QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS THE CORNERSTONE METHODOLOGY FOR UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP

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In our field today, qualitative studies remain relatively rare. They are time intensive and complex. They are also perceived to be fraught with methodological challenges that make certain of our colleagues skeptical of such methods. At the same time, they can be the richest of studies, often illuminating in radically new ways phenomena as complex as leadership. They are responsible for paradigm shifts, insights into the role of context, and longitudinal perspectives that other methods often fail to capture (e.g. Isabella 1990, Mintzberg 1973, Roberts and Bradley 1988). Yet despite these advantages, the contribution of qualitative methods to leadership research remains remarkably limited. It is a paradox given that qualitative research is, in reality, the methodology of choice for topics as contextually rich as leadership.

In my own research, qualitative research has played a significant role throughout my career. With an undergraduate major in anthropology, I was exposed to ethnographic methods early on. Though I did not continue on as an anthropologist who studied tribal peoples, my vocation would instead lead me to becoming an anthropologist of organizations. As a result, I have a special appreciation for qualitative research despite the fact that I have used survey and statistical methods during my career. In my capacity as a leadership researcher, I have conducted four major qualitative studies and am currently engaged in a fifth.

As a prelude to arguments that will follow, we can draw an analogy between the qualitative researcher and the spelunker or cave explorer. Appreciating the complexity of cave structures, the spelunker carries few preconceptions as to the terrain ahead. As one descends into the exploration, they not only have the opportunity of examining phenomena

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at deeper and unexplored levels but also are able to experience first-hand what they are examining. This feature adds an element of discretion or flexibility to follow unexpected opportunities and leads that present themselves. At the same time, they must possess the mindset of a cartographer. It is vital that they comprehend the relationship of each individual passageway to the overall cave structure itself. As such, the details of each encounter are informing an ever evolving map of the full structure being explored. Likewise, leadership which is vastly more complex than any cave structure demands similar capabilities in its explorers.

What follows in the opening section of this article are the author's arguments as to why qualitative methods must play a central role in leadership research. The focus then shifts to a discussion of one qualitative method that has been underutilized in leadership research - observation. The author discusses his own experiences employing observation methods in several research projects. This section is followed by a discussion of the challenges of managing the volumes of data generated by qualitative research. A principal advantage of qualitative methods is its ability to generate very rich data. As a necessary byproduct, it also generates large quantities of data. How the author manages this process is described. The closing section looks at the implications of the continuing dominance of the quantitative research paradigm on leadership studies and the challenge that this poses to qualitative researchers.

WHY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH MUST PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES

It is a long standing assumption that qualitative research in the social sciences has its greatest role to play in the exploratory phases of researching a topic area. In these situations, little is known about the subject to be investigated, and so hypotheses are purely speculative. The researcher's aim is to generate and explore as many hypotheses as possible about the phenomenon under study. As our understanding becomes increasingly well-defined, quantitative analysis can then refine and validate with "empirical rigor" the hypotheses generated by prior qualitative investigations.

This scenario certainly describes the context of the author's first qualitative field study which examined charismatic leadership in business organizations (1985). It was a subject where there had been little actual empirical study of the phenomenon. House (1977) had written a theoretical piece on charismatic leadership as had Berlew (1974), Katz and Kahn (1978), and Zaleznik and Kets de Vries (1975). This work, however, was largely speculative. At the time, it would have been premature to conduct a questionnaire survey of charismatic leadership simply because survey items would have been defined by and been limited to behaviors described by a nascent literature centered around untested hypotheses.

This paradigm where qualitative methodology is best suited to the early phases of an investigation has dominated our thinking. It is, however, an assumption that needs to be seriously challenged. Interestingly, in other fields such as decision-making and strategic change, this assumption has been successfully challenged (e.g. Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Gersick, 1994).

In reality, qualitative research must play an important role no matter what stage we are in the investigation of leadership topics. The main reason is the extreme and enduring

complexity of the leadership phenomenon itself. For the foreseeable future, there will be no endpoint—a moment where researchers will be able to say that we now have a complete and shared understanding of leadership. This is powerfully exemplified by the fact that after literally thousands of studies in the field we have yet to develop "a general theory of leadership that explains all aspects of the process adequately" (Yukl, 1994, p. 19).

As many of us are aware, this complexity is a byproduct of several important characteristics of leadership. Specifically, leadership involves multiple levels of phenomena, possesses a dynamic character, and has a symbolic component. Quantitative methods, by themselves, are insufficient to investigate thoroughly phenomena with such characteristics.

On the dimension of multiple levels alone, we can conceive of leadership as embedded in "nests" of phenomena (Avolio & Bass, 1995): the intrapsychic, the behavioral, the interpersonal, the organizational, and the environmental. One of the great shortcomings of quantitative research has been its inability to draw effective links across these multiple levels to explain leadership events and outcomes (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Typically, quantitative approaches—largely survey-based in the leadership field—have focused on a single level of analysis such as behavioral dimensions (Yukl, 1994) and in turn have overlooked the influential role of intrapsychic or group or organizational or environmental factors. In addition, there are the well-known criticisms that surveys more often measure attitudes about behavior rather than actual observed behavior and are influenced by the social desirability concerns of respondents (Phillips, 1973). Quantitative analysis is also poor at measuring interaction (Lantis, 1987)—a critical element of leadership—and tends to be uni-directional (for example, followers' perceptions of leader behavior). This narrowness of the frame of investigation is one of the most serious flaws of a purely quantitative approach. It simply reinforces the notion that leadership is principally the product of a single individual or a relationship with followers.

Additional problems are created by the nature of the descriptors used in survey-based quantitative research. Since they must be generalizable across a variety of contexts, they typically employ item descriptors that are broad terms. This type of terminology produces findings that are relatively "sterile" in the sense that a useful richness of detail is often missing. Furthermore, their utility for managerial practice is limited because details of the processes behind the descriptors are largely absent. Instead they end up measuring the presence and frequency of static terms. For example, if we take a typical descriptor like "actively sets goals for the group," we learn little about the actual processes used to set goals or how one knows whether selected goals will be effective relative to a specific context. With commonplace descriptors like "envisioning the future," little or nothing is conveyed about the actual time horizons of individual visions, whether the process varies by industry, what types of information are involved in the visionary process, and how irrelevant information about the future is weeded out.

In sum, most of these survey-generated leadership descriptors fail to help us understand the deeper structures of leadership phenomena. We trade-off the "how" and "why" questions about leadership for highly abstracted concepts and descriptions which allow us only to generalize across a range of contexts at relatively superficial levels (Pettigrew, 1990). They are like book covers which highlight in their titles an important discovery, yet are missing the explanatory chapters within.

The dynamic nature of the leadership process also poses serious challenges for quantitative methods. We can think of this dynamism occurring along several fronts. There is the evolution of a leader's relations with followers and with the larger environment over periods of time. Since organizational change is usually an integral part of the leadership process (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 1990; Tichy & Devanna, 1986), events such as achievements, failures, opportunities, and crises are constantly reshaping leadership experiences for both the leader and the led. For example, research has shown that the same individual may be perceived as a charismatic leader in one context but may not in another (Roberts, 1985; Roberts & Bradley, 1988). A survey might document this shift in the perceptions, but as a methodology it is far less effective in identifying the contextual elements that have induced this fundamental shift in perceptions.

Another central problem facing the use of quantitative methods in any dynamic process is that, by their nature, they measure only *static* moments in time. They are not easily able to track in any richness of detail how events unfold or how they may reshape interpretations of events. For example, surveys employed longitudinally face the challenge of new variables being introduced over time. Seeking consistency in survey results, the quantitative researcher may be reluctant to introduce and track these new factors in future surveys. In addition, survey methodology can promote a certain investigator detachment from the research site—to the point that researchers may simply be unaware of newly emerging factors. Qualitative methods, in contrast, demand far greater immersion in the research site and offer more opportunities to capture a longitudinal perspective in investigations—particularly if enthographic methods such as participant observation are employed. In turn, they afford a high degree of flexibility to discern and explore the influence of newly emerging factors caused by individual and environmental changes.

The symbolic and subjective component of leadership also has important implications for research methods (Conger, 1989; Hunt, 1991; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983). As has been argued extensively, quantitative methods are designed largely to capture a reality that is composed of concrete and objective structures. They are far less effective in a subjective, ever-shifting reality where human beings shape its creation. Yet the interpretative dimension plays a significant role in how leadership is defined and experienced. Attributions about outcomes are continually linked to "the leader" whereas in reality other factors play important or causal roles (Calder, 1977; Meindl, 1985). Impression management techniques employed by the leader may profoundly influence follower perceptions and distort realistic perceptions of the leader and the situation. Quantitative methods are far less effective at capturing these interpretative dimensions and seeing beyond them since they often assume that followers' and others' perceptions are accurate readings of a concrete, objective world. In contrast, as Morgan and Smircich (1980) point out, qualitative methods are ideally suited to such interpretative contexts: "For if one recognizes that the social world constitutes some form of open-ended process...[where] human beings engage in symbolic modes of discourse, create their reality, and project themselves from the transcendental to more prosaic realms of experience...[Then] The requirement for effective research in these situations is clear: scientists can no longer remain as external observers, measuring what they see; they must move to investigate from within the subject of study and employ research techniques appropriate to that task...qualitative forms of investigation..." (p. 498).

These three dimensions of leadership—multiple levels, dynamism, and social construction—make for a very complex research topic. As a result, the subject ultimately demands multiple research methods—irregardless of the field's stage of maturity. It also demands teams of researchers with diverse methodological and discipline backgrounds rather than individual researchers or research teams with similar backgrounds. As I have argued, quantitative methods in and of themselves are insufficient on the grounds that they capture relatively uni-dimensional and static perspectives on leadership. On the other hand, qualitative methods, when properly employed, offer the leadership field several distinct advantages over quantitative methods: 1) more opportunities to explore leadership phenomena in significant depth and to do so longitudinally (Bryman, 1992), 2) the flexibility to discern and detect unexpected phenomena during the research (Lundberg, 1976), 3) an ability to investigate processes more effectively, 4) greater chances to explore and to be sensitive to contextual factors, 5) and more effective means to investigate symbolic dimensions (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Despite these advantages, there has been one important shortcoming of the qualitative research conducted to date in the leadership field—its over-reliance on interviewing as its principal methodology. For example, observation has played a far more limited role in research (for examples of observation-based research, see Bussom et al., 1984; Conger, 1985, 1992; Kotter, 1982; Luthans & Lockwood, 1984; Mintzberg, 1973) than its actual potential. As a result, researchers have missed out on other qualitative tools that might not only be useful for gaining broader and divergent perspectives but also offer better validity testing of data through the use of multiple methods.

In sociological investigations, for example, the principal research method—say participant observation—is supplemented by three or four additional ones. The objective is to assure "between-method triangulation" of the data and to capture different aspects of the reality being studied. In a typical case, observation might be combined with unobtrusive methods, life histories, and survey interviewing with field experiments (Denzin, 1978). In this way, the shortcomings of one method are balanced by the strengths of the other. As Webb et al. (1966) note:

> So long as one has only a single class of data collection, and that class is the questionnaire or interview, one has inadequate knowledge of the rival hypotheses grouped under the term "reactive measurement effects"...As long as the research strategy is based on a single measurement class, some flanks will be exposed...No single measurement class is perfect...When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the more constricted framework of a single method. (Webb et. al., 1966, pp. 173-174.)

From personal experience, I know that in my research on charismatic leadership (1985, 1989), observation methods proved to be far more effective at capturing interpersonal dynamics and the unconventional behavior associated with charismatic leadership than did interviews.

By relying solely on interviews as a research strategy, qualitative researchers in the leadership field fall into a similar trap as questionnaire survey researchers—dependence on a single method. In sum, it is imperative that we increasingly utilize observation and other qualitative strategies in conjunction with interviews to ensure not only between-method triangulation of data but also multiple perspectives on the phenomena being studied.

OBSERVATION'S ROLE IN LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

The author has employed observation and participant observation in two research projects on leadership (1985, 1992). Without a doubt, observation when combined with interviews proved to be a powerful methodology for not only uncovering data either distorted in interviews or else not accessible through interviews.

When describing participant observation as a field research strategy, I am referring to more than the simple act of observation. As Yukl (1994) noted, observation in leadership research has at times been an overly simplistic, mechanical process failing to capture richer, more detailed information:

> ...in some observation studies the observer merely checks off predetermined categories to be coded at a later time. This highly structured form of observation may focus attention away from the most interesting aspects of the events being observed...Another deficiency in many observational studies...is the failure to gather information (using interviews) about the context of the behavior and the perceptions and intentions of the people being observed" (Yukl, 1994, p. 460-461).

Effective participant observation would include the interviewing of respondents and informants, observation and direct participation, document analysis, and introspection (see Bogan & Taylor, 1975; Denzin, 1978) as components of its overall field strategy. Under participant observation, the interviews themselves tend to be more open-ended, and observation is often less concerned with frequency counts of events and more concerned with interaction patterns and detecting the meanings believed to underlie behavior.

This combination of approaches under participant observation is particularly critical given one of the great dilemmas facing qualitative research. Van Maanen (1979) calls it the challenge of discerning between "operational data" and "presentational data". Operational data consists of what we might call more "genuine" data generated by spontaneous, candid interactions and activities engaged in and observed by the researcher while in the field (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 542). Presentational data, on the other hand, is contrived to maintain a certain public image:

> Data in this category are often ideological, normative, and abstract, dealing far more with a manufactured image of idealized doing rather than with the routinized practical activities actually engaged in by the members of the studied organization. (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 542)

The study of leadership is particularly prone to presentational data. If an executive or his/her subordinates believe they are part of a "leadership" study, there will be a conscious and unconscious desire to enhance their image through presentational data. Qualitative researchers must be particularly cautious in discerning what are the fictionalized images, actions, and behaviors versus the actual, day-to-day operating behavior of the leader. Quantitative research faces essentially this same dilemma—people answering questionnaires as they think they should. "Volunteered statements" in open-ended interviews conducted during participant observation which are then cross-checked by observation can offer an important validity test for presentational data. In addition, interview questions themselves can be structured to solicit a more realistic perspective by giving permission to minimize presentational data: "We know that all of us has our weaknesses. That there is no perfect leader. What are your boss' weaker areas?"

When this author conducted his 1985 field study investigating the perceived behavioral dimensions of charismatic leadership among senior executives, one of the major concerns was presentational data. The individuals being studied knew they were part of a research project examining their leadership. While they were not informed that the study's focus was specifically on charismatic leadership, they were aware that they were considered leaders based on performance data and outsider opinions. Given the normally positive associations to leadership and charisma—especially in a North American context, presentational data would naturally be present. Observation proved to be enormously helpful in this regard. By watching, for example, interactions between an executive and their subordinates over long time periods I could more easily discern the presentational data in my interviews.

I might add an important sidenote here. In addition to using observation as a validity check for presentational data, I also employed an interview method to determine the validity of respondent statements particularly as they related to charismatic leadership. A coding system was devised to note whether statements were volunteered or solicited. For example, in interviews with subordinates of leaders, questions such as "Do you consider your executive to be a charismatic leader?" were employed only at the very end of interviews. Instead I would wait to see if spontaneous remarks were made about charisma. Individual responses about an individual's charisma were then coded as to whether they were volunteered or solicited. The same procedure applied to statements about the attributes that comprised a leader's charisma. Volunteered statements were considered far more reliable, and solicited statements were always cross-checked against the volunteered statements of other respondents. As both Denzin (1978) and Becker and Geer (1960) point out, a solicited answer essentially puts the investigator in the difficult position of trying to ascertain whether the respondent is merely agreeing or would have ordinarily expressed such an opinion if they had not been asked. The "volunteer-directed" response more often appears to reflect actual respondent feelings.

In this particular research project, observation took place after a significant number of subordinate and peer interviews had already been conducted. This allowed the use of "between-method triangulation" to distinguish between the presentational and operational data described in interviews as well as to test hypotheses developed from interview data. I would then observe the leaders' interactions with subordinates over several work days. Beforehand, the interview descriptions of leader behavior and events had been coded into preliminary categories. These were then listed in the form of shorthand notations on one or two master sheets which I carried with me during my observation period. Throughout the observation period, I could then either validate or not the patterns of behavior described from interviews with respondents as well as perform frequency counts. Simultaneously, I would be taking extensive notes on the behavior and events observed—some of which had not been identified by respondents while elaborating on those already described in interviews. Additional hypotheses were therefore generated during observation which were tested in further observation and in interviews that were conducted both during and after the observation phase. Observation also permitted me to discern whether behavioral reactions were unique to a single subordinate or peer or more commonplace across relations with multiple subordinates or peers.

In general, as a researcher employing observation, I spend a great deal of time paying attention to voice tone and non-verbal behavior as another validation means especially for

presentational data. As well, I typically look for "off-the-cuff" remarks that may contradict what I am hearing. I then validate these by cross-checking the example with respondents and informants.

As a general strategy, I ensure that I am involved in the selection of the days and situations for observation (routine days versus special occasions) as well as the respondents for interviewing—that they represent a cross-section of functions, departments, levels, and perspectives on the leader's behavior. I intentionally request this level of involvement.

I then cross-check both my interview and observation findings with outsider perceptions of the executive and the company. I will call knowledgeable business writers, reporters, analysts, consultants, and academic colleagues to get their perceptions of a particular leader both before interviewing and after data collection. For example, in a recent CEO interview involving board governance issues, the executive kept remarking how his company was at the leading edge of these issues. It felt like excessive boasting. His behavior reminded me of the line in Hamlet: "Hamlet, thou dost protest too much." Afterwards, I spent significant time validating his claims with industry consultants, business writers, and academics familiar with the company.

Like most qualitative methods, the challenge, however, with observation is that it can generate a great volume of data. When combined with interview data, the qualitative researcher often faces a major task in efficiently organizing and analyzing what at times seems overwhelming. In the next section, we will look at this challenge.

THE DIRTY WORK: ORGANIZING DATA

An intensive qualitative study will generate great volumes of data. Miles (1979) humorously refers to the process as an "attractive nuisance". There can literally be thousands of pages of interview transcripts, observation records, field notes, and company documents. How does one effectively manage this sea of information? I will address the issue by describing the approach I typically take.

I attempt as closely as possible to follow the analysis procedure described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their grounded theory approach. This demands that the data and evolving theory be in a continual process of comparison throughout both the data collection and analysis phases. As such, I keep in a log a set of "running summaries" on the recurrent themes and shared facts emerging from the research as I am conducting actual data collection. From these summaries, I will generate from time to time some preliminary categories to use in later coding of the data. These initial codes tend to be at higher levels of abstraction (for example, "mechanisms the leader employs in organizational change" or "organizational vision"). These more general categories will allow me to sort more easily on my first read through all the data. It needs to be noted, however, that these categories are continually modified and refined to reflect new evidence. In addition, I keep a separate log of ideas, concepts, and theory that reflect my evolving interpretation of the data. This also is in constant revision as new information suggests changes or additions to the theory or insights. These two devices prevent the researcher from being completely overwhelmed when they later confront piles of transcripts and notes.

Once I have completed collecting data, I systematically review every transcript and note. Unfortunately, I have found no effective shortcut to this tedious part of the process that also ensures a reliable reading across the data. As I am reading, I make notes in the margins of

the transcript pages and observation logs highlighting the recurrent themes, new insights, well-illustrated examples and so on. In red pencil, I identify sections by my preliminary category codes. On separate sheets, I am also noting down new possible coding categories and subcategories as well as checking the data against the preliminary categories I formed during the collection phase. At this stage, I may retain, revise, or eliminate certain of my original earlier categories and have also begun to develop a sophisticated set of subcategories. By the end of this process, I will have lists of coding categories and subcategories. I go through these carefully to establish my final coding system (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To accompany the codes, I establish a list of acronyms for the various categories—for example, VN might stand for "vision", UCV for "unconventional behavior". In addition, I am always searching for rich examples to illustrate categories. These will be denoted with the code and the acronym EX—for example, UCVEX, unconventional behavior example. I return to the data and note in the margins of each page the acronyms identifying categories to be found on a particular page. In many cases, I will then extract verbatim sections under a particular code and place them together in a single file on my computer—each identified by source so that I can return to the original if need be. To ensure the accuracy of my category codes, I often have an independent coder who codes some representative examples. They are shown examples under each category as well as given an explanation for each. I then ask them to code randomly selected examples to determine the level of agreement between us.

I am now experimenting with computer programs which offer distinct advantages over elements of this manual process. Specifically, I have found the ATLAS/ti and NUDIST programs (see Weitzman & Miles, 1994) to be particularly helpful. These are essentially "code and retrieve" programs that allow researchers to go through their interview text on the computer screen, to divide it into segments or chunks by a particular category, attach codes to the segments, and then find and display all examples of these segments by the push of a buttom. These programs are also sophisticated enough to allow for hierarchical or multilevel coding of data. In addition, they have what are called "source tags" which allow the researcher to see where a retrieved segment has originally come from (the actual original interview, whom, when) and memo areas where you can write extended reflections about specific data. Because of these advantages, we will see these programs playing an increasingly greater role in qualitative data analysis as they allow researchers to retrieve more accurately and rapidly their data by category. In my own research, they are accelerating my ability to organize and process findings.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS: ARE WE FIGHTING AGAINST THE TIDE?

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, there was a flowering of interest in qualitative research. *Administrative Science Quarterly* would devote an entire issue to the subject (1979), and other academic journals soon followed suit with selected articles (e.g. Bryman, 1984; Das, 1983; Evered & Louis, 1981; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Van Maanen (1979) would declare that "there is something of a quiet reconstruction going on in the social sciences and some of the applied disciplines" (p. 522) referring to this growing interest in qualitative methods. There was even concern that the momentum might go too far and that certain of the "bad habits" of quantitative research would be adopted by qualitative researchers:

"Whereas the 1960's and 1970's have been dominated by an abstracted empiricism based on the use of quantitative methods, the threat now is that the 1980's may be dominated by a pendulum swing to an abstracted empiricism based on qualitative methods" (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 491).

Yet, with few exceptions, the pendulum did not swing too far—especially within North America. Qualitative research in leadership continues to be a relatively underutilized methodology (as measured by published journal articles). Why did the momentum not materialize into something more substantial?

Several critical forces are and will continue to be responsible for qualitative research's more limited impact on the field of leadership. Beginning in the 1950's and 1960's, we witnessed the rise of and fascination with quantitative methods as computers became more widely accessible in terms of cost and availability for researchers. Simultaneously, statistical manipulation techniques became more sophisticated. This had the unintended consequence of increasing the value of one's mastery in methods over the depth of insight gleamed from research studies themselves.

In addition, statistical analysis reinforced a long-standing belief that scientific investigation was dependent upon the analysis of large samples to uncover "truths". There have been few voices to contest this worldview. My colleague Henry Mintzberg once exclaimed: "What...is wrong with samples of one? Why should researchers have to apologize for them? Should Piaget apologize for studying his own children, a physicist for splitting only one atom?" (1979, p. 583).

The nature of the academic character has also contributed to the predominance of quantitative methods. We might say that one of our principal aims as academics is to make complex phenomena understandable. To accomplish this end, we dissect phenomena into discrete elements and then search for casual links to determine how each element influences the other. We are also drawn to generalizing across populations of study. With an emphasis on highly structured and uniform approaches, relatively standardized operating procedures, and an ability to produce precise numerical measures, quantitative research is an enormously seductive methodology in this regard.

There are also the structural characteristics of the academic promotion system—especially its criteria for publishing in leading academic journals that further reinforce the use of quantitative methods. For example, promotion is today based largely upon the volume of published articles and the stature of journal outlets. Performance measures based around one's quantity of published articles encourages faster turnaround time on research efforts. For this reason, surveys and laboratory experiments as well as research built around static time frames become the ideal. The higher time demands of qualitative and longitudinal studies preclude their use by junior faculty seeking promotion. The high stature journals are now those composed largely of articles employing quantitative methods. Editors and reviewers principally versed in quantitative methods simply reinforce this mold. In addition, from a reviewer's vantage point, quantitative methods are more standardized as to their application. As a result, they are more "transparent" in terms of assumptions and interpretations and therefore significantly easier to understand and critique. In response, books have now become the principal outlets for qualitative research rather than journals. Yet within the academic reward structure, books have a lower weighting than journal articles—the argument being that they are not subject to the same rigors of peer review as a journal article.

A final structural problem is the limited number of faculty with qualitative research backgrounds. This small pool of individuals limits the number of doctoral students exposed to such methods and in turn directly impacts whether we will have a critical mass of future faculty who are well versed in qualitative methods. Combined with an academic reward structure focused on the quantitative side, these two factors do not bode well for the future of qualitative research in leadership.

Because of these forces, we must ask ourselves whether we are willing increasingly to forego certain explorations of leadership phenomena because their complexity does not permit "rigorous investigations" as determined by quantitative methods? On this issue, the author can speak from personal experience.

In the late 1980's, at a conference on leadership development at the Harvard Business School, I was on a panel discussing whether leadership could be trained or whether it was essentially a product of family environments and genetic make-up. The panel produced a heated discussion with no resolution as one might imagine.

Upon returning to my university, I surveyed the leadership training literature to find that there were few if any studies that documented the impact of training programs on leadership development. There was, however, a vast literature on training, but much of it had to do with either training experiments in laboratory settings with college students as participants or else research investigating the training of very simple behaviors unrelated to leadership. No academic researcher had investigated the training of complex leadership behaviors in natural settings such as actual training seminars. I was intrigued by the lack of research in this area but had my suspicions as to why investigations could not be found. Issues of "rigor" as defined by quantitative approaches set serious limits on research designs in this area.

In discussing the project with colleagues who are experts in quantitative survey methods, we concluded that an investigation attempting to isolate the various training variables would most likely preclude natural settings. Training techniques varied too widely from program to program. In addition, participants would most likely experience different team and interpersonal dynamics in each program that could influence learning and would need to be isolated and measured. Participants themselves varied not only between but within programs. They were at differing life and career stages as well as psychological states and learning capacities. Sponsoring organizations had widely different cultures and attitudes towards training as well as varied training support systems. The list continues on. All of these dynamics of course needed to be controlled and measured. Yet to attempt to control for all of these variables would be something of a methodological nightmare from a quantitative research perspective.

The point is, however, quite simple. There were complexities at all levels—in the training programs, in the participants, and in their organizations. If the desire was to use natural settings, the ability to control for these variables using quantitative methods would have been an enormous challenge. Better not to undertake the project.

Instead I might have mirrored the training literature and set up my own laboratory experiments using simple exercises to determine the impact of training on individuals. But a laboratory setting could never have duplicated the richness and complexity of the phenomenon I wished to study. In the laboratory setting, I would have narrowed my selection of exercises down to a simple few. But I would not have been studying the phenomenon as it actually occurred. While providing some controls over participant

variability, university students as participants would not have mirrored the reality of managers with varying personal goals, differing career stages, and a wide range of home organizations.

What, however, if I had simply conducted a questionnaire survey of the participants to these programs? My dilemma would have been twofold with this approach. For one, I would have had a limited understanding of the multitude of contextual factors influencing participants in each training program. Many of these issues were impossible to ascertain without a researcher's immersion in programs themselves. Secondly, I would not have had an adequate understanding beforehand of the great range of methodologies used to teach leadership and how these influenced participant and program outcomes. Instead I might have made some simplistic assumptions that most approaches were roughly similar. After all, they were all "leadership training' programs. I would not have discovered that four instructional paradigms shaped the design of these programs and that each had different training implications (Conger, 1992). This information would have been very difficult if not impossible to ascertain by surveys. Respondents would have been in a poor position to validate these models by surveys since they themselves had no knowledge of instructional methodologies (which I as an educator did).

Ultimately, I chose to conduct the investigation using participant observation where I joined the training programs as an actual participant. I employed observation supplemented with extensive interviewing. To date, however, no similar study has been conducted by others. The reason I suspect is largely because of concerns of "rigor" as defined by quantitative methods of research and the time demands. As such, an entire subfield of leadership development remains largely unexplored. Yet it is issues as critical as training that require investigation and are ideally suited to qualitative approaches.

So what can be done to address this serious dilemma? There are several important steps that can be taken. At the doctoral student level, seminars on qualitative methods must become standard fare as mandatory coursework. In addition, candidates might be required to undertake at least one qualitative research project before graduation. The academic reward structure must itself shift. Since books remain the primary publication vehicle for qualitative research, promotion committees must revise their standards to put books on equal weighting with journal articles. Outside measures of impact such as the Social Science Citation Index and peer reviews can provide promotion committees with an objective sense of a book's quality. In addition, academic publishers can formalize their review processes to always include established peers of the author. In addition, journal editors can establish policies that support qualitative research in the determination of a manuscript's acceptance. Pools of reviewers drawing upon researchers who are known for high quality, qualitative research could be established by journal editors for qualitative research submissions. Finally, interest groups and other forums need to be created to establish qualitative standards and to promote the use of qualitative research.

CONCLUSION

As a research tool, qualitative methods have been greatly underutilized in the field of leadership. Instead, quantitatively-based surveys have been the method of choice. As I hope I have shown, this latter methodology fails to capture the great richness of leadership phenomena and instead leaves us with only sets of highly abstracted and generalized

descriptors. On the other hand, qualitative methods are ideally suited to uncovering leadership's many dimensions. When done well, these methods allow us to probe at great levels of depth and nuance in addition to offering researchers not only the flexibility to explore the unexpected but to see the unexpected. Our challenge then as qualitative researchers is not only to enhance our craft through the exchange of "best practices" and the continual improvement of our methods but also to play a missionary role. The larger academic community within which we live is not as open to qualitative methods. The paradigm that still guides the field is the quantitative model. Our task must be to join editorial boards, to help build reviewer pools of talented qualitative researchers, and to submit rigorous qualitative-based research to mainstream journals. In addition, we must encourage investments to be made in training doctoral students in qualitative methods as well as encouraging radical revisions in the academic reward structure towards a system that values qualitative studies. Like the leaders we study, we too must lead.

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