

Qualitative Research: Examining the Misconceptions

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For many in the academic circle, it is a matter of some contestation as whether a qualitative research is good enough to be qualified as academic research. The paper pursues two most widely leveled allegations against qualitative research—it is devoid of scientific rigor and ‘anything goes’ in qualitative research. The author argues that such allegations are misplaced and exist because of the lack of understanding of paradigmatic differences between qualitative and quantitative research, and due to the dearth of adoption of good qualitative research practices. The goal of this paper is two-fold: firstly, to examine the soundness of such allegations against qualitative research, and secondly, to report qualitative research practices to systematically counter the allegations of lack of rigor and ‘anything goes’.

Key Words: Interpretivist research, Methodological purposiveness, Methodological rigor, Qualitative research, Quantitative research

INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indian management education, it may not be an exaggeration to state that the contribution of qualitative researchers has been lagging in building scholarship. While qualitative researchers from reputed universities in the country have made remarkable contribution in sociology, history, political science, etc., they have remained ‘invisible’ in organizational and management research (Panda and Gupta, 2007; and Gupta and Awasthy, 2015). In management education, qualitative researchers are often compelled to face a hostile audience with a positivist epistemological stand. Qualitative research is alleged to be merely story telling; full of anecdotes and personal impressions of researchers. Moreover, qualitative research is labeled as unscientific because its findings cannot often be generalized (Bailey, White, and Pain, 1999). Allegations of these natures have stifled the growth of qualitative research within the management education. Consequently, it has given rise to the notion that qualitative research and researchers are of inferior quality (Groth, 2010).

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Much of the stigma attached to qualitative research arises due to a skewed assessment model. The benchmark designed for quantitative research is often applied to evaluate qualitative research which invariably ignores the differences in philosophical worldviews between these two approaches. As a result, opinions on qualitative research are formed with half-hearted information.

In-depth discussions on the epistemological and ontological differences between these two approaches are beyond the scope of the paper (for details see, Guba and Lincoln (1994). Rather it picks on a few selected allegations questioning the credibility of qualitative research. The selected allegations are sourced from the personal reflection of the author about many conversations with both qualitative as well as quantitative early career researchers and doctoral students. I call them allegations because these are assertions made by sections of the research community based on their opinions, which are influenced by their exposure and faith in certain paradigm, and not necessarily provided with any proof. Accordingly this paper is concerned with two practical questions: How valid are the bases of such allegations? And what can be done to counter these allegations? I take up these questions first through an exploration of why such allegations arise. Then I discussed how fair these allegations are, and finally, I reported some guidelines used by established qualitative researchers to counter these allegations.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH HAS NO RIGOR; ITS ALL KAHAANI¹

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

Why qualitative research is considered as not being “scientific” and “rigorous”? I tried to examine the works in general critiquing qualitative research to understand the basis for such allegations. Interestingly there is hardly any scholarly work published critiquing qualitative research. It is found that most of the works dealing with the quality issues in qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Hammersley, 2007; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Krefting, 1991; Mays and Pope, 1995; Seale and Silverman, 1997; Merrick, 1999;

¹ *Kahaani* means ‘Story’ in Hindi.

Payne and Williams, 2005; Cho and Trent, 2006; and Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013) are in defense of the qualitative approach rather than in critique of the same. Only exceptions are some textbooks on social research methods which highlighted 'limitations' of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Even these limitations are presented as opinions about qualitative research and no citations to scholarly work are being made while discussing these limitations. These findings strengthens the apprehensions that the critique of qualitative research is merely allegations reflecting a widely accepted mindset and without any 'scientific' evidence.

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

The term "rigorous" is closely associated with scientific methods. All scientific methods are considered to be rigorous because of their focus on thoroughness and fixation with accuracy. On examination of these attributes with qualitative approach one gets the impression that qualitative research is too vague (very little specificity is involved), rarely focused on accuracy and highly flexible. Qualitative research is seen as lacking the rigor pertinent to truly scientific work because they use interview transcripts, verbal reports, notes, etc., which are often projected as 'soft data' (Cherardi and Turner, 2002). However, the perceived lack of rigor due to type of data being used cannot hold a standing because as Trochim and Donnelly (2001) argues that at certain level qualitative and quantitative data are inseparable. As a research method qualitative approach acknowledges the presence of subjectivity and how it affects objectivity (Ratner, 2002). In contrast, quantitative research is considered as rigorous as it involves direct manipulation, objective measurement, and statistical testing of hypothesis (Packer, 2011). Qualitative research does not involve any statistical modeling and so the extreme severity of mathematization is remarkably missing from qualitative method. Within a positivist paradigm, where there is often a "physics envy" (Thomas and Wilson, 2011) with a resulting obsession towards emulation of quantitative methods associated with natural science like physics; this lack of use of mathematics often adds up to the notion that qualitative researchers hardly give any real treatment to the data.

Qualitative research is considered to be too subjective, it is difficult to replicate and can't be generalized (Bryman, 2012). Be it conferences or recruitment seminars in business schools, the integrity of qualitative research has always been challenged. One comment is heard often that the validity or truth value of scientific claims or observations in qualitative work are impossible to establish (Jessor, 1996). Qualitative research is generally considered to be a second-class science and is of poor standard. Some typical questions faced by qualitative researchers are, "How can you generalize from a small, non-random sample?"; "If somebody else did this study, would they get the same results?"; "How do you know that researcher is not biased and just findings what he or she expect to find" (Merriam, 1995, p. 51). These questions require sincere deliberations to establish the quality of qualitative research.

Findings in qualitative research are often perceived to be product of unsystematic views of the researcher about what is significant and what is not. Unlike quantitative research where the 'data speaks for itself', in qualitative research the distinction between objective analysis of data and researchers own impression about the data is sometime seems to be blurred. Since it is viewed as unsystematic and often depends upon the impression of the researcher, qualitative research is considered to be difficult to replicate (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). Qualitative research is often done with a small number of participants in a certain organization or locality. The sample in qualitative research is generally not taken as a 'representative sample' of any population. So, it is generally difficult to assess how the findings can be applicable to a different setting.

The second reason that researchers sometime call qualitative research as *kahaani* because it seems to many that in qualitative research 'anything goes' (Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Porter, 2003). The view of 'anything goes' or 'epistemological anarchism' introduced by Feyerabend (1993) argues that strict scientific method does not help scientific progress rather it is actually some amount of ad-hoc postulates breaking the rule ensure scientific progress. In a sense this ad-hoc postulates defy the typical rationalistic model of theory building. Some qualitative researchers use this view of anarchism to avoid sound justification for their action and thereby raising doubts about the rigor within the research. In the name of post-modernism, attempts are made to justify many poor quality research in which "the maxim 'anything goes' is used not as a complaint but as a recommendation" (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, and Silverman, 2004, p. 107) Positivist researchers sometime find that there is lack of explanation for methods used in qualitative research and consequently no protocol has been followed while conducting the research. It becomes difficult to establish what the researcher actually did and how he or she arrived at the conclusion of the research (Bryman, 2012). It appears that qualitative researchers simply put a label to a method adopted by them based on convenience and personal whims and fancies.

The allegation of 'anything goes' follows because of the perception that qualitative research does not have a well-defined protocol. Protocol is the blueprint of the research

connecting research question to data collection and analysis. Unlike quantitative research, which is usually carried out with a well-defined protocol, qualitative research sometimes struggles to put a cohesive design that establishes the relationship among research question, research methods and desired results (Silverman, 2013). This apparent arbitrariness in qualitative research approach feed the popular myth of qualitative research as being the weakest form of research design.

Thus, the qualitative research being a *Kahaani* broadly revolved around two discontentment – first, there is an absence of scientific techniques and rigor, and second, qualitative research is merely a reflection of capricious ideas of the researcher. But the veracity of these accounts require serious scrutiny before jumping into any kind of conclusion. Taking into account this précis, in the next two sections, I examine the standing of these allegations against qualitative research and present few strategies countering these allegations.

THE MISPLACED ALLEGATION OF KAHAANI

Qualitative research is a mix of three interconnected concepts—ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researchers approach the world with a set of ideas (ontology) focusing on a set of questions (epistemology) and then examine (methodology) the question in a certain way. Out of these three activities, qualitative researchers have been facing criticism in only one of the activities, i.e., the case of methodology. The way data has been treated and analyzed in qualitative research are often been criticized by their opponents, predominantly researchers rooted in natural science (Pratt, 2009). The above discussed allegations about qualitative approach being unscientific, devoid of rigor, and guided by whims and fancies of researchers are all directed towards the methodology in qualitative research. But does qualitative research actually have no rigor as suggested by the above discussed allegations?

The assumption underlying all these allegations is that quantitative and qualitative approaches are differently abled in their ability to ensure rigor in their findings (Mays and Pope, 1995). But the distinction between qualitative and quantitative approach is more about their ontological and epistemological stands than about abilities to ensure rigor. The problem is that many quantitative researchers consider qualitative methodologies as non-scientific because it does not adhere to certain way of doing inquiry. Social scientists have often argued that science is not about methodologies but about the way of posing a question (Shavelson and Towne, 2004). Infact one of the greatest methodological fallacies in social research is the belief that science is a particular set of techniques. More than a set of technique, science is a state of mind, or attitude, and the organizational conditions allowing that attitude to be expressed (Dingwall, 1992). All researches, both quantitative and qualitative, to be qualified as scientific inquiry “should pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically, should

be linked to relevant theory, should use methods that permit direct investigations of the questions, should provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning to rule out counter-interpretations, should replicate and generalize findings across studies and should disclose research data and methods to enable and encourage professional scrutiny and critique" (Packer, 2011, p. 17).

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

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

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

and multiple meanings. Such multiplicity in method makes it difficult to develop a single framework for assessing reliability, validity and other quality issues. In absence of any uniform assessment criteria, qualitative techniques appear to be highly subjective.

Qualitative research is interpretivist in nature and carried out to capture the meaning given by individuals to its surroundings. Qualitative researcher approaches the empirical reality as multiple realities constructed by the perceivers and attaches meaning to these realities. For the researcher to understand the complexities of multiple realities entangled in the perception and meaning-making process of the individual, it becomes imperative to remain inseparable from the individual's experiences that constructs reality (Bradley, 1993). These uses of multiple meaning and realities in qualitative research make it difficult for findings of such research work to remain applicable in different settings. Likewise, qualitative research is highly contextual and so the issue of ensuring generalizability becomes marginally irrelevant in the discipline of qualitative research (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). This is not to argue that findings from qualitative research can never be generalized; rather the purpose of these researches is not focused entirely on developing generalizable findings.

COUNTERING THE ALLEGATIONS

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

There are two issues related to assessment of quality in qualitative research. First, the models used to assess quantitative research are rarely relevant to qualitative research and not all qualitative research can be assessed with same strategies (Krefting, 1991). It has already been reported in the previous section on the paradigmatic difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Because of such differences the commonly used framework of reliability, validity and generalizability in quantitative approach largely remain irrelevant in case of qualitative work. By definition qualitative research is multimethod and borrows technique from different traditions. Under such circumstances, "is a single set of qualitative criteria possible?" to assess the quality of qualitative work (Hammersley, 2007). Since qualitative research is a combination of several traditions, and philosophical stands, it is often argued that it is not desirable to have a single set of criteria to assess a good qualitative research work (Pratt, 2009).

But considering the resistance against qualitative research and demands for explicit criteria to do systematic reviewing of qualitative work, many qualitative researchers (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; and Hammersley, 2007), have laid out 'guidelines' to ensure rigor in qualitative work. The basic strategy to ensure rigor is systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation and communication (Mays and Pope, 1995). With these guidelines qualitative researchers have made attempt to establish the trustworthiness of their research work to the critique. The two premises of the *kaahani* allegation – first, there is no methodological rigor and hence no truth value in findings and second, 'anything goes' are countered by qualitative researchers as they laid down some guidelines for qualitative researchers. In the following sections I discuss these guidelines that are evolved from practices followed by many qualitative researchers in their respective traditions.

THE 'LACK OF TRUTH VALUE OR TRUSTWORTHINESS' IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Reliability, internal validity, generalizability and objectivity are some of the important criteria to assess the truthfulness of any positivist research work. These criteria make sense in case of quantitative research as they originated from the positivist research tradition only. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that these criteria are inappropriate for evaluating research that is conducted within a naturalistic paradigm. There is an acknowledgment of the fact that researchers need alternative models suiting qualitative designs to ensure rigor (Krefting, 1991). Many qualitative researchers (Guba, 1981; and Kirk and Miller, 1986) have proposed model for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative work. Among these models, Guba's model will be discussed because it is relatively well developed and has been extensively used by researchers in recent years. According to Guba (1981), qualitative researchers should address four major concerns related to trustworthiness, which are truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. These concerns or aspects along with their parallel terms in both quantitative and qualitative research are shown in Table 1.

For qualitative research to gain credibility, it should adhere to data collection procedures that are well defined and accepted across the community of researcher. "Prolonged engagement" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) at the site of research can also lend credibility to research findings by developing contextual familiarity of the researcher. It helps when the qualitative researcher explicitly describes the ways in which he or she developed contextual familiarity of the research site. For example, Rerup and Feldman (2011) studies the process of trial-and-error learning in execution of organizational routine and their role in enactment of organizational schemata. They studied the Learning Lab Denmark and followed a longitudinal inductive research design. As their focus was on understanding organizational routine and related micro-actions, Rerup developed a long-term engagement of 7 years with the field. The fieldwork was carried from November 2001 to June 2004. The researchers carried two more additional field visits in June 2005 and January 2008. They admit that such

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

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

Source: Guba, 1981

prolonged engagement with field help them in developing a better understanding of the context. Professional background of the researcher can also add to the credibility of research findings. Triangulation of data through the use of various sources of data collection is crucial for credibility of qualitative research. Many qualitative researchers customarily adopt multiple sources of data collection without making explicit the reasons behind multiple sources. It is important to communicate to the audience, the significance of multiple sources of data collection and how they contribute to the overall truthfulness of the research findings. For example, in their study on emergence of multidisciplinary service (MDP) as a new organizational form in the accounting field of Canada, Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) collected data from multiple sources like interviews, and archival data. They gave details of the two categories of informants for interviews and five categories of archival data as they discussed in methodology. For the purpose of triangulations, they used ‘member checks’—they verbally presented their framework to few industry experts. Greenwood and Suddaby’s study on big five accounting firm is ground breaking work on institutional entrepreneurship both because of its contribution to theory development as well as methodological robustness.

Unlike in a quantitative tradition, the findings from qualitative research often deal with a specific set of participants and specific environment. Hence, it is difficult to demonstrate the findings that are applicable to other situations and population. Infact, many qualitative researchers are against the need for generalizability of the findings. Creswell (2012) argues that the “idea of generalizability holds little meaning

for most qualitative researcher" (p. 63). However, a contrasting view is also offered by other qualitative researchers (Yin, 2013). Their argument is that although a case is unique it still may be a fit within a broader group. Hence, the prospect of transferability need not be neglected. These scholars argue that even if the researcher does not directly make the inferences on transferability, the practitioners may find that their situations are similar in the study and may relate the findings to their own situations. Thus, in qualitative research, the transferability is primarily decided by the reader of the study, and not by the researcher.

The changing nature of phenomenon studied under qualitative study makes the issue of reliability problematic. Human nature is not static or the subject of study under any naturalistic inquiry is not stable over a period of time. Hence, it is not possible to find the similar findings by various researchers even if they study the same phenomenon over a different period of time. In a qualitative research, the credibility to a large extent ensures dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Erlandson, 1993; and Nelson, 2008). Measures like overlapping of methods (interviews and field visits to collect data) ensure credibility of findings, which in turn takes care of the dependability of the study. Some direct measures, like developing a protocol of the research design detailing sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods, enhance the transparency and subsequent dependability of the study. Such detailed description of protocol increases the likelihood of anyone following the prototype model under the context depicted within the study to find similar results. For example, the work by Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) on institutional entrepreneurship presents a detailed discussion on steps followed for identifying data sources, process of data collection, and their analysis.

In order to establish quality in a qualitative research, steps should also be taken to ensure that research findings are the result of experiences and ideas of informants, and not of the preferences of the researcher. Triangulation can ensure confirmability and reduce the effect of researcher's bias. A detailed methodological description can enable scrutinizers to understand the adherence to research practices and acceptability of findings. Practices like 'audit trail' allows readers to trace the course of data analysis by showing how the data leading to formation of findings are gathered and processed during the course of research work. For example, in their ethnographic study of reinsurance trading in Lloyd's of London, Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, and Spee (2014) presents a detailed description of their data collected through interviews, field observations, and archival sources and how these are coded and analyzed. Their exhaustive description of data analysis gives clarity to the reader about how they treated the data collected from field.

'ANYTHING GOES' IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The apparent arbitrariness in qualitative methodologies is due to lack of definitive rationale for data collection and analysis. The link between abstraction of ideas proposed

and empirical observations based on which such abstractions are proposed, needs to be made explicit to the audience so as to present the study as a systematic investigation. Morse and Richards (2002) have pointed out that the qualitative method is actually endowed with two principles—*methodological purposiveness* and *methodological congruence* (see the works of Jain and Sharma (2013), Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), and Lok (2010) for example) which deals with the issue of establishing the link between research question, data collection, and analysis.

Methodological purposiveness, the first principle, explains how a particular research purpose and question lead researchers to certain data source and analysis. Table 2 gives an example of methodological purposiveness relating choice of designs, data sources, and technique of analysis with research question. The principle of methodological purposiveness is an extension of the issue of ‘transparency’ in writing. In methodological purposiveness, the focus is on being transparent in presenting the research design by showing linkages among various components of the design. For example, Lok (2010) in his work on the rise of the logic of shareholder value in UK presents a detailed description on how his theory on work practices leads to identification of sources of data as well as guided the analysis of data. In his work, the tabular representation of data analysis showing linkage among identity constructions, quotes from informants and related codes given by the researcher clearly establish the required transparency for qualitative research work. The second principle, methodological congruence, refers to the ability of the researcher to think in a way that fit the investigation, method, and analysis. For example, if the researcher is working with a ‘grounded theory’ design, then she must be able to think as a grounded theorist. This way, the researcher can use the same set of data (e.g., interview scripts) and same set of technique (e.g., coding) to come up with a different set of findings (e.g., Typology).

To summarize, the perception related to rigor in qualitative research is a stereotyped notion generated from looking at the work of half-backed qualitative researcher. In the language of quantitative research, these works are not the ‘representative sample’ of the whole gamut of qualitative work done in management research. Qualitative research in its original form do address the issue of rigor (van der Meer, Spowart, and

Table 2: Methodological Purposiveness

Research Questions	Methods that may be Appropriate	Likely Data Sources	Analysis Technique
Question about the meaning (what is the meaning of...?) and about the core or essence of phenomena or experience	Phenomenology	Audiotaped, in-depth conversations; phenomenological literature, art, films.	Theme-ing, memoing and reflective writing

Table 2 (Cont.)

Research Questions	Methods that may be Appropriate	Likely Data Sources	Analysis Technique
Observational questions (What are the behavioral patterns of ..?) and descriptive questions about values, beliefs, and practices of a cultural group (What is going on here?)	Ethnography	Participant observation, field notes, unstructured or structured interviews, documents, records, photographs, focus groups	Thick description, rereading notes, storing information and coding by topics, storying, coding, recording field notes and diagramming to show patterns and processes
Process questions about changing experience over time or its stages and phases (What is the process of becoming..?) or understanding questions (What are the dimensions of this experience..?)	Grounded Theory	Interviews, participant and nonparticipant observations, conversations recorded in diaries and field notes, comparative instances, personal experiences	Theoretical sensitivity, developing concepts, coding at categories, open coding for theory generation, focused memoing,
Questions seek to explain some present circumstances ("why" and "how" some social phenomenon works)	Case Study	Documentation, archival records, interviews, observations-direct and participant, artifacts	Pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, Logic models, cross-case synthesis, coding, etc.

Source: Adopted from Morse and Richard (2002) and Yin (2009)

Hart, 2013) as evident in qualitative work published in some top ranked journal (Binder, 2007; and Swan, Bresnen, Robertson, Newell, and Dopson, 2010). To do statistical analysis, one requires training; similarly, qualitative data analysis also demands systematic training and hand-holding support to early career qualitative researchers (van der Meer, Spowart and Hart, 2013). In absence of good quality training on qualitative research, there are many ill-trained qualitative researchers struggling to produce good quality work. The allegation of *kahaani* can be countered once these researchers get support in writing and conducting qualitative research.

CONCLUSION

This paper has given an overview of selected allegations against the quality of qualitative research. Apart from examining the truthfulness in these allegations, this paper also explores the alternative guidelines to counter these allegations. Written from the perspective based on personal reflections and insights arising out of the experiences from communicating with other researchers in management schools, this paper does

not claim to hold a dispassionate view on the topic. This paper, by no means, discourages management scholars to take up qualitative research. Rather, the attempt is to draw attention to certain hindrances pertinent to qualitative research. Management scholarship should get rid of the tendency to look at quantitative and qualitative research as rivals. These approaches can never be rivals as they are suited for areas that are mutually exclusive. Qualitative research can fight these popular allegations only when it enjoys a large-scale acceptance, which should come from both academia and business. It is heartening to see qualitative research methods gaining ground in addressing business problems. For example, areas related to consumer market research have started using qualitative methods like ethnography to understand the decision making process of consumer.

For qualitative research to have growing significance in academia and business, professional research bodies need to be formed for promotion of qualitative research. The 'strategy-as-practice' group is an interesting example of how promotion of a research community can help in promoting research in certain direction (Bell and Thorpe, 2013). Research in strategy has been dominated by positivist oriented publications till the emergence of the strategy-as-practice group promoting interpretive research. The group starting in 2003 began promoting their research agenda through publishing 'special issues' in various high-ranked journals. They conducted tracks, symposia and workshops at reputed management conferences and encouraged doctoral students to take up research in strategy-as-practice domain. They established a website which acts as repository of resources and a discussion space for researchers. The group also published several handbooks and in last ten years the group has been able to put together an influential research community by developing a strong identity. For promotion of qualitative research in business schools of India, there is a need for similar efforts. Finally, the purpose of research is to unveil the truth; the truth beyond the idea of exactness can only be explored when the personal interpretation of social actions is valued adequately. Such interpretations can only be valued through a qualitative approach. So, the challenge remains before qualitative researcher is to make a clear case for usefulness of qualitative approaches in management research.

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