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Multi-Visual Qualitative Method: Observing Social Groups in Mass Media

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Keywords

qualitative research

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Multi-Visual Qualitative Method: Observing Social Groups in Mass Media

by
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Abstract

In reviewing the bibliography upon which qualitative method is based, the author refers to ethnography, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and cultural studies, and argues that a combination of the qualitative methods is actually possible. To enforce his point, he gives the example of research that was recently conducted about the National Television Channel of Greece. Moreover, through the theoretical review, he asserts that the application of all qualitative methods is a way to transfer ourselves from observation to focusing and depth interviews. He believes that such an application can be really effective while collecting data as well as while analyzing and presenting the results of the research. Finally, it is his firm conviction that this shift to qualitative multi-methods can be also achieved in other scientific fields, apart from that of mass media.

Introduction

In this article I aim to present the way in which three qualitative research methods can be effectively combined: observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews. In order to see the application of their simultaneous use in the same field, I have initially considered the national television channel of Greece and, specifically, the journalists through their labour relations. The article consists of four parts: first, I present a theoretical review of the foundations of the qualitative methods; second, I refer to the specific choice of the multi-visual qualitative method; third, I develop its application into three distinct levels of research: design, data collection procedure and analysis; and fourth, I evaluate the qualitative method itself.

Interpretative Social Inquiry: Influence in Communication Research

The frameworks of interpretative social science were many years in the making and involved the development of concepts from several branches of the human sciences. In their work, Weber, Husserl and Schultz, provided warrants for many concepts that later became important, including the social construction of reality ([Berger & Luckmann](#), 1967; [Garfinkel](#), 1967), the rules of language use ([Cicourel](#), 1974), and the self in social life ([Goffman](#), 1959). Their ideas continue to exert great influence on nearly all of the human sciences.

Interpretative inquiry has been practiced in a number of social scientific disciplines, but it is especially prominent in sociology. The approach itself has many names: interactionist ([Fisher &](#)

[Strauss](#), 1978; [Silverman](#), 1985, p. 85), humanistic, phenomenological, naturalistic ([Wester](#), 1987, p. 14) or, simply, qualitative sociology.

The common heritage is [Weber's](#) (1964, p. 88) classic formulation of sociology: "a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at casual explanation of its course and effects". The essence of interpretive sociology is the analysis and interpretation, through understanding (verstehen) or empathic understanding, of the meaning that people give to their actions.

Four methodological sources merit further discussion: ethnomethodology, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, and cultural studies.

The first form of interpretive inquiry seeks to identify the rules that people apply so as to make sense of the world around them. Whereas ethnomethodology originates from the work of phenomenologists, in particular [Husserl](#) (1931) and [Schultz](#) (1967), the central figure in its later development has been Garfinkel, who conceived the term, formulated the core ideas and has served as a source of inspiration for other ethnomethodological researchers. For Garfinkel, ethnomethodology is a form of "practical sociological analysis" ([Schultz](#), 1967, p. 1). This sociological analysis, however, is not merely an undertaking of professional sociologists; on the contrary, ethnomethodology is an everyday activity in which social agents constantly engage as they arrive at an interpretive understanding of other agents and actions through interaction, thus making sense of social reality.

As a sociological approach, ethnomethodology is actually a peculiar one. It forsakes the usual theory-building path of developing explanations of human behavior in topical fashion. Ethnomethodology's distinct "topic" is the local construction of meaning through certain interactional practices, mostly conversational ([Sacks](#), 1963). The content of those practices is of little, if any, importance or consequence. What are consequential are really situational resources and the sequence of activities used in constructing coherence for a given practice. That is, the nature of work is not to be found in the products, proclamations or expressed ideologies of organizations, but in the observable activities and use of artifacts in the workplace. Every workplace has its own organization of resources and sequence of activities. The focus is on how and when people engage in an activity, not what its functional status might be. A thorough look at some key concepts reveals the interpretive basis of ethnomethodology.

All social life is enacted in contexts. The practical reasoning in which people engage depends upon their use of situational resources in specific contexts. Expressions that draw upon particular aspects of the local context to establish orderliness, naturalness and factuality are called indexical expressions. The meanings of most, if not all, utterances would be unfathomable if we did not know the contexts in which they are spoken ([Dore & McDermott](#), 1982). Indexicality involves the artful organization of behavior and other resources of a setting (like workplace) in order to create a meaningful act. As [Garfinkel](#) (1967, pp. 1-11) points out, indexical expressions possess rational properties because they are responsible for creating the order in interaction. The rules and norms of social situations are evident in the indexicality of the communicative action itself.

There is no one research method associated with ethnomethodology. Nevertheless, participant observation and in-depth interviewing are frequently employed as significant elements of an open research strategy. A prominent place is almost always given to everyday conversation, this being the primary medium of everyday interaction. A special approach, refined to perfection by Garfinkel and his colleagues, is that of experiments which are designed to disrupt those rules of conversation that are taken for granted. As [Garfinkel](#) (1967, p. 37) himself described the technique: "[p]rocedurally it is my preference to start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble". [Douglas](#) (1976), in particular, has greatly contributed to the development of this approach, and has in the process ignited a continuing debate of the ethnical legitimacy of such research strategies ([Cavan](#), 1978). The justification given for using a disruptive mean of research is that its final result is the underlying rules governing human behavior in everyday situations.

Ethnomethodology has had a major impact on the communication research agenda. Its most direct application is found in the area of conversation analysis.

As it is evident from the list of research concerns that was mentioned above, the overriding interest in the structure of speech virtually leaves little or no room for its relational, affective or cultural aspects. The value of conversation analysis as a way to describe the local construction and organization of interactional coherence has been increasingly recognized in the communication field. ([Heritage](#), 1984). In terms of method, conversation analysis often relies on transcripts of discourse tape-recorded under naturalistic conditions. Unlike discourse analysis, however, conversation analysis admits additional types and levels of contextual detail beyond the transcript itself, and usually results in an interpretive rather than statistical analysis ([Hopper](#), [Koch](#), & [Mandelbaumet](#), 1986).

Media studies that draw, in part, on this approach include [Mollotch and Lester's](#) (1974) examination of news as purposive behavior and [Tuchman's](#) (1978) investigation of news organization. A landmark study of interpretive social inquiry into media, drawing according to its references on symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and ethnography was [Lull's](#) (1980) examination of the social uses of television. He wondered how media, particularly television, "play a central role in the methods which families and other social units employ to interact normatively" ([Lull](#), 1980, p. 198). Using a combination of participant observation and interview research methods, Lull and his associates examined interaction and communication patterns in their natural setting: the home. This work actually functioned as a preparation of the way for many recent studies in the ethnography of communication.

The second tradition leading to qualitative communication inquiry draws inspiration from anthropological and socio-linguistic approaches to language. The ethnography communication considers discourse as pro-vital to the study of social life.

The greater part of research falling under the ethnography of communication rubric concerns speech performance. Its theoretical grounding derives from several sources, of which the most prominent is the philosophy of [Wittgenstein](#) (1953). Wittgenstein asserts that the practice of language can be effectively analyzed only in terms of the logic of "language games". He argues

that there are no private rules of meaning in language. The meanings of language emerge only when we are aware of the social rules that govern its usage.

Two streams of empirical study came together to form the ethnography of communication research program: socio-linguistics and folklore. Socio-linguistics is concerned with the relationship between linguistic forms (especially grammatical rules and vocabularies) and their social uses and meanings. It also includes a focus on how people as members of a specific culture gain competence in the use of linguistic codes and forms. On the other hand, folklorists study oral and material cultures. Operating somewhere between humanistic (literature and ethnic studies) and scientific (anthropology and linguistics) disciplines. Folklore studies involve the collection of examples of "in situ" speech or musical performance in order to develop a clear understanding of their cultural and historical origins and functions. In contrast to socio-linguistics, which stresses the social practice of language, folklore studies stress the artful performance of feeling and thought in regional, ethnic or national cultures.

Today, ethnography is practiced in other disciplines as well, such as anthropology, within which several versions of this approach now exist ([Clifford & Marcus](#), 1986; [Ellen](#), 1984; [Sanday](#), 1983). However, despite such diversity, most anthropological seem to agree on three major core principles.

First, ethnographic research is concerned with cultural forms in the widest sense of the term, including everyday life as well as religion and arts ([Fetterman](#), 1989; [Hammersley & Atkinson](#), 1983). Second, studies generally acknowledge the need for long-term participant observation, with the researcher functioning as the primary instrument of inquiry. And third, multiple data-collection methods are generally employed, according to [Sanday](#) (1983, p. 21), as a check on observational findings.

More specifically, [Sanday](#) (1983) identifies three distinct types of anthropological ethnography: holistic, semiotic and behavioristic. Of these three, the holistic one has the longest tradition and it is dominant within the discipline. The word "holistic" refers directly to scope of inquiry and specifically to the purpose of investigating many aspects of the particular group or society that is being studied. For this exact reason, anthropological ethnographies have commonly been situated in clearly defined settings, such as a village or other small geographical community. Finally, the establishment of rapport between the researcher and the group studied is considered to be a critical element of ethnography ([Seiter, Bochers, Kreutzner, & Warth](#), 1989). This is one of the reasons why some researchers ([Wolcott](#), 1975) suggest a minimum of one year for the fieldwork phase of an ethnographic project.

The 1960's and 1970's saw the development of the field of communication ethnography with several anthologies, field studies and pragmatic statements making its progress ([Bauman & Sherzer](#), 1975; [Leeds-Hutwitz](#), 1984; [Stewart & Philipson](#), 1984). Fieldwork has been conducted that it describes role-based communicative styles as they function in particular subcultures or social situations. Through these studies, we can learn how communities "enforce" speech norms, and what happens when they are breached. The speech community is viewed as a constantly performed accomplishment, with a basis in consensual rules.

[Braber](#) (1989) examined critically three ethnographic studies of women and popular culture, and essentially came to the same conclusion that much of what is considered to be ethnography deviates somehow from what anthropologists mean by the term. Moreover, Braber questioned [Hobson's](#) (1982) analysis of the British soap opera "Crossroads", [Radway's](#) (1984) study of female readers of popular romance fiction, and Seiter and colleagues' research on soap opera viewers. All three studies were limited, definitely to a varying degree, in regard to the aspects of anthropological ethnography that Braber considered: centrality of the concept of culture, employment of participant observation, and smallness of the research setting.

In spite of these subject, the call for more ethnographies of media audiences is frequent and forceful. Ian Ang, in her book "Desperately Seeking the Audience", disparages the emphasis on de-contextualized quantitative data, largely promoted by the television industry, and recommends "ethnographic understanding" of audiences as an alternative ([Ang](#), 1991). On the other hand, although she argues at length for the value of ethnography in audience research, still, she devotes no more than a footnote to the characteristics of ethnography as a concrete, empirical approach to conducting research.

For all the discussion and disagreement among anthropologists about the nature of ethnography, the anthropological consensus, as noted above, may well provide the best starting point for designing ethnographic media research. At the same time, there are a number of general issues outstanding in the scientific debate on how to develop systematic and applicable qualitative research methods.

Symbolic interactionism was the form of interpretive inquiry at the center of the theoretical and methodological reorientation of the 1960's and 1970's; it is the study of how the self and the social environment mutually define and shape each other through symbolic communication. It is grounded primarily on Mead's book *Mind, Self and Society* ([Mead](#), 1934), which was described as the "single most influential book to date, on symbolic interactionism" ([Manis & Meltzer](#), 1967, p. 140). Others, (e.g., [Cooley](#), 1930; [Dewey](#), 1925; [Thomas](#), 1928), also contributed to its development, but there is general agreement that the refinement of the theoretical position came from [Blumer](#) (1969). He posited, first of all, that people act on the basis of the meaning they themselves ascribe to objects and situations. Second, Blumer held the conviction that meaning derives from interaction with others, and that this meaning is transformed further through a process of interpretation during interaction ([Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds](#), 1975, p. 2).

Coupled to these notions was a methodology stressing respect for the world and actions in that world, what is often referred to as a naturalistic perspective ([Lincoln & Guba](#), 1985). Specifically, participant observation is normally associated with the naturalistic perspective and generally with the work of symbolic interactionists ([Ackroyd & Hughes](#), 1981, pp. 102-103; [Rock](#), 1979, p.178).

Other sociologists also contributed a lot to the development of the naturalistic perspective. [Goffman](#) (1959), for example, is credited with the creation of a distinct "dialect" of symbolic interactionism, the dramaturgical approach ([Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds](#), 1975).

Symbolic interactionism has several points of affinity with communication. It is mostly concerned with the role of symbolic expression in processes of social affiliation as well as of social conflict. It provides explanations for the relationships among understanding, motive and message design. What is most important for students of communication is that symbolic interactionism offers a way inside the meanings inherent in roles and actions ([Duncan](#), 1962; [Faules & Alexander](#), 1978).

Furthermore, symbolic interactionism has directly influenced the development of the constructivist approach to interpersonal communication ([Delia](#), 1977). Constructivism seeks to explain how persons adjust and adapt their communicative situations. It has borrowed widely from rhetorical theory, personal construct theory, and cognitive-developmental psychology. It also draws on such concepts from symbolic interactionism as role taking, the definition of the situation, and the emergence of meaning in interaction. Qualitative methods of inquiry have played a small role in empirical studies of constructivism. For the most part, the approach relies on structured coding systems applied to simulated social situations.

Interactionism concepts have also contributed to the interest in looking at organizational communication as a cultural phenomenon. The interpretive debts of this approach are quite eclectic, with strong elements of ethnomethodology, narrative theory, and cultural hermeneutics cited in its founding essays ([Pakanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo](#), 1983). However, its emphasis on the performance organizational myth, ritual and everyday interaction, as well as the focus on conflict, belies an interactionist influence.

As [Raymond Williams](#) documents generously in his book *Keywords* (1976), "[c]ulture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (p. 87). From its early meaning of the "cultivating" of resources and knowledge, the word took on its own current usages: a) "general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development", b) "a particular way of life, either of people, a period, a group, or humanity in general", and c) "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (p. 90).

All three usages, Williams notes, are closely related, but in the social sciences the second meaning has predominated. In cultural anthropology, where the concept is crucial, culture is the system of meanings through which social practices make sense to a people, and by which these practices carry on across generations in enduring form ([Geertz](#), 1973; [Schneider](#), 1976). Culture also distinguishes the range of behaviors and statuses permitted to the members of a group or a social body. Artifacts such as totems, metaphorically clarify the identities of tribes and ethnic groups. So, considered as a system, culture makes it possible to think of all the material and organizing efforts of a people.

Apart from that, it can also be argued that cultural studies embody diverse approaches that all have an interest in the matter of signification.

From a classical marxist framework, the primary function of ideology is to naturalize the conditions of societal inequity and economic class dominance existing in capitalistic societies. The concept of cultural hegemony has been used widely in cultural studies in order to characterize the political struggle for domination ([Gitlin](#), 1979; [Gramsci](#), 1971; [Hall](#), 1982).

In some ways, like the Chicago School symbolic interactionists, British cultural studies, psychoanalysts, and reception studies analysts, also began to examine in close detail the marginal and struggling elements in society, including working class male students ([Willis, 1977](#)), punk subculture ([Hebdige, 1979](#)), and teenage girls ([McRobbie, 1982](#)). In their accounts, cultural action is an artful and self-conscious attempt to secure spaces and moments of identity in a society obsessed with instrumental control. Therefore, culture was seen in a new light: "[c]ulture is understood both as a way of life--encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power--and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities, and so forth" ([Nelson, Treichler, & Grossman, 1992, p. 5](#)).

In some of its forms, feminist research has followed a cultural studies path in attempting to understand how women interpret male and female signs in mainstream texts such as television. Feminist theory holds the conviction that practices of everyday communication tend to exclude, marginalize, or distort the future interests of women, because these practices serve the interests of a patriarchal social system. Feminist research seeks to document these practices, their effects in gender relationships, and how creative resistance to them can occur. Other feminist studies focus on how women use specialized media so as to explore their own aspirations and identities ([Brown, 1990](#); [Grodin, 1991](#)). In accordance with their beliefs about women's culture and interpersonal styles, feminist researchers often use a collaborative approach that involves close relationships with participants in defining and exploring the research problem ([Stanley & Wise, 1983](#)).

In a structuralist, semiological and postmodern culture, the intertextuality of a cultural artifact tends to draw attention reflexively to its own stylistic conventions, historical antecedents, and ways of "reading" it ([Fiske, 1987](#)). Some proponents of post-modernism claim that the media have become such skilled readers of mediated culture, that notions of either ideological dominance by the media or the autonomy of self are passé ([Gergen, 1991](#)). Postmodern life is seen as situational, fragmented, fluid, style centered, participatory, and reflexive. The textual form of communication studies exhibits some of these same characteristics, especially in the sense of breaking down the author's imposed master narrative of traditional social science ([Browning & Hawes, 1991](#)).

To sum up, cultural studies has no stable object of inquiry. It is up to the theoretical perspective, and often to the purpose of individual analysis, to drive work in cultural studies.

Multi-Visual Qualitative Method

Qualitative approaches try to bring us close to the performances and practices of communication. The qualitative inquirer seeks somehow to get inside this action. The research "instrument" is the human investigator, who reflexively becomes an inseparable part of both the action itself and the ensuing description. The "human subject" is the other person(s), whom we respect and from whom we learn. The "data" are texts, which change over time as the researcher's interests, knowledge, and abilities change through time. The "products" are typically full of voices, stories, events, interpretations, hypotheses, and claims. The "qualitative research" of this article concerns

the empirical study of communication from an interpretive and cultural- hermeneutical perspective.

A particular example comes from the results of our recent multi-method qualitative research act about the journalists who work in National Television Channel of Greece.

First, the objective of this multiple method study was called "idiographic". One does generalize in qualitative research, but not in a way that tries to attain the scope of a universal law. Instead, the richness of the particular elements that have documented and the patterns of themes they exhibit, allow the researcher to generalize in other cases of the same problem in the culture of a people.

Second, theory in qualitative inquiry usually consists of some ways to understand a people's (journalistic work) rationality. Then, we are interested in their logic and in the kind of evidence they consider worthwhile or relevant. But the purposes of research are clearly not exhausted there. To expand the implications of the case(s) under study, we bring other frames of reference to bear, such as the conceptual resources of the communication discipline. One uses the case to inform theoretical and practical arguments about morality, ideology, politics, social interaction, or symbolic discipline. A useful representation of the case results from our ability to translate the practices of the other person(s) into language and into a set of problems with which we are familiar in the communication discipline.

In our research, we used a qualitative multi-method, such as observation, focus groups and individual in-depth interviews. In these combined uses of qualitative methods, the goal was to use a qualitative multi-method, such as observation, focus groups and in-depth interviews. In these simultaneously combined uses, our goal was to use each method so that it contributes something and/or unique to the understanding of the phenomenon under study. This mix of qualitative methods actually gives new opportunities for an effective research, perhaps of any kind.

An often quoted definition of observation has been offered by H. S. Becker and B. Geer:

By participation observation we mean that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time. ([Becker & Geer](#), 1957, p. 28)

The primary purpose of participant observation research, accordingly, is to describe in fundamental terms various events, situations, and actions that occur in a particular social setting. This is achieved through the development of case studies of social phenomena, normally employing a combination of data collection techniques. But, what are the actual advantages of naturalistic settings? Three major advantages of such settings are: a) an ability to collect data on a larger range of behaviors, b) a greater variety interactions with the study participants, and c) a more open discussion.

Observation will always have a advantage whenever it is necessary to observe behaviors in their natural context and, especially, when it is necessary to follow these behaviors in detail over time.

Moreover, such a method is the primary tool for the investigation of broad aspects of culture, like television organizations.

However, when we wish to study a participant group like journalists, it is surely preferable to follow focus groups as a second (not alternative) qualitative method in the same case.

Focus groups are not really new. Within the social sciences, Bogardus's description of group interviews is the earliest published work. Furthermore, group interviews played a notable part in applied social research programs during World War II, including efforts to examine the persuasiveness of propaganda and the effectiveness of training materials for the troops ([Merton & Kendall](#), 1946) as well as studies on factors that affected productivity of work groups ([Thompson & Demerath](#), 1952). At present, there are two principal means of group interviews have: collecting qualitative data in groups and open-ended interviews, both of which typically occur with individuals. Likewise group interviews, focus groups not only occupy an intermediate position between the other qualitative methods, but it also possesses a distinctive identity of their own.

Focus groups as a qualitative method have the following characteristics: a) it is limited to verbal behavior, b) it only consists interaction in discussion groups, c) the groups are created and managed by the researcher, d) it requires greater attention to the role of the moderator, and e) it provides less depth and detail about the opinions and experiences of any given participant.

As a result of these, thus, they offer something of a compromise between the strengths of participant observation and individual interviewing. Functioning in this way, that is as a compromise between the weaknesses and the strengths of these other qualitative techniques, focus groups are not as strong or effective as is either of them within their specialized domain. The respective weaknesses of observation and individual interviewing, however, allow focus groups to operate across traditional boundaries, but this flexibility may be the greatest strength of this method helping our progress in a scientific field.

Broadly speaking, four approaches inform interviewing practice: ethnographic, feminist, postmodernist and personal construct approach. In all approaches, however, reflexivity is accorded a key role, in the sense of the researcher reflecting on his or her own experience and role within the conduct of the research.

[George Kelly's](#) research designs (1955) are an integral part of his personal construct psychology. For Kelly, objective reality is a myth. Our subjective reality is based on the meaning that we have attached to previous experiences. It is the meaning that is influential, not the event itself. Such personal meanings are the basis of our individual theories or frameworks, through which we filter and interpret current experiences. Kelly's focus is on the individual as the maker of meaning. It is the idiosyncratic nature of our experience that accounts for the difference between people. Personal construct approach, there, is a dynamic element of personal agency. "People are neither prisoners of their environment nor victims of their biographies, but active individuals struggling to make sense of their experiences and acting in accordance with the meaning they impose on those experiences" ([Kelly](#), 1995, p. 15).

This kind of individual interviewing has a clear advantage: a greater amount of information for each informant to handle and share, as he or she is able to evaluate each situation calmly and correctly. As these suggestions show, observation, focus groups and individual interviews can be complementary techniques across a variety of different research designs. In particular, either of them can be used in either a preliminary or a follow-up capacity with the rest. This illustrates the larger point that the goal of combining research methods is to strengthen the total research project.

Planning and Research Design

The first choice and move is the research design: the funnel and the cycle share the image of circularity, but for the cycle itself it is dominant ([Carbaugh & Hastings](#), 1992; [Spradley](#), 1980). The basic idea is that the researcher initially formulates a research problem, engages in such activities of observation, focus groups and individual interviewing, and develops tentative explanations. Then he or she goes back to collect new data, possibly to consult the literature again, to revise and test new explanations, and so on. The process continues until he or she "gets it right", that is until the task of interpreting problematic data is finally resolved.

Coming full circle in our discussion, the release of control opens us to unexpected paths of questioning and discovery. Curiosity and creative suspicion are continually turned on both the design and our own process of converting experience to knowledge. An insistence on control would surely prevent us from being fully skeptical about how we can familiarize ourselves with another cultural reality.

Multi-visual qualitative method needs to be planned in the same systematic way as any other type of research. It is useful to draw up a checklist of preliminary questions in order to develop a description of the situation, such as : "What is happening already? What is the rationale for this? What am I trying to change? What are the possibilities? Who is affected? With whom will I have to negotiate?" ([Elliot](#), 1980).

The outline of the stages of multi-visual qualitative research is:

- a. Select the general area,
- b. Discuss, observe, read, and decide on your first action,
- c. Take your action,
- d. Examine the information you have collected,
- e. Evaluate, processes and outcomes,
- f. Plan next action,
- g. Take next action, and
- h. Continue.

Data Collection: Observing - Focusing - Interviewing

We need to gather data in order to come to a position of being able to monitor the practice which is at the center of the inquiry. The methods selected for gathering the information you need for action will depend on the nature of the information required. It is highly important to gather

information that will tell us more as a practitioner than we already know in general. This should be done in such a way that it informs the thinking of not just us, perhaps, as a "key" researcher, but of all concerned with the intervention programmes, and so offer the opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of intervention programmes in general. This may involve a combination of the following procedures, wherever this is appropriate. At this point, it is important to stress that if we are carrying out practitioner research, we must select those data collection methods that do not distort our practices in an unwelcome way or lead us to wrong conclusions that make our research useless:

- a. Collection of document relating to the situation,
- b. Detailed diary,
- c. Observation notes,
- d. Notes of meeting with the focus group,
- e. Interviews,
- f. Shadowing: shadow studies can give vital information when the study extends over boundaries into different aspects of practice, as can happen in institutional life,
- g. Tape, video, photographs recording,
- h. Triangulation: this is an essential ingredient whereby you use a range of the above methods to check out the information gained, the interpretations, and your decisions about action.

In a multi-visual qualitative research that was recently conducted in the greek National Television Channel 1, we tried to consider the various bureaucracy problems that usually appear in an organization like this:

- a. We carefully observed the behavior of officers and employees in all organization fields,
- b. We experimented with small groups of new journalists,
- c. Focusing on the constructs and choosing only few of the evident associations, we noticed that those colleagues construed as supportive, are also experienced as inventive, trustworthy, and less likely to be politically malleable.

The whole study was based on the analysis of observations, documents from focus groups and interviews. The cycle of the research process moved from gaining an initial picture through this material to exploring themes and writing up. At each stage followed, the analysis generated was discussed with the participants employed in the organization. The individual interviews focused on the topics of the past, present and future of the specific organization, its values, atmosphere and ethos, its purpose and mode of functioning, the working environment, the composition of workers, the participants' experience and views on the position of the organization in society, and, finally, the current use of the organization and its facilities. Hence the study was organized around bureaucracy principles of consultation about the research questions, reciprocity within the process of generating the accounts and analysis, and accountability over the emerging issues.

Analysis focused on the following issues: structure, how this was perceived by the participants as well as by the researcher, what, if any, kinds of role divisions exist, management structure, the patterns and flow of workday; communication and information processing, decision-making structures, regularity of meetings and who attends them, access to records, how people find out

about what is going on and how democratic this is; environment, appearance, accessibility, how well resourced this was and how conducive to successful organizational and worker functioning, relations with external organizations (private television); effectiveness to the extent perceived by the organization, and why, whether considered in terms of personal development, success rates or mere survival; power and politics, formal versus informal forms of power, power used positively and/or negatively, the value accorded to expertise, confidence and time spent within the organization.

As a result of building up this picture of the specific television separately and given the different focus of the services and varying levels of financial security, each step exhibits a different profile of strengths and weaknesses, achievements and problems. Nevertheless, some similarities of structure were discernible, with high levels of member participation, few role divisions, high levels of trust and cooperation, and collective forms of work. The structures on which the organization was based all relied heavily on personal networks that were used to organize work. Despite a common preoccupation with issues of structure, communication, resources and development, the organization demonstrated differences in their fluidity of organizational boundaries, differential demands made of workers and corresponding ability to cope with stress, differences in ability to take positive action over which journalists used and worked within the organization and different accounts of the role of political commitment within the work.

Hence the tensions or contradictions of bureaucratic practice were crucially played out through organizational structures and roles. In terms of the role of personal networks, these are the arteries along which the blood of the organizations flow. They worked best when based on prior or current friendship; but, owing to their informality, some members could be inadequately supported, and these were precisely those most likely to leave.

On the other hand, in terms of its adequacy, sociological theory appears to have little to say about organizational structures such as these experienced in this research. Therefore, the study poses new questions for both media and sociological research including: the role of friendship within organizational structures and formats; strategies deployed in, and political analyses of, the process of managing engagement with outside structures (political and social services) without recuperation; the perception and exercise of power relations--how these are used positively and/or destructively, and how this relates to the position of each organization externally.

Now that some of the key subjects of the analysis have been outlined, we can step back to the focus on the production of this account.

In these two steps, Planning and Collecting data, we didn't give attention to the technique of qualitative multi-method (focus group interview practice, tactical observing, sampling, adopting roles, question design and use etc.) as much as to the methodology of multi-visual qualitative analysis. Besides, each researcher is allowed to follow his or her own technique in the application of a qualitative method, bearing in mind some ground principles, which he or she shouldn't take for granted.

Analyzing and Writing Texts in the Field

There is some strategies of qualitative analysis: metaphorical, dramatic, typological, discursive and phenomenological ([Lindlof, 1995](#)).

It is commonly accepted that language forms the greater part of all the exemplars examined so far. This should not be surprising, given that language does a great deal more than convey the content of our thought. Oral and written languages constitute the primary means by which individual experience becomes an accessible social reality. It is through the practice of language that we define and accomplish goals in relationships. Indeed, if we want to know how something is done and what it really means, we do have to consider how it is talked about.

Yet, the development of computer technologies and software, some designed for qualitative data applications, is proceeding apace and seems to be exerting some serious influence on analytic practice.

Conclusively, the way in which we write and present every qualitative research, depends directly on each researcher as an individual. In our study of the bureaucratic behavior of the workers in the greek National Television Channel, writing had a double style in its appearance: first, we presented, on the basis of hypothetical questions, the dialogues and the specific words of the participants who were interviewed, and second, followed the hermeneutical conclusion.

Assessment

There may be external validity problems. At times, the results can end up in being very subjective, depending more on who the researcher was than the situation which was being observed. Researchers may well notice different aspects of the situation while doing their job.

A researcher can produce results that are over-impressionistic, carelessly produced, or just idiosyncratic. The fact that somebody is known to be interested in a particular (social) phenomenon, could well affect people's behavior and response, and this is likely to be different when the observer is present and when he or she absent.

The question "why" may be poorly formulated, leading directly to a concentration on the wrong aspects of a situation. As it has already been mentioned, one should be aware of the possible inter-dependence of observations and interpretations. The question "what", may also be quite problematic, as there may well be internal problems of validity. The researcher could be blind towards what is being looked at, (s)he may not understand or conceive it, (s)he may think that (s)he has noticed something or may influence the ongoing process both consciously and unconsciously.

In conclusion, despite the potential drawbacks, multi-visual qualitative method will surely produce rich and exciting results when applied, which could well end up in challenging all the existing assumptions about social life so far. Moreover, it could question our ideas about experience and rules, and point out the way towards new developments. Admittedly, a lot still depends on who the researcher is, but following the guidelines described above should help to minimize the problems of this effect. Of all qualitative methods it is probably the least reactive

and the one that is most likely to produce valid results and insights that are very much rooted in "real life".

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