



This is a repository copy of *The handicap of lists, QROM and the future*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/91412/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Lee, W.J. (2015) The handicap of lists, QROM and the future. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 10 (4). pp. 350-354. ISSN 1746-5648

<https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2015-1306>

---

**Reuse**

Unless indicated otherwise, fulltext items are protected by copyright with all rights reserved. The copyright exception in section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 allows the making of a single copy solely for the purpose of non-commercial research or private study within the limits of fair dealing. The publisher or other rights-holder may allow further reproduction and re-use of this version - refer to the White Rose Research Online record for this item. Where records identify the publisher as the copyright holder, users can verify any specific terms of use on the publisher's website.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>



Emerald

Qualitative Research  
in Organizations  
and Management

## The handicap of lists, QROM and the future

Journal:	<i>Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management</i>
Manuscript ID:	QROM-07-2015-1306.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Qualitative research, Journal quality lists, Insider accounts, New technology, ABS List

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

Review

The handicap of lists, *QROM* and the future

**Purpose:** This short article considers the contribution that this journal has made to the development of qualitative research over the ten years of *QROM*'s lifetime and its potential to contribute further in the future.

**Design/ Methodology/ Approach:** Reflections are made from the author's standpoint as a longstanding associate editor of *QROM* and a UK academic in the field of accounting.

**Findings:** Concern is expressed about the way in which the use of a particular journal list in UK institutions – namely the ABS list – has skewed development away from qualitative research during the hitherto lifetime of *QROM* but how, despite that handicap, *QROM* has made a notable contribution.

**Originality/ Value:** A reflection informed by both the disciplinary and geographical context as well as ten years' service as an Associate Editor of this journal.

The handicap of lists, *QROM* and the future**Introduction**

I am delighted to have received this invitation to comment on the development of qualitative research over the last ten years, the contribution made by *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management (QROM)* in that period and a prospective agenda for the future. I will address each of these areas in turn from the perspective of someone who has been an associate editor of *QROM* since its inception and who is working in the UK in the discipline of accounting. Reflections like this can only ever be partial, so my initial comments will discuss a handicap to *QROM* before I proceed to draw out two of the important contributions that I believe *QROM* to have made and then I suggest ways in which those contributions may advance further along with expression of another emergent agenda item for qualitative researchers. I will end with an aspiration for the future.

**Qualitative research development since 2006**

Looking back to 2006, qualitative research had made inroads in a number of management disciplines. A useful yardstick was provided by members of the business and management (B&M) panel of the 2001 research assessment exercise (RAE) that indicated that a number of disciplines – including: Accounting; Information Systems; Marketing; Organizational theory; Strategic Management; and Technology, innovation and operations management – exhibited evidence of qualitative research and alternative epistemological positions to positivism (Bessant *et al*, 2003). For example, my own discipline of accounting had developed a highly respected “alternative academic super-structure” of conferences and journals which were of at least of equal standing to those containing more conventional, quantitative research (Guthrie and Parker, 2004, p 10) and which embraced qualitative research, the underlying intellectual frameworks and the challenging questions that such work facilitated. Guthrie and Parker’s view reflected the comments of the 2001 RAE B&M panel who found that “The UK produces accounting research that is clearly world class, but ... being world class in accounting research is not identical to having impact on US research” (Bessant *et al*, 2003, p 56). In the accounting discipline, the alternative academic super-structure continues to allow qualitative research to make an important contribution as represented by others’ reviews of the field (for examples, Humphrey, 2014; Parker, 2012).

In the UK context there was, however, a development that has hindered qualitative research across the full range of management disciplines; that was the gradual emergence of the Association of Business School’s guide to journal quality – hereafter the “ABS List” - from 2004 (Nedeva, Boden & Nugroho, 2012). Official assessments of quality, such as the RAE, rely on panel members’

1  
2  
3 painstaking reading and comparison of articles; by contrast, the ABS List encourages reading quality  
4 from a ranking given to the journals in which that work is published. The methodology used to  
5 compile the ABS List has always been quite opaque, but there is some evidence that aggregate  
6 citations of a journal influence its rank. This creates two kinds of bias against new journals that  
7 publish qualitative research. Firstly, new journals have less history, so citations will be lower.  
8 Secondly, qualitative journals publish work from a broad range of epistemological stances, which  
9 leads to those articles being cited less frequently than ones that promote a narrow focus by  
10 upholding a positivist pursuit of single truths. American journals that lean towards positivism  
11 dominate the highest rankings in the ABS List, even though research quality audit panels state world  
12 class research does not equate with publishing in American journals. Unfortunately, the ABS List has  
13 been used in a number of UK Management and Business Schools as a proxy for the quality of articles  
14 when considering new appointments and promotions. This practice has discouraged UK academics  
15 from publishing in newer qualitative journals such as *QROM*.

#### **Contribution made by *QROM***

16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27 The contribution made by *QROM* would warrant a systematic review of its entire contents  
28 that space constraints prevent and a summary of its coverage has been provided recently elsewhere  
29 (Lee & Cassell, 2013, p 128). Instead, I will draw out two particular contributions that I believe  
30 *QROM* to have facilitated in quite outstanding ways. Firstly, insider accounts that entail researchers  
31 using their intimate knowledge of their own cultural context to elaborate on academic life: Insider  
32 accounts were generally confined to edited collections such as those by Bryman (1988) and  
33 Humphrey and Lee (2004). *QROM* established a special section for insider accounts and although  
34 very few articles have been published in the Insider Accounts section, its presence has encouraged a  
35 wealth of substantive articles that have reflected critically on the practice of being an academic –  
36 whether it be through autoethnographies or insider-informed accounts of research (Johnson, 2014;  
37 Sanders-McDonagh, 2014), teaching (Humphreys, 2006) or more general academic practice (Haynes,  
38 2011) – or in providing accounts of how research projects developed (Llewellyn & Northcott, 2007).  
39 Such work escapes from prescriptions of how academic work should be conducted, to illuminations  
40 of the real quandaries, challenges and triumphs of being an academic and – in my view – can provide  
41 a whole lot more assistance in inducting new academics, or reassuring them that their experiences  
42 are not isolated incidents caused through some fault of their own, than any amount of textbooks or  
43 “pedagogic” contributions on how to use a particular method or technique that are found in some  
44 methods journals.  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Secondly, *QROM* has played a key role in discussions of how new technologies may be  
4 employed to help develop research methods and enhance understanding of organizations.  
5 Examples of this include Davison, McLean and Warren's (2012) exemplary collection of different  
6 articles in a special themed issue on the use of a range of visual methods, Pritchard and Whiting's  
7 (2012) articulation of a variety of sources of data available from the internet in e-research and  
8 Corrigan and Beaubien's (2013) application of Goffman's dramaturgical framework to internet based  
9 research. If anyone needs convincing how innovative *QROM* has been in this respect, they should  
10 review the content of the research methods journals that journal "quality" lists rank highly and see  
11 the extent to which these issues have been covered in those journals up to now and when such  
12 coverage occurs. If there has been a benefit to *QROM* of many UK academics shying away from  
13 publishing in newer journals because of journal rankings, it is that the authors that write for it come  
14 from across the world. The discussion of innovative ideas and articles written by authors from  
15 different continents are surely signs of a high quality journal. If only those responsible for compiling  
16 lists spent a little more time reading the journals that they rank!  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28

### 29 **Future agenda**

30 In considering an agenda for the future, I would suggest that *QROM* continues doing what it  
31 has always done so well. In relation to insider accounts, I have often attended conference sessions  
32 on research methods where papers are delivered by people who have just completed a PhD. It is  
33 clear that the authors have tried to apply a method religiously and become frustrated when the  
34 situation demands that they adapt their method to specific circumstances. So, they claim to have  
35 come up with a new method rather than a different application. We could all learn from them if  
36 they wrote reflexive accounts of limits to methods that weave in discussions of ethics, access,  
37 demands for theoretical development, etc., that face us all in the course of empirical studies. The  
38 "insider accounts" section of *QROM* appears an ideal publication outlet for such work.  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

45 In relation to the use of new technologies, there is considerable scope for further  
46 development and – in some cases – fusion with existing methods. For examples, areas not yet  
47 considered sufficiently include how: (i) Skype facilities make interviewing possible across great  
48 distances; (ii) digital conferencing tools such as *Vidyo* could facilitate group interviews from  
49 dispersed sites, as well as allowing greater collaboration between researchers who may be based at  
50 different sites in multi-site ethnographies; and (iii) organizations' use of digital tracker tools generate  
51 meanings for those organizations. There will no doubt be other technological developments that  
52 *QROM's* readers and contributors will wish to consider in future.  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 A future agenda could also include glocalistic – as a fusion of local and global – issues in  
4 research. Glocalistic research may be distinguished from cross-cultural research in two ways. Firstly,  
5 unlike cross-cultural research, it does not necessarily involve a comparison between empirical  
6 evidence collected in different countries, but instead involves a researcher moving between two  
7 countries to use ideas and methods developed in one country to research in another and is likely to  
8 involve translation from one language to another to operationalise the ideas developed in one  
9 country in the second country and then translate the data back into the other language. Secondly,  
10 glocalistic research infers relationships of domination and subordination. English-speaking countries  
11 have attracted many research students and academics who are confronted by numerous issues  
12 around interpretation of language and the appropriateness of particular theories and views of  
13 ontology and epistemology when conducting research in their country of origin. If research is not to  
14 become a means of intellectual imperialism, it is essential that intellectual instruments of the  
15 glocalisation process are reflected on and understood. The plurality of *QROM* makes it an ideal  
16 journal for that.  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26

#### 27 **Concluding comment**

28 I have reflected on how, despite the handicap of lists, *QROM* has made notable  
29 contributions in its ten years of publication. My hope is that by the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
30 edition of *QROM*, I have celebrated the demise of lists such as that associated with the ABS so that  
31 more of my colleagues in the UK work to a maxim of producing the best possible work and  
32 submitting it to the most appropriate journal.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## References

Bessant, J., Birley, S., Cooper, C., Dawson, S., Gennard, J., Gardiner, M., Gray, A., Jones, P., Mayer, C., McGee, J., Pidd, M., Rowley, G., Saunders, J. & Stark, A. (2003): "The state of the field in UK management research: reflections of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) panel", *British Journal of Management*, Volume 14, Number 1, pp 51-68.

Bryman, A. (1988): *Doing Research in Organisations*, Routledge, London.

Corrigan, L.T. & Beaubien, L. (2013): "Dramaturgy in the internet era", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 8, Number 3, pp 308 – 325

Davison, J., McLean, C. & Warren, S. (2012): "Exploring the visual in organizations and management", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 7, Number 1 pp 5 - 15

Haynes, K. (2011): "Tensions in (re)presenting the self in reflexive autoethnographic research" in *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 6, Number 2, pp 134-149.

Humphrey, C. (2014): "Qualitative research – mixed emotions", *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, Volume 11, Number 1, pp 51-70

Humphrey, C. & Lee, B. (Eds) (2004): *The Real Life Guide to Accounting Research: A Behind the Scenes View of Using Qualitative Research Methods*, Elsevier, Oxford.

Humphreys, M. (2006): "Teaching qualitative research methods: I'm beginning to see the light", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 1, Number 3, pp 173 – 188.

Johnson, B. (2014): "Ethical issues in shadowing research", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 9, Number 1, pp. 21 - 40

Guthrie, J. & Parker, L. (2004): "Diversity and AAAJ: interdisciplinary perspectives on accounting, auditing and accountability", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Volume 17, Number 1, pp 7-16.

Lee, B. & Cassell, C. (2013): "Research Methods and Research Practice: History, Themes and Topics", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Volume 15, Number 2, pp 123-131.

Llewellyn, S. & Northcott, D. (2007): "The "singular view" in management case studies", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 2, Number 3, pp 194 – 207.

Nedeva, M., Boden, R. and Nugroho, Y. (2012): "Rank and File: Managing Individual Performance in University Research", *Higher Education Policy*, Volume 25, pp 335-360.

Parker, L. (2012): "Qualitative management accounting research: Assessing deliverables and relevance", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Volume 23, Number 1, pp 54–70.



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Pritchard, K. & Whiting, R. (2012): "Autopilot? A reflexive review of the piloting process in qualitative e-research", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 7, Number 3, pp 338 - 353

Sanders-McDonagh, E. (2014): "Conducting "Dirty Research" with extreme groups: understanding academia as a dirty work site", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Volume 9, Number 3 pp 241-253.

For Peer Review