

Is There a "Legitimation Crisis" in Qualitative Methods?

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Conference Essay:

ESF Exploratory Workshop on Improving the Quality of Qualitative Research. Adger University College, Kristiansand, Norway, 25 – 28 June 2007 organised by David Silverman (Goldsmiths' College/Kings' College, University of London, UK), Anne Ryen (Adger University College, Kristiansand, Norway) and Shalva Weil (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

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Abstract: This report describes the European Scientific Foundation (ESF) workshop on improving the quality of qualitative research, which took place in Kristiansand, Norway in June 2007. It convened different European scholars from different disciplines who use different qualitative methodologies to discuss the state of the art and the quality of qualitative research in their respective disciplines. The focus was on a possible credibility gap and criticism of qualitative research by quantitative colleagues and others. The participants debated improving qualitative methodology, what better methodologies one can employ, which techniques one can use, which research designs are preferable, how one can enhance credibility and, finally, how one can overcome the "legitimation crisis" in qualitative studies. They had several suggestions, ranging from providing better guidelines (MAEDER) to improving research designs (GOBO, SILVERMAN). KONECKI debated the merits of triangulation. Several participants thought that utilising different techniques would avert a credibility gap e.g. putting reflexivity to better use (BUSCATTO), or employing life-histories to better advantage (BERTAUX). Some suggested innovative methods, such as applied theatre (HUNDT), or the use of audio-technological techniques (HEATH). PRIOR thought that the repositioning of documents would improve research studies; DREW thought that the emphasis in research should be on conversation analysis (CA). It was pointed out that varying numbers of informants are involved in different types of research: RYEN relied upon a main informant; WEIL reported upon the advantages and pitfalls of collaborative research. KVALE impressed upon his audience the importance of treating qualitative research as a craft. Younger researchers also attended the workshop and some practical suggestions were made as to how to continue the debate and improve quality.

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1. Background to the Workshop

Qualitative research is increasingly employed as a suitable methodology in education, economics, law, sociology, anthropology, accounting, and a wide variety of other disciplines. This methodology is also gaining popularity in market-based evaluation studies and in traditional quantitative territory, such as business studies and economic geography, and in development studies. [1]

Qualitative research constitute the background to decisions on change both in Europe and in developing countries. Its increasing use can be attributed to the sensitivity of its research tools and the variety of techniques that one can employ. However, if the credibility of such research is doubted, then the policy implications of qualitative work may also fail. [2]

There is a wide array of suggestive theories and contrasting methodologies currently present in qualitative research. With few numbers, even qualitative researchers who are serious about their credibility in the day-to-day research activity, appear to rely on mere examples or instances to support their analysis. Hence, research reports routinely display data extracts which serve as telling instances of some claimed phenomenon. However, the use of such an evidential base rightly provokes the charge of what SILVERMAN has called "anecdotalism" (see below), namely choosing the very extracts which support one's argument. [3]

A workshop on *Improving the Quality of Qualitative Research* was convened at Agder University College in Kristiansand, Norway, under the auspices of the ESF (European Scientific Foundation) and co-sponsored by the Forum for Research on Professions and the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Welfare at Agder University College. It was designed to bring together scholars, ranging from junior scholars (four were local Norwegian graduate students) to acclaimed full professors, from a wide range of European countries (UK [4], Israel [1], Norway [1], Denmark [1], France [2], Italy [1], Ireland [1], Poland [1], Switzerland

[1], Sweden [1]), to address the credibility gap in qualitative research. All the participants were sociologists, except two anthropologists and a psychologist, but they work in different university departments, including management, education, health and social medicine. The workshop provided a rare opportunity to develop substantial arguments to satisfy external critics and to inspire a new generation of qualitative researchers. [4]

2. Scientific Content of the Meeting

There were fourteen presentations, exploring the credibility gap in qualitative methods and suggesting techniques and tools to overcome the gap. The suggestions ranged from collaborative projects, to the use of documents, life-histories, single major informants, applied theatre and conversation analysis. In addition, it was suggested that qualitative methods should be regarded as a craft, and that in the study of qualitative methods, one should examine how artefacts are created, and try and minimise artefactuality. The sessions were accompanied by lively discussions, as well as small group discussions on the practice of qualitative methods, and the implications of the workshop proceedings. [5]

The workshop opened on 25 June 2007 with a presentation by Asbjorn RODSETH, Professor of Economics from the University of Oslo, who is a representative of the Standing Committee for the Social Sciences of the ESF. RODSETH explained the workings and the funding opportunities of the ESF, including the Exploratory Workshops, of which the workshop on "Improving the Quality of Qualitative Research" reported on here is one. [6]

The three co-conveners—David SILVERMAN from the University of London, Shalva WEIL from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Anne RYEN of Adger University College, Kristiansand (who was also the local organiser)—introduced the workshop. They explained that it was organised around two themes: improving quality and better methodologies. [7]

2.1 Improving the quality of qualitative methodology

The first speaker in the Improving Quality stream was Christoph MAEDER from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, who spoke about "The Quest for Quality in Qualitative Research", asking "Is there still hope?" He pointed to the fact that qualitative research, as a scientific endeavour, is itself socially embedded and there is a need to be able to assess and evaluate qualitative research by means of comprehensible criteria. He saw a need to develop such criteria. Drawing on experience in a working group which developed a proposal of "Guidelines to sound qualitative research" for the Swiss Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities, he shared with workshop participants the guidelines. The guidelines for qualitative research were based on the premise that sound qualitative research is rooted in theoretical social science questions and topics concerning research, which enable intersubjective agreement. The guidelines were designed to provide evaluation criteria that hitherto were more or less implicit and to aid researchers in submitting their proposals to funding agencies. [8]

The second speaker in the stream was Marie BUSCATTO from the Laboratoire G. Friedmann, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne – CNRS, France, who presented on the subject of reflexivity as quality. Relying heavily on the French tradition in qualitative methods, she discussed the epistemological ambivalence of ethnography, in which research methodology is primarily subjective, and certainly not positivistic, and in which the four R's (reliability, representativeness, reactivity and reproducibility) do not apply. She maintained that once subjects are interacting with researchers a new definition of scientific principles is needed, leading to the establishment of what is progressively labelled as a "reflexivity model". Based on the idea that the observer is embedded in the world she means to study, reflexivity implies that social relations developed through the research are part of the study. They may be used either to open up research possibilities, or to analyse data constructed through the survey while maintaining as great a degree of control as possible on the conditions of their sociological interpretation. BUSCATTO laid out key principles in action for carrying out reflexive research, in which truth is conceived as "more or less"; the research data is socially produced with the researcher influencing both the objects of research, and the critical use of multiple methods. In order to avoid the "trap of over-interpretation", and improve the quality of qualitative research, a set of precautionary principles, procedures, and techniques may be used at different research stages. These bear on observation contextualisation as well as on such practices as systematic note-taking, cross-checking, saturation, triangulation and testing one's material by submitting it to the observed subjects and to colleagues. [9]

2.2 Better methodologies

Steinar KVALE from the University of Aarhus, Denmark, presented a psychological perspective with a view to improving the qualitative methodology of interviewing. KVALE suggested that one could address the credibility gap in qualitative methods by deemphasising the interviewing method and looking at interviewing as a social craft, which takes time to learn. He stated that the interviewing process is not systematic methodology, but a highly skilled craft requiring a repertoire of specialised tasks and the exertion of personal judgement. Thereafter learning the craft of interviewing through apprenticeship is advocated. Good interviewing requires extensive training to become a skilled practitioner of the craft of interviewing. In lieu of available practice communities for interview apprenticeships, KVALE suggested learning interviewing through an interview practicum, as well as a formulated theoretical approach at the outset and a good handle on techniques. Discussion focused on the analysis of data elicited in interviewing, as opposed to collecting the information by other means, as well as debating whether the current emphasis on a methodology for interviewing and for analysing interview texts may reflect a new qualitative positivism [10]

Daniel BERTAUX, Emeritus Researcher from the Centre d'Etudes des Mouvements Sociaux (EHESS) and Laboratoire Cultures et Sociétés en Europe, of the Marc Bloch University, Strasbourg, addressed the question of how life-histories could be used to create better methodologies. The "ethno-sociological"

way of using life stories examines aspects of socio-structural relations' patterns, processes, and dynamics that quantitative methods, by their very design, are unable to capture. In social mobility research, after 40 years of largely quantitative research, very little is known about the processes through which resources get "passed on" within families from one generation to the next. According to BERTAUX, individuals' life stories provide information about a social world in which people have lived part of their life (e.g., a French artisanal bakery), about a given typical situation they have experienced (e.g. the situation of being a poor single mother), or about a process of becoming. His approach deals with interviewees as informants and about social realities "out there" that they (had) experienced. It stands in stark contrast with the currently fashionable "narrativist" approach, where the focus is on subjective construction of meaning, and on the way people interpret their lives. [11]

BERTAUX argued that as a sociological method, life stories possess six distinctive properties:

1. *Historicity*. Social phenomena are not only embedded in social contexts but also in "time". Lives are doubly embedded in time: in their society's historical time, and in their own ("generational") biographical temporality. Classic empirical methods currently used by sociologists focus on "lateral causality" (of one "variable" on another), thus missing the temporal, "historical" nature of all social phenomena; while life stories immediately bring these twin temporalities to the fore.
2. *Singularity*. Sociological methods, because they focus on generalisations, turned their back on singularity, yet in the history of science, "odd cases" which could not be "explained" by general laws appear, and remain stubbornly there.
3. *Subjectivity*. While life stories are wholly "subjective", it does NOT mean that they are not *objective as well!*
4. *Activity*. Of great importance: life stories allow people to tell what they have done, and more generally "what they did of what had been done to them" (SARTRE) during the course of their lives. When given a chance to describe their own "courses of action", people have to resort to narratives, for this is the (only) discursive form that suits the description of action through time. It may be shown that neither social statistics or surveys, or (non-narrative) interviewing or direct observation (which by nature is limited to short time periods), have the ability to provide detailed descriptions of courses of action.
5. *Contextuality*. Ultimately, social-historical contexts are, according to BERTAUX, what sociologists are trying to describe and understand. But first they need to get, from people who have experienced them, partial descriptions of these contexts, and then try to make sociological sense of such descriptions. In such an ethno-sociological approach, the goal is to reach, through the multiplication of life-story interviews combined with other kinds of data, some sociological understanding of a given social world, social milieu, social situation, or process of becoming.

6. *Expressivity*. This does not refer to the content of life-histories as the five preceding properties, but to their form and to its communicative power. Life stories provide much better reading than statistical tables, observation protocols, or extracts of interviews (viz. Clifford SHAW's *The Jack-Roller* or in Oscar LEWIS' best-seller *Children of Sanchez*, or in a renewed interest in testimonies e.g. Rigoberta MANCHU). [12]

BERTAUX explicitly did not list "authenticity" as one of life stories' most important properties: for him every life story is partly authentic. He further claimed that it is necessary to collect multiple life stories in the same part of social-historical reality in order to reach "saturation", that allows one the possibility of generalising. BERTAUX ended his presentation with a table showing which of the six intrinsic properties of life stories are valued by different constituencies e.g. academics, policy-makers or funding agencies, "practitioners" using sociological inquiry and analysis for practical reasons, the educated public, and interviewees themselves. [13]

2.3 Improving methodological techniques

On the second day of the workshop, Krzysztof KONECKI of the Institute of Sociology, Lodz, Poland, lectured on "Triangulation and the quality of qualitative research: the problem of reality" in which he described methodological and epistemological problems connected with fieldwork. He analysed the "investigated reality", "the realness of the researched reality", assuming that researchers have specific perspectives of the social and psychic reality. He went on to discuss the analytical process, and the commonsense procedures (so called "triangulation procedures"), which are used in the field by researcher and during analysis or writing a research report to adequately "re-present" researched reality. [14]

He pointed out that the stages of reality representation are interconnected and create one complex intellectual process, which is called "field research" but the additional meta -analysis of the process amounts to what we call "reflexive field research". The problem of the quality of qualitative field research is strictly connected with grounding the description of reality by triangulation, and not with the problem of validity, i.e. whether the research procedures truly help to answer the research questions or whether the research measures what it was intended to measure. The quality of qualitative field research is also not connected with a problem of reliability (whether the results are consistent over time) because even revisits to the field cannot solve the problem of temporal and historical changes of reality in the investigated field. [15]

KONECKI exemplified the use of triangulation in his own fieldwork in a factory in Poland, where he documented flirting on the production line, and in another fieldwork setting in Japan, where people appeared to be saying one thing but acted differently according to another set of rules. The repetitiveness of research can afford the opportunity of intersubjectivity. Discussion focused on the existence of reality or the impossibility of proving "non-reality", and revisits as one method of triangulating. [16]

Gillian HUNDT from the School of Health and Social Studies, Warwick University, England, discussed in a multi-media presentation the use of applied theatre as an innovative methodological tool in qualitative research, which has relevance to collaborative studies, in which one increases the use of research subjects in one's research endeavours as a means of data collection, data validation, and knowledge transfer. Applied theatre, performed in non theatre spaces, can be a powerful tool for eliciting views and touching audience's emotions as well as cognition. Her two examples came from South African villages and a UK setting. HUNDT related to theatre as a form of data collection, data validation and the dissemination of knowledge. She based her work on BOAL's ideals of the "theatre of the oppressed", whereby the audience becomes "spect-actors" (not spectators) and are given a voice. The South African study looked into hypertension leading to a stroke at a relatively early age and used applied theatre to validate data gathered from rapid ethnographic assessment in six villages on community understandings of health and illness and health seeking behaviour and to discuss possible ways forward in dealing with the problems of stroke. She suggested that one can address the credibility gap and make research more collaborative and validated by the use of applied theatre developed from research findings. [17]

In the UK, applied theatre was used as a vehicle to raise issues in relation to risk, identity and ethics in relation to prenatal genetic screening. Issues from an ESRC study on this topic were dramatised through a multimedia one woman show with a panel discussion. [18]

The performance acted as a trigger for deeper thought and discussion on risk, and the impact of innovative health technologies on clinic organisation and the experience of staff and women attending. HUNDT's presentation problematised how the use of theatre is a powerful method of raising issues, and a means of addressing a credibility gap with an audience and to a public. However, there are difficulties in of evaluation, establishing its reach and impact beyond the moment and the constant negotiation of the place of the research within the theatre. [19]

2.4 The design of methodological research

David SILVERMAN of Goldsmiths College/Kings' College, University of London, discussed art and artefactuality in qualitative research, giving examples from medical research. His paper discussed whether research findings may be an artefact of research design, as in the "hard" sciences. For instance, in medicine, randomised control trials have become regarded as the Gold Standard precisely because they are seen to prevent spurious, artefactual findings. Similarly, past criticisms of IQ tests draw heavily upon the self-confirming nature of their results. [20]

Using examples from studies of "national identity", SILVERMAN showed how the issue of artefactuality may play a useful role in assessing the design of qualitative research. An alternative to surveys is in-depth interviews. SILVERMAN discussed the limits of interviews, which often still have leading questions, tidied up

transcripts, anecdotal use of extracts not in a sequence and the tendency to use interviewees' responses to answer one's research question. He claimed that the appeal to in-depthness mirrors the romanticism of the "Interview Society" and that direct questions on "identity" in "in-depth" interviews clearly generate responses that may be artefactual. Manufactured data necessarily produces responses that are an artefact of the research setting. He showed how identities are inevitably articulated in local contexts which must be described. SILVERMAN concluded his talk by asking: Is artefactuality unavoidable? He maintained that it depends on how documents or transcripts are analysed. He concluded that one must study how artefacts are created, or try and minimise artefactuality by avoiding manufactured data and examining natural behaviour, while avoiding the pitfalls of interviewing mentioned above. [21]

Lindsay PRIOR from the Department of Sociology, Queen's University, Belfast, Ireland, talked about repositioning documents. He maintained that in sociology the focus on documents has been almost entirely in terms of content and interpretation i.e. monocular. Documents are usually considered mute, inert, like an informant. However, qualitative researchers can regard documents as topics; and even consider documents as "actors". PRIOR took examples from the field of genetics in the UK NHS (National Health Service). He showed that documents are not only written but used and serve as a resource for action, about the past, present and plans for the future. He stated that in networks, in which documents are entangled, documents are actually "actors", albeit non-human actors. In the example he analysed, a genetic chart constructed by medical staff was considered as an active "actor". Documents constitute part of an interactional network. PRIOR suggested treating documents as a source of information, opinion, and belief. Indeed, the standard approach to the use and analysis of documents in social research focuses primarily on what is contained in them. In this frame, documents are viewed as conduits of communication between a writer and a reader—conduits that both contain, and can be scrutinised for, meaningful messages. PRIOR said that while documents invariably contain information, every document enters into human activity in a dual relation. First, documents enter the social field as a receptacle (of instructions, obligations, contracts, wishes, reports etc). Second, they enter the field as agents in their own rights with effects on patterns of interaction. In improving the quality of qualitative research, PRIOR suggest how we can move beyond the hermeneutics of text and to draw upon some observable features of documentation as data resource in action. [22]

PRIOR was followed by Giampietro GOBO of the Dipartimento di Studi Sociali e Politici Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, in Milan University, Italy, who like SILVERMAN, demonstrated how even in hard sciences, many important experiments never took place, or the material was tampered with or manipulated. They were conceived but in practice were only "thought experiments" and never occurred. The history of the hard sciences is a continuous, incessant and recursive display of schizophrenic behaviour: stating strongly overt methodological rules and then secretly disrupting them because, for a number of organisational reasons, it is impossible to apply the set of methodological rules

displayed in the handbooks. In methodology, rules are often prescribed that are often tacitly removed or worked out. GOBO stated that he does not necessarily subscribe to postmodernist ideas that find methodology as an obstacle. However, he examined good organisational reasons for bad research; for example, publish or perish pressure. Sometimes, data collection and analysis are sacrificed. In addition, there are good sociological reasons for bad research; for example, if methodology is constituted by rules, which are rarely applied, methodology can rarely be applied as is written in the qualitative methodology handbooks. One way is to revisit traditional methodological concepts, such as validity, reliability, and craft a new methodology that is more practical and sociologically and organisationally-based. GOBO gave an example from his own work on sampling in which he showed that most of the well-known qualitative researchers were actually survey-workers and most of their work was derived from small and opportunistic samples. He called for decolonising methodology and a methodology grounded in practice. He argued that we need more tips and advice on how to carry out our task. A trend is research teams. Why is team research growing? It is an organisational answer to academic pressure. In a research team, the methodological rules are loose because it is difficult to control all research behaviours. How much can one trust their ethnographic notes? So we have to find a sustainable methodology in order to take into account these organisational changes in qualitative research. He pointed out, however, that such "situated methodology" does not totally give up traditional ways of carrying out research. [23]

2.5 Enhancing the credibility of qualitative research

On the third day of the workshop, Paul DREW of the Department of Sociology at York University, England, opened with a lecture on conversation analysis (CA), is an inter-disciplinary method connecting sociology, linguistics, psychology and other disciplines. It is a rigorous and systematic method for analysing talk-in-interaction in a wide range of ethnographic and interactional settings—and thereby as a method for understanding the "constitution" and co-construction of the work of various organisations and institutions. DREW reviewed the method, its applicability and its limitations, and considered the intersection with other research methods. Basing himself on a conversation between George Bush and Tony Blair, recorded at the G8 meeting in St. Petersburg in July 2006, which was recorded by mistake when Bush's microphone was accidentally left on, DREW showed how a single conversation can in fact influence international diplomacy. In a study of affiliation in interaction, Drew demonstrated that conversation forms move from imperatives ("I need you to ...") to ("I wonder if ..."), that is from low contingency and high entitlement, to high contingency and low entitlement. Bringing examples from ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) oncology, the doctor always makes positive remarks; he worked with 60 to 80 cases and argued that qualitative methodologists could also attempt to analyse larger data sets (hundreds of cases). Giving examples from his research in medical health with Primary and Secondary Care consultations between doctors and patients, DREW concluded that CA, combined with other methodological tools, could enhance the credibility of qualitative methods. [24]

Anne RYEN of Adger University College, Kristiansand, Norway, took an opposed approach and addressed the credibility issue in ethnographic research by working with a single main informant, an Asian businessman in East Africa. Publications on working with informants have focused on informants as insiders, the challenges in recruiting an informant in a new field, and the quandaries informants may produce. Later researchers became concerned with the potentially exploitative nature of qualitative methods, and about the moral ambiguities of fieldwork. RYEN claimed that field relations should be seen as resembling ordinary relations between lay people. Portraying informants solely as information-providers veil the interactional aspects of doing fieldwork. Rather we should describe the shifts in the collaborative relations in the field. This leads us to accept the multiplicity of why informants volunteer to participate in our projects. As in daily life, members move between alternative contexts and paired identities. In this way, researchers can avoid being trapped in the "neo-colonialism" of cross-cultural research. Correct relations with the major informant are crucial to the credibility of our research. Analysing informant-researcher relations as less structural and more collaborative will provide us with more wide-ranging data and is crucial to the credibility of our research. RYEN maintained that field relations should be seen as resembling ordinary relations between lay people, and argued against portraying informants solely as information-providers. She exemplified this with extracts from conversations between the researcher and her key informant. She claimed that researcher-researched interaction is never static. In real life, RYEN's key informant was sometimes depressed, and at times the conversations were personal. RYEN recommended that researchers should be more flexible about drawing professional/private boundaries in field relations and should not exclude all personal matters from the relationship. These conversations should be regarded as part of the fieldwork itself, which is part of the ordinary everyday life of ethnographers. [25]

Christian HEATH, from the Department of Management, King's College, University of London, argued in his lecture "The Strike of a Hammer" for the use of audio-technological innovations in qualitative research, which sociologists have tended to neglect in the past. Basing himself on Bernard HIBBITS, a legal anthropologist, who claims that different forms of non-verbal actions, such as large noises, handshakes, and so on, are essential for securing legal contracts e.g. wedding contracts, and are increasingly absent in modern society. HEATH's paper focused on the public auction and the strike of a gavel on a piece of wood, which marks the valuation and sale of goods, from small amounts of money to millions. The gesture is of a profound, momentary, legal significance. In auctions of fine art, antiques and objects d'art, the striking of the hammer signifies the acceptance of the highest bid, whereby the closing session concludes the contract between buyer and seller. Even the design of a simple gesture, the striking of the gavel, is representative of the complexities of social relations. Video can be an unprecedented opportunity to address the fine details of social action and interaction in naturally occurring settings. HEATH brought to the attention of his audience the finest details of the sequential actions, through which he developed analytic insights that are grounded within the sequential organisation of activities and prioritise the importance of participants' "standpoint"

and "practice". Through the auction, HEATH demonstrated how video analysis can take into consideration talk, visible and material conduct, whilst taking the participants standpoint and their participation seriously. [26]

2.6 Overcoming a "legitimation crisis"

In order to overcome the so-called "legitimation crisis" in qualitative studies, which makes problematic the traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research, one tactic, as suggested by several speakers, is to engage in collaborative research. In the wake of globalisation, collaborative research has accelerated, to the extent that it has become the "darling" of most funding bodies. Shalva WEIL of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, in a lecture entitled "Is Collaboration an Improvement?" examined collaborative research, which has not come sufficiently under the scrutiny of qualitative methodologists. Within anthropology, collaborative ethnography stems from a well-entrenched tradition engaging others in a public act, sometimes far beyond the boundaries of the discipline's discourse. However, too little attention has been given to the pitfalls of collaborative qualitative research in general. This may involve surrendering academic principles to further political ends, claiming "authority" over weaker partners and suppressing dialogical cooperation. In the paper, Weil discussed her engagement in a recent research project in which 20 Palestinian and Israeli principals participated in two workshops annually on the subject of school violence. The workshops were aimed at enabling the principals from both sides to share their techniques, models and skills of curbing violence in a wider educational context. WEIL described the difficult implementation of the project, and then examined the lack of real equality between the researchers, their different ethnographic styles and different backgrounds. Together, research partners appeared to be mirroring the Palestinian-Israeli realities in which power relations rule. Nevertheless, as WEIL pointed out, collaborative studies have the potential of becoming much more than mere "participatory action research". [27]

3. The Quality of the Discipline

The workshop convened different European scholars from different disciplines in different fields of qualitative methodology to discuss the state of the art and the quality of their disciplines. It afforded an opportunity to exchange ideas in a face-to-face situation. The timing of the workshop was essential in order to "nip in the bud" the doubts of potential funding bodies and the existing critiques of qualitative research from quantitative colleagues so that qualitative studies will be recognised as legitimate. The participants debated improving qualitative methodology, what better methodologies one can employ, which techniques one can use, which research designs are preferable, how one can enhance credibility and finally, how one can overcome the "legitimation crisis" in qualitative studies. They had several suggestions, ranging from providing better guidelines (MAEDER) to improving research designs (GOBO, SILVERMAN). KONECKI debated the techniques of triangulation. Several participants thought that utilising different techniques would avert a credibility gap; for example, by putting reflexivity to better use (BUSCATTO), or by employing life-histories to better advantage (BERTAUX).

Some suggested innovative methods, such as applied theatre (HUNDT), or the use of audio-technological techniques (HEATH). PRIOR thought that the repositioning of documents improves research studies; DREW thought we should do more CA (conversation analysis). Different numbers of informants are involved in different types of researches: RYEN relied upon a main informant; WEIL reported upon the advantages and pitfalls of collaborative research. KVALE impressed upon his audience the importance of treating research as a craft. [28]

In addition to the main lectures, participants split into three groups to discuss practical ideas aimed at improving the quality of qualitative methodology. Some of the participants, including the doctoral students, were not entirely convinced that a credibility gap exists. They wanted to narrow the question, pointing out that in certain European countries ethnography, ethnology and qualitative methods are quite advanced. Nevertheless, they agreed that more can be done for qualitative methods to gain credibility. Suggestions were made to hold a summer school for graduate students on qualitative methods, organise future scientific workshops in order to go into the debates in greater depth, and so on. [29]

There were also discussions of who commissions research and what the attributes of the policy-makers. It was concluded that the challenges of credibility include how we present ourselves to different audiences: academics, practitioners, funding agencies, and other lay people. [30]

In conclusion, the Kristiansand workshop was designed to take up the challenge of quantitative colleagues and it provided a serious academic forum in which such questions could be discussed. It also managed to stimulate some younger scholars in the field and to act as a catalyst for clear thinking. It is hoped that the workshop will have spin-off effects on the direction of larger groups of qualitative researchers, such as those who met in Glasgow, Scotland for the ESA (European Sociological Association) Research Network in Qualitative Methods conference, those who participate in the EUROQUAL project already funded by the ESF, and readers of online qualitative journals. [31]

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