Harvey & Kou, 2013) or snapshots (Paquin & Howard-Grenville, 2013).	• Use the passive voice to externalize the author, imply neutrality, anonymity, standardization; use the active voice to get more personal as a narrator and be more engaging. • Develop strongly visual style.
Bridging techniques and heuristics	• Research is not timeless, and almost all the papers in our sample use words such as "years" or "decades" to objectivize. • 18 studies relativize their results using words such as robust or surprisingly. Davis and Eisenhardt (2011) and Michel (2011) are good examples. • Most studies reveal quantitatively the volume of their data, e.g., "Detailed observations of activities, events, and discourse were recorded in a field diary, which extends to 400 pages" (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015, p. 624) or "Observations were documented as field notes and typed up daily (an average of 20 typed pages per day)" (Levina & Orlikowski, 2009, p. 678). • A majority of papers underline and offer a clear transparency of the evolution from first-order to second-order coding (see Clark et al., 2010; Nag & Gioia, 2012).	• Unmask dichotomies: "rather than either-or, it is oscillation between 'it, and the contrary of it.'" • Objectivize, relativize with adjectives such as "tangible," "robust," to show rigor, "surprisingly," to show deviation from extant theory. • Quantify, "nearly all," "xxx pages of transcript," to reassure the statistical mind. • "Next-step," i.e., "our framework shares many concepts with the field of . . . ," or create lacunae "while we know a and b, we lack data on c." • Explain/render comprehensible the translation from first-order to second-order language. • Show evolution, work with temporality: "for many decades," "in recent years."

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Rhetorical Choices	What Emerges From Our Sample	Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Attitude	• Most of the studies use “might” or “maybe” to share their cautiousness. Harrison and Rouse (2014) provide a fine example.	• Clearly and plausibly argue and, at the same time, relativize propositions. • Express doubt, which is not hidden away, but expressed, so as to invite the reader to engage and reflect.
Citation	• Most of the studies in our sample cite Eisenhardt (1989)—19 times; Glaser and Strauss (1967)—11 times; Lincoln and Guba (1985)—11 times; Locke (2001)—8 times; Miles and Huberman (1994)—12 times; Strauss and Corbin (1998)—12 times; Van Maanen (1979; 1988)—19 times; and Yin (1984)—12 times. Most of them argue and explain every step of the methodological approach, such as Gioia and Thomas (1996)—15 times; and Isabella (1990)—2 times.	• Cite leading methodology scholars to describe overall method, or elements/steps, if a mix of methods is applied. • Explicitly rely on and reference a role model study.

and the tables and figures are in harmony with the text. Everything is precise and detailed, and yet extremely parsimonious.

2. A strong independence and intellectual probity. Ariño and Ring’s (2010) study on fairness in alliance formation is a noteworthy example of a candid narration of how field expectations (they thought they would be observing a successful alliance formation in real time) are proven wrong (the alliance was eventually aborted), how researchers adapt and objectives shift (trust in alliances became an issue), and how data access and collection intentions are renegotiated (lively accounts of tactics and ruses to get and keep field access). Michel’s (2014) monumental 10-year ethnography among investment bankers is written in a much more controlled, result-oriented manner. Rather than sharing contingencies, she explains her research field and analytic strategies in a radically matter-of-fact, parsimonious manner.
3. A logic of theory presentation with the reader in mind (customer orientation). Writing is also being smart about wanting to be read: appealing storytelling with a touch of emotion, impeccable conceptualization, rhetorically built and argued, engaging the reader’s reflection, actionably packaged in smart tables and/or helpful figures and/or graphs, integrated models, and hypotheses, effectively connected back with original quotes and with the literature. Such concrete visualizations of process steps and theory stimulate readers to build and/or test it further. Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, and Thomas (2010) provide two tangible models that can be built on by other researchers, a process model on identity change (p. 426) and a framework destined for testing propositions on transitional identity (p. 433). Moschieri (2011) also delivers a palpable process model (p. 387) and a set of propositions ready for testing. Michel’s (2011) well-designed integrated framework of organizational control and body action roles (p. 352) is easily adoptable for testing, as is A. L. Wright and Zammuto’s (2013) model on institutional change processes in cricket.

Data coding is not a necessary part of the procedure in exploratory research. Good narratives are powerful sense makers. But coding, though it neither interprets nor builds theory, seems popular, as indicated by our sample: Scholars appreciate the efficiency of coding when faced with vast amounts of narrative data in which they hope to find what their respondents' "real world" is like. The same goes for overview tables, frequently required by reviewers and thus probably a smart write-up strategy to enhance publication chances, despite occasional voices that regret such standardization and call for more pluralism (e.g., Bansal & Corley, 2011). Barley (2006) purports that methods are particularly interesting when they get "close enough to behavior to show how people wittingly and unwittingly build and maintain their social worlds" (p. 17). Such closeness, and a smart writing strategy to handle the myriad of data (over 20 pages of notes per day), can be observed in Levina and Orlikowski's (2009) study of shifting power relations in a fast-growing strategic alliance context, where, on the basis of their highly detailed every day observations, they

> then performed a critical genre analysis to untangle and explain how the power relation among participants on the project were being reproduced or challenged. This analysis involved examining how control over genre enactment was exercised (e.g., who set the time and location of a meeting, who was responsible for the agenda, etc.), as well as who had competence in and participated in the various genre enactments, and how. For each of the genres identified in our genre analysis, we specified the status distinctions implicated in its enactment. (p. 678)

For practical referencing, we have summarized the heuristics of good craftsmanship in a table (Table 3).

Authenticity

The dimension of authenticity is principally about the *process*, that is, the researcher's journey. Convincing, here, comes from truthfulness to the field: trust in his or her engagement and empathy that he or she has truly "been there," with an open mind-set, gotten his or her hands dirty, and hung around a long while, developed a deep and detailed understanding of the setting at hand, and so forth, so as to be trusted as a legitimate ambassador, translator, and interpreter of the setting under study. Also included is the notion of plausibility. Even though authenticity and plausibility are not the same, they are related. We found that when we as readers had established trust in the researcher's competency and probity, we were willing to engage, to be receptive to propositions, even if these were a priori exotic or contestable (see also Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998, for an excellent example of this).

One main tension seems to be between how the study really developed and writing it in a way that captures the attention of the reader and is publishable. Richard P. Feynman (1965) phrased it bluntly in his 1965 Nobel Prize lecture:

> We have a habit of writing articles in scientific journals to make the work as finished as possible, to cover up all the tracks, not to worry about the blind alleys or describe how you had the wrong idea first, and so on. So there isn't any place to publish, in a dignified manner, what you actually did in order to get to do the work.

Studies that go further in the qualitative paradigm, taking the logic of narrative as research to the fullest, candidly share the meandering (e.g., Larson's, 1992, legendary narrative on how the research question changed through the process) the iteration (e.g., Gioia and Chittipeddi's footnote 1 in their 1991 *SMJ* article), the doubts (e.g., the extent to which informants are telling the truth; see Hatch &

Table 3. Convincing with Craftsmanship.

Issues of Craftsmanship	What Emerges From Our Sample	Some Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Methodological savoir faire	• Most papers put the emphasis on a very clear methodological section (see Clark et al., 2010, for a well-detailed section). Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009), Van Dijk et al. (2011), Nag and Gioia (2012), and Brink and Benschop (2014) also provide clear details about first- and second-order concepts. Still, Moschieri (2011) and Harvey and Kou (2013) provide a well-detailed grid of analysis. Most papers provide a step-by-step process description about the coding procedure (see Michel, 2014; Paroutis & Heracleous, 2013; Shepherd & Williams, 2014),	• Explain your method clearly and yet parsimoniously; embed it in the general stance. • Dare to deviate from it if/when needed and explain the rationale for the deviation: Why is your approach better? What forces you to go a different path? How can you get closest to the field (Barley, 2006)? • Reflect on the type of theory that this research will/can (or cannot) produce and state the appropriate claims (and only those).
Independence, probity	• Michel (2014) fully details the coding procedure, detailing candidly the triangulated data; triangulation is richly and clearly described in a table. • Clark et al. (2010) describe the methodology tightly and well and the emerging model framework leads to good grounds for future research.	Explain candidly: • Any hiccups, e.g., difficult field access, contingency in the middle of a process • Any insights, new ideas, changing research question, etc. • Explain how it impacted the research design, and generally how you dealt with it.
Tools and materials	• Some papers provide a mix of different qualitative tools/methods (see, e.g., Paroutis & Heracleous, 2013).	• Be coherent in the type of tools chosen for different steps and justify the choice. • Dare to invent new tools and approaches, especially in terms of the possibilities the Internet and mobile devices (especially smartphones) offer; the complete qualitative methodological toolbox is not yet written.
Substantiation heuristics	• When data analysis is rich and well documented, an effort is made to present overview tables and data supporting interpretations (of second-order themes; see Smith, 2014).	• Give a generous amount of space to the results; they are of equal importance to the journey. • Take the reader by the hand when you build your conceptual framework so that the building blocks, the architecture, and the relationships (or propositions) can be understood and the reader can engage with it.

Schultz, 2017), and the exact generative moments, potential personal biases, and preconceptions are thus still rare. This is understandable, perhaps because this requires authors to express lack of knowledge and risk their reputations (MacIntosh et al., 2017).

Elements of convincing in our sample through authenticity include the following:

1. A lively, honest, detailed, and engaging narration of the field. This includes the actors, their realities, and the relations that the researchers were able to build with them to build trust and

deeply engage the reader and an understanding of narrative types and levels: macro level, holistic; micro level in situ; individual practices, praxis, or practitioner narrative; and so on (Fenton & Langley, 2008).

2. A clear (honest) explanation of the research design steps and procedures. All tables display forms of stepwise data aggregation and contain some deeper levels of meaning, links between properties, and interpretation. Categorization is used to describe phenomena and to distinguish from new data or to make inferences (Dey, 2007) and is usually the core level of finding and, therefore, central to presentation. Codes are fractured into a conceptual level by categorization (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), that is, texts are highly synthesized and conceptual here rather than stories from individuals or groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sometimes they are enriched with original quotes that help the reader understand categories, but add length. In sum, the generic prototype study here presents tables with data sources, and aggregate tables with first-order and second-order steps and some type of "aggregation dialectics," preferably with representative proof quotes built in as the backbone of the theory—in the cases where theory is developed. Process, theorizing, and framing are visualized for more power (Mengis & Eppler, 2008). Category labeling is almost uniform: (a) organizing categories, examples, final coding categories; (b) first-order (informant) concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate analytical terms. These exact terms inform most inductive studies published in the past two decades.[6] Writing up research in terms of role model studies seems to be a paying strategy, also as a learning process for young scholars (Pratt, 2009; see also Worren, Moore, & Elliot, 2002). Using a recognized template increases the likelihood of publication—and of being read and cited: the most cited study of our sample, Andriopoulos and Lewis's (2009) comparative case study on ambidexterity, is also, seemingly, the most objectivized and most rigorous.[7]
3. Forms of validation/proof of scientific rigor in line with the chosen stance. These include respondent or member checking or other forms of triangulation techniques (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). Some studies mimic traditional mainstream inquiry in that they objectivize their analysis process to the extreme. With this, they reduce the interpretive and narrative potential of the method chosen, in favor of some type of proof of validity and generalizability. Others, in line with a more transformational mind-set (Cho & Trent, 2006), allow for reiterations and expansions of themes and findings. It is difficult to know how far objectivizing procedures are caused either by the authors' lack of familiarity with interpretive and narrative approaches and thereby lack of self-confidence to write it up inductively, or by their expectation of and/or actual reviewers' comments asking for more validity of the deductive, traditional kind. Most papers use a linear, organized form to suggest a controlled research process and validate through craftsmanship, by quantifying and qualifying research effort and design (see rhetoric) and by citing examples of scholars who performed a similar approach. Huy (2011), in an energetic, first-person narrative on middle managers' emotions, sustains the narrative theorizing through sheer volume (over 200 interviews), and triangulation through observation, focus groups, and internal documents, detailed in a table (Table 2, p. 1395).
4. An actionable, credible, and pleasurable account of the field, as perceived and lived by the actors under study. The authors have gone there with humility, empathy, a subtle touch of humor, and an open mind. We also find evidence of this open mind-set—often in smart, precise tables—which displays receptivity and how our own a priori beliefs were left at home. For example, Reinecke and Ansari's (2015) rich and lively dual temporal study convinces with concise tables (especially Table 3, p. 632, composed of respondent quotes on contrasting temporal structures).
5. A capacity to actively engage readers in the narrative. This is important not only for them to discover the realities of the field at hand, but to reflect on propositions that are a priori

beyond their sphere of the probable, to rethink and question taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas (also reflexivity). Van Dijk, Berends, Jelinek, Romme, and Weggeman (2011), for example, take institutional theory head-on in their study on radical innovation by proposing a series of novel and counterintuitive arguments on how embedded agents can overcome legitimacy crises to facilitate radical innovation:

> In other studies, the presence of competing demands from multiple institutional constituents has been presented as a dilemma to overcome . . . similarly, whereas Oliver (1991) argued that environmental uncertainty stimulates organizations to conform to established institutional logics, our findings suggest that ambiguity provides opportunities for transformation. (p. 1509)

For practical referencing, we have summarized the heuristics of authenticity in a table (Table 4).

The degree to which researchers apply some of the heuristics above depends on their choice of researcher role, voice, and style. A "confessional" style (Van Maanen) would go quite far in sharing personal learnings, introspections, mistakes, iterations, changes in research tactics, and so on, whereas scholars adopting a "realist" posture would camouflage or tone down such moments.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity concerns the research in all aspects, but principally the result, the *substantive contribution*. Does the final writing propose something distinctive, a singular contribution? Does it position this contribution offering space to reflect? Reflexivity—the act of critical (self-)reflection on biases and preferences—has been central to qualitative inquiry and impactful research (MacIntosh et al., 2017), and more so since the debate on the lack of predictability of the management world, and the fragility of the increasingly dynamic and transitory nature of organizations has emerged and taken shape with such terms as postmodern, linguistic, and narrative (Denzin, 1997; Lyotard, 1984). Some even argue that narrative, rather than a method of inquiry, is a process of understanding, of becoming; and that narrative *is*, therefore, reflexivity (Lyle, 2009). There is a consciousness of the coexistence of multiple, albeit connected realities and diverse cultural ways of being and that these realities and ways are constructed, deconstructed, and co-constructed by the actors involved. Reflexivity is strongly linked to authenticity and feeds on some form of articulation of belief, doubt, and experience and how these are resolved to arrive at stable propositions (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). Convincing arises from an interplay of varying points of view—that of the tensions in the method, the actors in the field, the researcher, his or her colleagues, the reviewers, and ultimately the readers. The value of a particular inquiry arises not from its approximation of an ultimate truth, but from its usefulness as an instrument in the social debate leading toward such "truth" (Fendt & Sachs, 2008). Practice issues can no longer presume to be resolved by validated nomothetic knowledge, but must be researched, particularly in co-construction, often across communities (e.g., scholar-practitioner).

Reflexivity here builds on Schön's (1982) *reflective practice* and extends it, in that beyond the reflection-in-action and the reflection-on action (post-thoughts) of both the respondents and the researchers themselves, it establishes a quasi-dialectic with the reader by creating a space for others to engage in critical thought by confronting them—through a powerful narration, a plausible aggregation of findings, and a cultural critique—with unusual, unfamiliar, perhaps contestable, and yet irrevocable propositions. In our sample, it was mainly narratives on issues connected with power that engaged the reader in this way: for example, Korczynski's (2011) study on the dialectical sense of humor at the workplace, in which he frames the power and the (liberating, soothing, and/or

Table 4. Convincing with Authenticity.

Issues of Authenticity	What Emerges From Our Sample	Some Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Be there, deeply and for some time	• Full details about methodology and the respondents/people interviewed are given in the papers.	• Provide details of your stay: how long, how close, what setting (locus, depth, breadth of access). • Detail profiles of the observed actors, and/or respondents.
Understand the field in some detail	• Some papers really detail a lively introduction for readers unfamiliar with the field (see Levina & Orlikowski, 2009, with "management consulting" or Ariño & Ring, 2010, with a candid narration of relationships explained between events).	• Provide rich, descriptive detail of the specific field. • Describe with intimate precision some typical every day actions in the field.
Empathize	• A strong emphasis is given on emotions shared by the key players in the research: fear, happiness, anger	• Choose a seasoned template, deviate late if the data and/or contingencies require it. • Explain your plan on how to get data, close to people, access to meetings, etc. • Then candidly describe what happened, if the plan worked or not, and how you improvised. • What people shared, how they felt; their fears and ambitions about their work and life.
Narrative choices	• Some papers provide a holistic (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Ashforth & Reingen, 2014) or historic (Canato et al., 2013) view of the analysis. Narratives are often clearly reported in the paper (see quotations reported by Costas & Grey, 2014. or the dialog reported by Brink & Benschop, 2014 for examples).	Integrate macro and micro levels: • A holistic dimension that captures the context in its full complexity. • A micro-level in situ approach for sense-making practices, praxis, practitioners' narrative (see Fenton & Langley, 2008). • Use of narratives as artifacts to further deepen the sense-making process.
Probity	• Some authors share their interest in their research theme (Levina & Orlikowski, 2009; Patvardhan et al., 2015) or the method (Harrison & Rouse, 2014) with the reader.	• State your personal interest in the research question. • State if and how interests shifted during the research, and why (insights, contingencies). • State how you dealt with personal bias (narrative interviews, member checking, etc.).
Share the emotion, exhilaration, wondering, doubts	• It seems that most authors share their enthusiasm and/or passion about their research (e.g., C. Wright et al., 2012).	Share the strong feelings that you have experienced in the field: • The empathy, the adventure. • The culture, language, rites you encountered. The insights that triggered your inquiry, aggregation process, and framing. • If/how it changed your perception, your understanding, your beliefs.

humiliating) potential of humor. Canato, Ravasi, and Phillips (2013) begin their study with a respondent quote that pulls the reader right into the dilemma under study, the field reality, the stakes, and the reigning culture:

> Six Sigma had this terrifying thing of not wanting errors. But if you do innovation the way we do, pure risk is something you have to be able to admit and accept . . . . With all these gate reviews, Post-it would have never seen the light . . . and if Six Sigma would block a hypothetical new Post-it, then Six Sigma is not for us. (p. 1724)

Another intriguing example is Costas and Grey's (2014) study on the power of temporality. From the very first sentences, this narrative grasps the reader and presents one disruptive proposition after another, in a vivid, exciting style, peppered with numerous well-chosen respondent quotes. The art is in the balancing of (reassuring) familiarity and (compelling, noteworthy) newness, essentially through bridging tactics. All narratives in our sample generously used "normalizing" rhetoric as bridging heuristics to reassure readers who might be unfamiliar with storytelling research:

> All data were transcribed, usually within the two weeks of data collection. In the first step the researcher read and re-read the data, whilst simultaneously reading studies on the various themes emerging from the data. The process of data analysis and emergence of themes was iterative. *Initially* . . . . The researcher then reread the data to specifically look for . . . . *Following this*, the researcher systematically analyzed her data with respect to . . . . (p. 920, italics added)

One key tension the authors seem to be facing is the balance between discovery, speculation, and documentation (see also Van Maanen et al., 2007), in other words, keeping an open mind versus "an open head." This is not entirely different from managers with normal tendencies to firefight and solve daily operational issues, and how we spend time in executive education to encourage taking time out for reflexivity. This is about being conscious about driving the data versus being driven by the data, the reporting versus the discovery (Charmaz, 2007). In essence, we need to learn when to get our heads out of the data sand and be informed but not be blinded by it, and elevate our thinking into theoretical contributions.

For practical referencing, we have summarized the principal heuristics of reflexivity in a table (Table 5).

Imagination

By imagination, we mean the capability of authors to capture the very essence of a social reality and to hold it up before the reader, in the way of writing, like a match to light a candle. It requires a grain of folly, a vehement inquisitiveness, and sensitivity, spontaneity, inventiveness, intuition, insight, and *passion*. We look at the research interest. Is the phenomena grasped at a particular angle, does the field design lift the study out of the often-banal mainstream, does the researcher seek out "extreme" respondents, are connections surmised in unusual places, and is there any stepping out of the comfort zone, pragmatism, inference to the best explanation (Argote, 1999)? It also concerns a particular resourcefulness in the face of adversity, when things go wrong, when the field closes, when contingency disrupts the research context, and so on. Furthermore, we think of Weick's theory construction through disciplined imagination (Weick, 1989), by paying particular attention to facts, values, goals, memories, or questions we might forget, fear, push aside, or neglect. Such behavior might necessitate the willingness to unlearn (Kleinsasser, 2000), the ability to shed familiar

Table 5. Convincing with Reflexivity.

Issues of Reflexivity	What Emerges From Our Sample	Some Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Reflection-in-action	• Many papers in our sample provide a logical and thoughtful flow of their "journey" including interpretations (e.g., Van Dijk et al., 2011).	• Moments of insights, of feelings in the research journey (keep a memo of these). • Moments of insight/reflection that actors in the field have shared (keep a memo).
Reflection-on-action	• Some papers refer to prior coding process (Smith, 2014) or prior work (Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Moschieri, 2011). Importantly, some papers are written so it allows and encourages the readers to reflect (Harvey & Kou, 2013; Moschieri, 2011; Nag & Gioia, 2012).	• Return to insights ex post, when in a similar context again. • Conduct a meta-analysis of your work (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). • Iterate between analysis and writing up: They are closely related. • Give the reader space to make his or her own reflections.
Propose a writing style to the reader	• Most papers use cautiously well-known terms considered as "traditional vocabulary" such as "thick description" (Patvardhan et al., 2015; Smith, 2014), "constant comparison" (Clark et al., 2010; Nag & Gioia, 2012; Shepherd & Williams, 2014), "transcription and coding" (Paroutis & Heracleous, 2013) "first-order concepts" (Nag & Gioia, 2012).	• Bridge with "normalizing" rhetoric (use traditional methodological vocabulary). • Camouflage the (perceived) subversive nature of the approach. • Legitimize by using well-established terms, such as "thick description," "constant comparison," "conversation between data and theory," "transcription and coding," "first order concepts," etc.
Bridging heuristics	• Most papers emphasize the rigor of their analysis by using words such as "systematically" (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Harvey & Kou, 2013; Pandza, 2011; Smith, 2014), "triangulation" of data or between authors (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Shepherd & Williams, 2014; Smith, 2014) aimed at reassuring the reader about the robustness of the analysis.	Find a balance between familiarity and newness, use bridging rhetoric: • Ethnographic immersion "extended over a period of *n* months" (feels long, shows seriousness). • Data were "systematically analyzed," while "simultaneously," "triangulated between authors," etc. (reassures that process is controlled and rigorous). • Reference leading methodology scholars and works to "validate" steps in the research designs.
Provoke generative moments, hunches, leaps	• Besides (sometimes conventional) grateful to the anonymous reviewers, most papers thank colleagues, key actors in the story of the paper.	Create a receptive climate, a petri dish for serendipity: • Collide with (very!) diverse people in (very!) diverse places at (very!) diverse times. • Empathy and inquisitiveness: engage, go toward people, and ask for feedback or explanation. • Approach people with half-finished ideas and invite them to co-construct.

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Issues of Reflexivity	What Emerges From Our Sample	Some Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Temporal reflexivity	• Some papers underline that phenomenon has to be viewed as distinct, stable, and detached from the past and future, which calls for a reflexivity over time (see, e.g., Reinecke & Ansari, 2015).	• Embed phenomena and field experience in a historical, temporal context. • Build reflexive links between past, present and future actions.
Prior practice	• Some authors rely on archival data prior to data gathering (see Clark et al., 2010; Patvardhan et al., 2015; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015) or prior participant observations (Costas & Grey, 2014).	• Practice fieldwork prior to the study. • Observe and translate intentions, perceptions, and insights into action. • Reflect (in writing) on the learning from this experience and share it.

practices, methodological templates, and so forth and venture into the unknown. Weick (2002) speaks of "dropping one's tools to regain lightness and agility" (p. S15), which relates back to good craftsmanship, as it requires great mastery of research methods to be able to deviate from them.

Did we find evidence of such behaviors and heuristics in the studies of our sample? Yes and no. Many studies had elements of creativity, mainly in terms of methodology (see Paroutis & Heracleous's, 2013, innovative multimethod approach). We see resourceful, creative ways to visualize complex relationships (e.g., Paquin & Howard-Grenville, 2013, who combine process observation with empirical network analysis devices such as mapping and snapshots, and Harrison & Rouse, 2014, who have imagined conceptually and visually appealing illustrations for their models of elastic coordination in creative work), or smart designs (A. L. Wright & Zammuto's, 2013, highly creative desk study), or unusual, inspiring ways to present findings in tables and figures (e.g., Lipparini, Lorenzoni, & Ferriani, 2014, with their unusual and exciting graphics to display knowledge flows between firms; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015, with their culture-grounded clock time/process time approach, and their astute theorizing process model of ambi-temporality; Clark et al.'s, 2010, transitional identity evolution graph). Others have shown great creativity in negotiating access to difficult fields (Harrison & Rouse, 2014, a prime example of creative use of an extreme case setting), or in engaging the respondents, that is, by making them draw or mime their realities, ambitions, fears and relationships, rather than interview them (E. Barrett & Bolt, 2007). But rather than verbalizing these situations, that is, recognizing them as data and/or as strategic moments in the theory-building process, authors have generally toned them down.

In contexts of uncertainty, knowledge and opportunities are not so much sought but constructed based on insights. Insights often lie in unexpected places, in intersections, in micro-caches, in the liminal, and/or in holistic perspectives. We claim that theory is generated at least partly in the unconscious (Crawford, Dickinson, & Leitmann, 2002), and emerges at certain moments of reflection, or of play, or of absent-minded musing (Peirce, 1992), or while washing the dishes. These moments, these hunches, have been referred to as conceptual leaps (Klag & Langley, 2013), or generative moments (Carlsen & Dutton, 2011), moments at the liminal between seeing/understanding a novel construct, and being able to put it into words. These are small frequent occurrences, not one singular magic insight (Van Maanen et al., 2007). They can be provoked. Heuristics can include empathy, a genuine interest in and curiosity for people and phenomena; a strong bias for action and experimentation (Burch & Goshal, 2004), that is, work with what you have and the readiness to accept disgrace, ridicule, embarrassment, confusion, and deceit (Simard & Laberge, 2015);

multiplying encounters with diverse, unusual people in unusual places, and co-construction of ideas; embracing contingency as an opportunity rather than a problem (Harmeling, Sarasvathy, & Freeman, 2009); and hanging out, doing nothing, musing (Peirce, 1992). By creating, through such behaviors, a climate, a petri dish receptive to chance, happenstance, or serendipity, hunches can become process inherent. To invite serendipity, we need to leave some space, some improvisation, some oxygen in our research design and behavior. So, researchers are advised to practice such heuristics as generous hanging around in the field with no apparent purpose, being there before and after the moment when we are supposed to be there, and multiplying encounters with diverse actors, mainstream but also "extreme users" (Brown, 2009). And we need sagacity—a general openness and motivation (Weisenfeld, 2009), the capacity to multiply conceptual leaps and weave them together (Mintzberg, 2005), to discover from a very small number of observations and the opportunism to seize it when it comes our way.

Do we get published because we "go mainstream" or because we are creative? One key tension seems to be between how much imagination authors use throughout the study process and the extent to which this can be written up at all, and/or in a way that defies the norms. Although we found glimpses of high creativity in our (selective) sample, authors must wonder, like we did, why anybody would take the risk of "being too different." When today's canon is a clear explanation of the research process, reference to a handful of seminal methodology scholars, a somewhat repetitive language (labels), table structures and theory-building levels on tables, packaged into a classical, linear write-up. In other words, while some (few) lively storytelling narratives have broken ground, digging deeply into the true potential of inquisitive and exploratory analysis, many may not make it into leading management journals yet.

For practical referencing, we have summarized the heuristics of imagination in a table (Table 6).

Discussion

This is a study on a sample of a large variety of qualitative approaches. We based our independent choices (Sandelowski, 1995; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) on our experiences and our passions as qualitative scholars in a continuing strive to become *subjective thinkers* in a Kierkegaardian sense, and at the same time armed with contemporary pragmatism and craftsman's integrity that makes us question and doubt our work and relentlessly reexamine our assumptions (Ryle, 1968). We have focused on the matter of *writing* qualitative research, as a central element of interpretation and meaning making. We have set out to distil what constitutes persuasive writing, and how it can appeal to and convince readers, including reviewers. We have displayed our condensate along five key writing practices, emerging from reading, debating, and negotiating the texts at hand, and we have proposed, for each, a set of actionable heuristics.

We purport that management researchers could and should matter not merely as researchers, but as human beings who set out to understand other human beings, and who through that probing come to discover new and better selves, if not different, and reexamine stances, beliefs, and ideas, and stimulate our readers to do the same and understand the worlds that we shape and that shapes us. But to make a difference, *we must be read*, just like composers must be heard and (visual) artists must be seen. And this requires persuasive, and often amazing, writing. We must also be capable of writing relevant knowledge (Courpasson, Arellano-Gault, Brown, & Lounsbury, 2008)—a subjective construct that starts with asking good, actionable questions on many urgent organizational and societal issues at hand (Jonsen et al., 2010). *Writing* is central to such research and intricate in its process. We examined how scholars who have passed the test of publication have negotiated the tensions along five distinct but related *practices of convincing*—see Figure 1—and proposed some actionable heuristics for each (Tables 2-6). Rather than proposing a template, we suggest and maintain that each writer must find his or her personal style and footprint in line with his or her research interests,

Table 6. Convincing with Imagination.

Issues Concerning Imagination	What Emerges From Our Sample	Some Pragmatic, Actionable Heuristics
Trigger the unconscious	• All papers offer some creativity at some point: some through visuals (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009), taxonomy (Korczynski, 2011), sampling (Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011), methodology (Paquin & Howard-Grenville, 2013).	• Understand conceptual leaps and their value as data and significant moments. • Understand that there is not one, but many small ones, that it is an ongoing partly subconscious cognitive activity.
Contingency	• If most researchers think of contingency in terms of limits and bias, some papers in our sample turn it into a more positive light (see Harvey & Kou, 2013).	• Treat contingency, happenstance, etc. as an opportunity, rather than a constraint. • Make contingencies transparent in your writing.
Abduction	• Most authors have the continuous interplay between emerging concepts and data and some of them used an abductive methodology (see, e.g., O'Mahoney et al., 2013).	• Go beyond induction, to explore not only "what is" but also what "might be." • Use abductive tools from innovation methods (lean start-up, effectuation, design thinking).

personality, stance, empirical field, theoretical ambition, and targeted audience. We offer this study in the hope that it can inspire scholars to venture more often and more deeply into the challenges and pleasures of qualitative writing and thus discover its infinite generative power.

Once written, qualitative inquiry may still be hard to publish, but once it is, it is intensely read, appreciated, and cited.[8] So where could qualitative inquiry be going? Early seminal studies, thanks to their detailed process descriptions, have begun to serve as role models well before they even entered the research manuals: Dutton and Dukerich (1991), Larson (1992), Van Maanen (1988), Charmaz (1983), Orlikowski (1993), Isabella (1990), Eisenhardt (1989), and later Corley and Gioia (2004), to name a few. Later, more explicitly methodological contributions proposed clear and rigorous conceptual underpinnings to the different emerging approaches, which in turn gave confidence to many novice scholars to take the path of qualitative inquiry, including a much-needed focus on studying processes and temporality (Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Srikanth, Harvey, & Peterson, 2016). These (comprehensive elements of) boilerplates bring craftsmanship and confidence to scholars, but also canons of rigor, substance, and scienticity to supervisors, editors, and reviewers.

This perhaps comes at a price insofar as the writing (up) of qualitative research is today *expected* to look like an "Eisenhardt template" or a "Gioia template" (term used by Langley & Abdallah, 2011); "the Gioia method for building grounded theory" (as recently phrased by Meister, Sinclair, & Jehn, 2017) or a "Langley template." Qualitative designs are becoming kosher—on the condition that they display a recognizable structure that typically includes such terms and labels as "data," "coding," "analysis," "triangulation," "themes," "aggregated dimensions," and so forth.

It appears that we still tend to perceive scientific method as a tool in a quest for objectivity and, "by innuendo and osmosis" (Stout, 2001), associate objectivity with linear cognitive processes. Subjectivity—*creativity*—is by contrast undesirable. But research can—and must—be creative. If we as scholars want to take on the big questions, if we want to contribute, however modestly, toward addressing the challenging societal, cultural, economic, and technological impacts of an accelerated digital world and address some of the daunting dysfunctions and asymmetries at hand, we might need to think differently about the world, perhaps radically differently. When studying novel phenomena we often have neither much data, nor theory to test. We are thus doubly in the unknown and must imagine *new ways of researching new ways of managing and organizing*. Abductive reasoning, for example, is one form of research that can do that, and go beyond explanation ("what is"), toward imagining new possible futures ("what could be").[9] See also Van Maanen et al. (2007).

Moving forward in the field, we could try to break down some of the silos of our disciplines and venture beyond our comfort zone (Cheng, Henisz, Roth, & Swaminathan, 2009; Lee & Brown, 2013). We have a responsibility to work hand in hand with scholars from other disciplines, including our own historic reference disciplines (Locke, 2015), practitioners, and a wide variety of other stakeholders, across functions, cultures, and continents (Heracleous, 2011; Pfeffer, 2007; see also Kuhn, 1978; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The big questions, those that matter, may require it. This is a challenge since social realities are, as stated, messy, stressful, idiosyncratic, irrational, context-bound, and contingent. Interpretive techniques of many kinds, some accounted for in this paper, can "provide a deeper and richer understanding of the issues under investigation" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520), and unpack the phenomena of interest (Birkinshaw, Brannen, & Tung, 2011), such as complex, fleeting, and contingent moments of managerial agency. Suddaby (2015) and Sword (2014) suggest that academics could improve their writing by taking inspiration and *analogies* (Oppenheimer, 1955) from other genres (see Lord, Dinh, & Hoffman, 2015, for a recent example). We advocate such a transdisciplinary mind-set, capturing not only what each science can teach us but also what sciences may see together when they collaborate (Khapova & Arthur, 2011). This could also include writing in different and novel ways, and also for practitioners' outlets—excellent rhetorical practice and communicating with an audience typically larger than academia.

Regardless of the abundance of insightful recommendations available at our fingertips, we remain in a *dilemmatic space* between the rising demand for qualitative inquiry on the one hand, and a cultural, structural, and technical incapacity of our still dominantly positivist academic world to actually process such inquiry on the other. We believe that this dilemma is temporary. It characterizes all nascent innovations, institutional disruptions, and/or paradigm changes facing a "glass ceiling" (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). Innovators deploy rhetorical strategies to construct meanings and justify interpretations (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) until a critical mass, an institutional "tipping point" (Gladwell, 2000) is reached, at which point enough individuals in a system have adopted—or learned to deal with—a paradigm, so that its further rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining (Angehrn & Nabeth, 1997). Importantly, systemic shifting is costly (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Thus, until now we may have been somewhat comfortably caught in the echo chamber of our own institutionalized voice and norms for persuasive writing. Nevertheless, the tipping point *is* within reach.

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Notes

1. While we acknowledge—with St. Pierre and Roulston (2006)—that qualitative research "is not one thing" (p. 678), for the sake of this study, we use frequently the terms *qualitative research*, *qualitative inquiry*, and *qualitative research methodology* broadly, referring to nonquantitative, inductive research, context laden and with interpretive elements, typically aimed at "holistic understanding." At the same time, we concur but

do not engage in the qualitative versus quantitative debate, as this is indeed problematic in numerous ways (for discussions, see Locke, 2015; Walsh et al., 2015).

2. E.g., *British Journal of Management* (2015), *Strategic Management Journal* (2014), *Management Decision* (2012), *Journal of International Business Studies* (2011), *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (2010), *Organizational Research Methods* (2008).
3. "Novelty" seems to be an exception, mentioned considerably less by reviewers/editors than by authors.
4. The research section of the *Financial Times* ranking seemed of some relevance because scholars' tenure progress at many European business schools is informed largely by their publications in outlets on that list. We do not endorse such hit parades but acknowledge their importance.
5. W. K. Smith (2014) thanks Corley in her acknowledgments, and indeed this study resembles that of Corley and Gioia (2004) in that the method description and tables (all, but especially Table 3, p. 1598) are of such detail and precision that they could almost be used as a template.
6. This somewhat isomorphic procedure comes with the recommendations (perhaps not altogether intentionally) of many thought leaders: For Van Maanen (1998), "examples must be our guide" (p. xxv). And for Taylor and Bogdan (1998), "Perhaps the best way to learn inductive analysis is by reading qualitative studies and articles to see how other researchers have made sense out of their data. So, study up—not to find theoretical frameworks to impose on your data, but to learn how others interpret and use data." (p. 141).
7. This study features over 860 citations in Google Scholar by the end of April, 2017.
8. For example, in 2005, of 17 papers that received more than one vote in the *Academy of Management Journal* poll, 11 were qualitative studies (Barley, 2006, p. 19).
9. Abduction is concerned with the generation of ideas, not just their understanding. It is conjectural and ampliative. Such research (informed by pragmatism; Barley, Meyer, & Gash, 1988; Peirce, 1905; Watson, 1997) works with doubt (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008), speculations, conjectures, and assessments of plausibility (Weick, 2005). It touches the realm of innovation and entrepreneurship, and scholars can seek inspiration from and find a rich toolbox in such literature (Dew & Sarasvathy, 2007; Katila & Shane, 2005; Leonard-Barton, 1995).

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