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Validity in Qualitative Research: A Processual Approach

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Abstract

Validity and reliability of research and its results are important elements to provide evidence of the quality of research in the organizational field. However, validity is better evidenced in quantitative studies than in qualitative research studies. As there is diversity within qualitative research methods and techniques, there is no universally accepted criteria to assess validity in qualitative studies; its usefulness is also questioned. Therefore, in this paper, we argue that qualitative research should adopt a processual view approach of validity since it should not be the product of a single test or just one step in the research. Processual validity both supports good research and helps in its reflection and guidance. To illustrate our approach, we present the processual approach adopted by one of the coauthors during the development of a research project. We highlight the validity assurance activities for both ex ante and ex post research, peer review and participation in an international conference, which corroborated the quality of the processual approach and the results that were obtained.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Theory Building, Validity, Reliability, Processual Approach

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Validity in Qualitative Research: A Processual Approach

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Validity and reliability of research and its results are important elements to provide evidence of the quality of research in the organizational field. However, validity is better evidenced in quantitative studies than in qualitative research studies. As there is diversity within qualitative research methods and techniques, there is no universally accepted criteria to assess validity in qualitative studies; its usefulness is also questioned. Therefore, in this paper, we argue that qualitative research should adopt a processual view approach of validity since it should not be the product of a single test or just one step in the research. Processual validity both supports good research and helps in its reflection and guidance. To illustrate our approach, we present the processual approach adopted by one of the coauthors during the development of a research project. We highlight the validity assurance activities for both ex ante and ex post research, peer review and participation in an international conference, which corroborated the quality of the processual approach and the results that were obtained. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Theory Building, Validity, Reliability, Processual Approach

Introduction

An adequate effort in the pursuit of validity assurance seems to be vital in order to have a work accepted by the scientific community (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Furthermore, it is necessary that qualitative research strives to firmly demonstrate its scientific nature to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena studied without losing sight of the subtlety of the immersed researcher's subjectivity in a context that is in constant change and development (Drapeau, 2004b; Van der Maren 1996; Van Maanen, 1995). Validity in qualitative research can have different meanings, such as rigor, trustworthiness, appropriateness, and even as quality, and it can be described in a great variety of terms (Golafshani, 2003). However, despite the importance of the concept to the development of the qualitative research field, few studies try to fill up this gap and to help solving the quest (Golafshani, 2003; Kvale, 1995; Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1992; Onwuegbuzie, & Johnson, 2006; Whittmore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001; Winter, 2000).

This article aims to analyze the processual aspect of validity in qualitative research. This issue seems to be fundamental when addressing a qualitative study due to its nature, proposal, ontology and the variety of research methods that are involved (Royer, 2007; Thompson, 2011). However, one may pose the following question: Why should a researcher adopt a processual rather than a traditional validity approach? We argue that the focus on

ensuring validity and transparency of qualitative research is not specific to any single stage of the research; instead, it should be part of all research stages.

Unlike validity in quantitative studies, qualitative validity is not a watertight product or a set of measures that can ensure the validity of the research. There are paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological differences between quantitative and qualitative or mixed research (their incommensurability is not advocated here) (Drapeau, 2004a; Hammarberg, Kirkman, & Lacey, 2016; Royer, 2007; Thompson, 2011). There are also differences between the purposes of the research based on the context and the maturity of the field and the available literature. Quantitative studies are not better than qualitative ones and vice versa. They are merely different and could be complementary. As evidenced more recently, there is an increasing process of approximation and dialog between them (Aubin-Auger et al., 2008; Benedicto, Benedicto, Stieg, & Andrade, 2011; Brannen, 2017; Creswell, 2009; Molina-Azorin, & Fetters, 2016). However, while validity is recognized and widespread in quantitative research, the same cannot be said for qualitative studies (Drapeau, 2004a).

We need broader discussions on how to maintain quality, accuracy and consistency between the problem, the data, and the methods of qualitative studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Leung, 2015; Mukamurera, Lacourse, & Couturier, 2006; Winter, 2000). It seems unrealistic to adopt the same criteria for validity and reliability used in quantitative studies, reinforcing the argument in favor of adopting a processual approach to validity since it allows for the control of the validity at different stages of the research. This seems to be a coherent approach to the maintenance of scientific criteria, especially for different types of methods, epistemologies and qualitative ontologies. Dubé and Paré (2003) had already included elements of validity in the research process to obtain scientific rigor, such as a strongly formulated research question, a well-described theory, a research design that potentiates the scientific aspects of the study, and a well-described process of collecting and analyzing data.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section provides a description of validity that was originally developed in quantitative studies. The second section reviews the versions of validity applied to qualitative studies. In the third section, discussions on the theme are carried out, concluding with the proposition for a processual approach of validity. The use of this processual view is then illustrated by research conducted by one of the coauthors. Finally, we present suggestions for future research contributing to the continuous development of the field.

Validity and Reliability

Quantitative research studies are based on an epistemology that comes from the understanding of the object through empirical studies with techniques borrowed from the natural sciences (Brannen, 2017; Drapeau, 2004b; Thompson, 2011). These studies benefit from a certain stability and development of the theoretical paradigm (Pfeffer, 1993) and of measures that allow researchers to express their attention on the quality of their work. In general, the most important criteria are the reliability and validity of the research (Winter, 2000).

Reliability assesses the consistency of results over time. Reliability contains a particular embedded notion of stability of the results found, which means that they will be repeatable over time (Golafshani, 2003). Historically in quantitative research, content validity is determined by a correlation coefficient (Hull, 1928). Adopting a more comprehensive definition, Kirk and Miller (1986) have characterized validity as the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn from an analysis, and reliability as the consistency with which a research procedure will evaluate a phenomenon in the same way over several attempts.

Currently, quantitative researchers show a certain consensus about the use, importance and especially the operationalization of the validity itself (Cronbach, 1989; Winter, 2000). However, new ways of researching with big data and artificial intelligence (AI) seem to promote new discussions in the quantitative research field. The same idea could also be applied to the qualitative research field (Evers, 2018) when analyzing the use of big data, AI and machine learning regarding qualitative studies (Evers, 2018). For example, AI suggests coding options and supports working with different types of information and help to improve reliability of the research (Evers, 2018). Daniel (2018) described this as the emergence of a new scientific paradigm associated with development of new tools and approaches to data mining, visualization and construction of meaningful information.

Validity of Qualitative Studies

Many researchers prefer not to use the term validity, thus agreeing with Smith (1983) on the incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative research concerning epistemological and ontological assumptions. Therefore, they state that criteria such as validity and reliability should be abandoned in qualitative studies. Wolcott (1990) also expressed skepticism regarding the usefulness of these concepts. On the other hand, authors such as Foucault (1972) and Kirk and Miller (1986) discussed the importance of truth in the quality of the results achieved in empirical qualitative studies and the search for *objectivity* in the construction of knowledge. Moreover, McKinnon (1988) highlighted the unintended biases and effects caused by the researcher, limitations in access to adequate data, and the complexity and limitations of the human mind as threats to the quality of research results.

For other authors, while recognizing the need for validity criteria or something similar, its application in qualitative studies is still permeated by ambiguities and obscurity (Dellinger, & Leech, 2007). Some researchers prefer to adopt the same criteria of internal and external validity in qualitative research. Examples are the works of Aubin-Auger et al. (2008), Ergene, Yazici and Delice (2016), and Miles and Huberman (1984). However, this does not seem to be the standard. On the contrary, several authors prefer to propose and adopt different terminologies and concepts for qualitative studies, arguing that validity and reliability, for example, are consecrated terms in quantitative research and therefore carry a certain inheritance with them. In this way, Dellinger and Leech (2007) found seventeen different terms related to the concept of validity. Maxwell (1992) identified five different types of validity: descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, generalization and evaluative.

- *Descriptive validity* – The researcher does not embellish or distort the information, situations and facts reported are those that were seen and heard. For Maxwell (1992), this category is related to the concepts of “reporting” and “primary understanding” by Runciman (1983, p. 226). Another important issue highlighted by the author is the interdependence of observations and descriptions with the theory used in the research.
- *Interpretive validity* – This refers to the researcher’s sensitivity and mental processes in order to capture and interpret /construct the meaning of the objects, events and behaviors of the people engaged and involved in the studied phenomenon. Such validity encompasses the conscious processes, hidden intentions, beliefs, concepts, and values of the participants.
- *Theoretical validity* – This refers to how much a theoretical explanation that is developed through research analysis is consistent with the data (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Every theory has two components: concepts and categories and describes how they relate. Thus, this validity

will also have two aspects: the validity of the *blocks* (concepts, categories) with which the researcher builds the model and the ways that the blocks interact and relate when they are put together.

- *Validity generalization* – This is the condition of extending the explanation to other specific situations or other populations, times and places. Generalization in qualitative research usually occurs through the development of theories that can encompass larger and different situations.
- *Valuation validity* – This refers to the ability to look critically at one's results and the research itself as a way of learning and expanding one's understanding.

The most important types of validity for qualitative studies, according to Maxwell (1992), are the descriptive, interpretative and theoretical validities. The importance of these types was reinforced by Johnson (1997), who adopted Maxwell's first three criteria and added internal and external validity as representative elements of the validity structure in qualitative research.

Another proposition found in the literature is the replacement of the term validity in qualitative research by trustworthiness (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006) or rigor (Golafshani, 2003). Without rigor, research would be worthless or, even worse, it would be a fictional piece (Morse et al. 2002). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of a research study is the central aspect of the issues that are conventionally called validity and reliability. These authors proposed specific criteria to be used as a guideline to trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. For Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006), the first criterion replaces the quantitative concept of internal validity. The second criterion replaces the external validity. The third criterion replaces reliability. Finally, confirmability returns the idea of objectivity.

More recently, Paiva, Leão, and Mello (2011) proposed five validity criteria in qualitative research: triangulation, the construction of a research *corpus*, a clear, rich and detailed description of the research performed, surprise and feedback of informants (communicative validity). Triangulation may be the best-known criterion for qualitative researchers. Triangulation consists of the interrelationship between the information obtained from the data that was collected from different sources to increase the understanding of the study in question, thus improving the reliability of the results.

According to Jick (1979) triangulation comes from the navigation and military strategy areas and uses different reference points to locate the position of an object. With triangulation, the researcher can achieve what is often called a dense description, a "holistic work" (Jick, 1979, p. 603), or a convergent meaning (Bonoma, 1985). According to Patton (1999), triangulation makes it possible to compare and to cross-check data, thus assessing the consistency of the information coming from different sources at different times. Olson et al. (2016) note that triangulation has been one of the most used methods to ensure validity in research. For Fusch, Fusch and Ness (2017), the triangulation technique allows the researcher to explore several facets of the studied phenomenon.

The second criterion is equivalent to the representative sample and sample size in quantitative surveys and can be used for both validity and reliability. To operationalize the construction of the research corpus to guarantee the quality and rigor of the study, there needs to be another criterion that is well known to qualitative researchers—data saturation. Data saturation is exemplified by the number of interviews that are conducted until there is no additional useful information due to saturation. As observed by Morse (2003, p. 1123), through the saturation process. "The researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed."

The third criterion, the clear, rich and detailed description, makes it possible to provide others with the context and a certain transferability of the situation. Thus, the criterion assists both the contextualization and also the provision of a dense description of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973; Paiva et al., 2011). In addition to supporting validity, this criterion also influences the reliability of the study, which means that other researchers may find results that are consistent with different attempts.

Surprise is the fourth criterion, which is presented by the authors as an element that ensures validity and reliability. The research and its process cannot be a sort of straitjacket. It is always necessary to safeguard the innovative potential and changes brought about by the research field and the scientific findings. For example, in the history of management, we can cite the odd surprises provoked by the studies of Elton Mayo at the Western Electric plant in Chicago.

Mayo's works are known as the Hawthorne studies and, initially, he was interested in understanding the connection among the physical and environmental conditions to the workers' performance (Muldoon, 2012). However, Mayo's was surprised by something very important, the informal organization. In the words of Paiva et al. (2011):

Surprise is a criterion of validity in qualitative research and it has an importance in tradition both regarding the discovery of inspirational evidence to new forms of thought on a specific theme, and the change in mentality already crystallized around the phenomenon. (p. 202)

However, all research cannot be expected to be innovative. Corroborative studies also present their importance and prominent role in science. Finally, there is the informants' feedback criterion, which is also known as confirmability. It represents a regular audit that verifies whether what the researcher obtained in the collection and analysis was what the informant wanted to say, or if the phenomenon studied is adequately portrayed.

Based on the literature review presented in this section, we concluded that validity is a necessary attribute of qualitative research and that the wide variety of terms related with validity show the importance and the need for new ways of organizing and thinking about the field.

Debates, Discussions, Details

Despite the paradigmatic differences between quantitative and qualitative research, many efforts seem to be directed toward reduction of barriers. These efforts were developed, for example, in the validity studies of mixed or quali-quantitative methods (Dellinger, & Leech, 2007; Drapeau, 2004a, 2004b; Long, 2015; Onwuegbuzie, & Collins, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). However, although these studies sought a more impartial field for validity by mainly postulating the use of other vocabularies and/or a unifying framework, the main issue was not discussed.

Validity (or trustworthiness) differs in nature in quantitative and qualitative researches. As Winter (2000, p. 5) states: "Validity is not in any simple sense a unitary concept." While in quantitative studies it presents itself more specifically as a result of a test, in qualitative studies it should be processual. A processual approach aims to have a temporal interconnected search for holistic explanations and emphasizes the need to link process analysis to the location and explanation of outcomes over the time (Pettigrew, 1997). As noted above, for quantitative research, content validity is mainly the resulting product of statistical tests, whereas in qualitative studies, the context, the interpretation of the researcher, and the construction, reflection, and reconstruction of the information are important elements to obtain a good

understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Aguinaldo, 2004; Mukamurera et al., 2006; Royer, 2007). As a consequence, in qualitative studies, validity cannot be seen as a product or something isolated. There are no protective measures. It is an ongoing process and should be confronted from the beginning of the research until its publication. Consequently, there is no single validity test although there are guidelines that allow a certain quality to be guaranteed to qualitative studies, resulting in an approach that is aligned with the definition of trustworthiness stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

For these reasons, a process-based view is advocated for assessing validity in qualitative studies. This process makes the question of validity something dynamic, and it reinforces the position of Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) on the problems and dangers of having only *post hoc* criteria to ensure research quality. Godoy (2005) also presents similar concerns. In this way, a processual view of validity changes the importance of the latter.

The need for processual validity comes from the symbiosis itself or the co-participation of the researcher in qualitative research. In this, the researcher engages him- or herself and is involved in and by the research. Each step of the study is not isolated but supports the previous one and reverts to action in the next phase. There is a concomitant construction of both the observer and the observed. This corroborates “the qualitative approach that considers the world to be in continuous motion” (Drapeau, 2004b, p. 126).

For Mintzberg (1991), in the processual view, there are mutually supportive elements and there is a need for adaptation to different contexts and internal situations. Therefore, there would not be a more important phase of the research, but all of them are equally important, and different phases may have more or less critical aspects depending on the contingency. It is up to the researcher to know how to adapt and develop creative and effective strategies to deal with the obstacles that are found. It should be kept in mind that the processual view allows researchers to approach investigations in a more complex, dynamic, holistic and integrated way. Time is of great importance, as are interrelated activities, attitudes, dialogs, reflections and, above all, the very question of the social construction of validity (Kvale, 1995). For Godoy (2005, p. 88):

It is expected that the act of research is not understood as a merely technical and objective activity, but as an activity that also involves the subjectivities of the researcher and of those being studied. Being aware of the difficulties and limitations suggested can tell the researcher the ways of improvement.

Thus, validity is something that is being constantly built throughout the research and not the isolated result of a test, metrics or preventive measures (Figure 1).

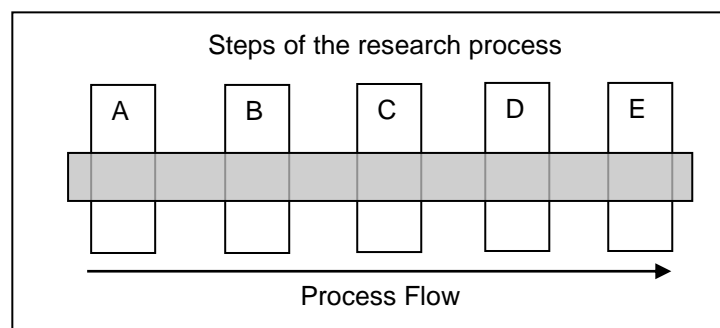


Figure 1 – The processual construction of the validity

Source: The authors

Therefore, the processual operationalization of validity is comprised of the following:

- A. Attention of the researcher towards the research project that initially seeks to establish the domain, the design and the limits of the research and the alignment of the subject, the design and the method of investigation (i.e., criteria for selecting one or more cases, data to be collected, and collection modes, and data analysis);
- B. Organization of data collection (i.e., choices of respondents and informants, adoption of participant observation or not, selection of documents, etc.);
- C. Data codification and analysis that establishes the structuring of concepts, the evidence and the categories' correct connection;
- D. Data analysis that seeks to understand the phenomenon through multiple sources of data and in a complete way; and
- E. Discussion of the results and a return to the theory, which completes the theorization process.

The goal of processual construction of validity, as presented in Figure 1, is to analyze the debriefing and the reflection as a continuous process. That means that an ongoing movement between the different steps is necessary. This process is recursive, particularly between steps B, C and D and between steps D, E and A. The processual approach as a whole and its steps follow the procedures described by Whittemore et al. (2001). These authors described in detail how research design, data collection, data analysis and discussions are essential for the research validity and reliability.

The processual approach is an old method of working and can be found in the question of Heraclitus (*panta rhei*, which means that everything flows); in the philosophy of becoming (Bosma, Chia, & Fouweather, 2016; Chia, 1998, 1999); in the systemic and cybernetic theories (Bertalanffy, 1950; Koskinen, 2013; Senge & Stermann, 1992), and even in the poststructuralist theories (Cooper, 1986, 2005). The processual approach is not characteristic of a single paradigm, but permeates, albeit not uniformly, each of them. (There will hardly be a fixed set of validity criteria capable of satisfying all qualitative approaches.) We agree with those who state it is important that researchers should not have only one validity assessment of results (Coenen-Huther, 2003; Newton & Burgess, 2008). Moreover, Thompson (2011) describes the research process as a sequence of brief and fleeting moments. Thus, researchers doing qualitative research can be more reliable if they adopt a multicriteria approach to develop their theories.

More than ordinary criteria, qualitative research depends on researcher's prudence, transparency, conscience and attitudes. Taking on what some have described as a research process that is associated with changes, dynamism, construction with uncertainties and risks, incomplete information, selective selection, based on personal and political preferences, attention and expectations is a challenge (Aguinaldo, 2004; Drapeau, 2004a, 2004b; Winter, 2000). This means that validity represents a point of reference for the construction and direction of the research itself. In Aubin-Auger et al.'s words (2008, p. 145), "The value of scientific research largely depends on the researcher's ability to demonstrate the credibility of his findings." Consequently, transparency at all stages is key to validity in qualitative research (Barbier & Legresley, 2011).

A Practical Application of the Processual Approach to Validity

The processual approach we developed is illustrated by the research developed performed by one of the coauthors (Hayashi, 2011). This research analyzed the links of the

wine production chain of one of the largest Brazilian wineries. The research was qualitative with descriptive intentions and it involved the participation of 45 people interviewed through semi-structured questionnaires. All the interviews were recorded, and transcribed and coded to support data analysis. Nonparticipant observation was also conducted at the winery with the commercial representatives and with a shopkeeper. Due to the transdisciplinary and innovative character of the research, special care was taken with the study's rigor and quality to guarantee its acceptance both by the academic community and by the examining board. The thesis study proposed a wine chain integrative framework using both strategic and artistic theories and using Joseph Beuys' social sculpture concept. Thus, to ensure the research validity was to also ensure the thesis defense of the resulting PhD dissertation and the researcher's desired academic title.

In this research, validity was assured by several techniques and at several research stages, not only in the phase called evaluative or *post hoc*. For Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002), the *post hoc* search for validity does not mean much and therefore it is recommended to its fullest extent. In their studies about reliability and validity in qualitative studies, Morse et al. (2002, p. 17) observe: "It is time to reconsider the importance of verification strategies used by the researcher in the process of inquiry so that reliability and validity are actively attained, rather than proclaimed by external reviewers on the completion of the project." In other words, the quality of research cannot be assured only with *post hoc* measures. Table 1 shows the measures adopted to ensure the thesis's validity.

Research stage	Process Flow	Action
Before data collection	A	Previous immersion in the field Pilot testing
During data collection and analysis	B-C	Data triangulation Theoretical triangulation Rich and detailed field description Feedback with informants and industry experts Prolonged exposure of the researcher in the field Saturation
After the analysis	D-E	Researcher's exposure at a scientific event Peer Review

Table 1 – Measures to improve the research validity

Source: Adapted from Hayashi (2011)

It is important to emphasize the researcher's previous immersion in the field of research. Before data collection, the researcher remained a participant observer in a wine shop for three months in order to compose a research proposal. The store is located at an important business center in Porto Alegre (Brazil) and is a tourist attraction for those who come to the city and residents. Thus, many contacts were made with customers/consumers, commercial representatives, and winemakers who visited the store. During these months, the researcher had contact with the field, knew its peculiarities and in the research context became a part of his reality.

Another essential point to increase the validity of the study is to have correct and enduring contact with key informants (Dikko, 2016; Faris, 2017), and to extend the researcher's contact time with the phenomenon to be studied (McKinnon, 1988). Additionally, as in the metaphor of the artisan, the theoretician who knows more deeply the day-to-day operations of the organization and of the sector can bring denser and interesting details (Mintzberg, 1987). In this way, it is possible to extrapolate the mechanical descriptions through the construction

of facts, events and stories that are more coherent, rich and memorable (Dyer, & Wilkins, 1991). As there should not be theoretical distancing from the practical, it is essential that the interesting aspects also have some adherence to the practical reality. Only in this way is it possible to confront the reality adopted in an automatic and uncritical way (Davis, 1971). The critical reflexivity developed by the researcher serves as a personal strategy to alternate and oscillate between the abstract world of theory and the practical reality (Wainwright, 1997).

On the other hand, within the process flow scheme (Figure 1), the first step means to foster the attention of the researcher to better know the object and the studied phenomenon (Stage A). According to Olson et al. (2016), immersion in the field and previous experiences allow the researcher to better understand the context and the peculiarities of the phenomenon, thus creating strategies of data collection and analysis that are more appropriate and fruitful.

Another important point was to conduct a pilot test in a company with similar characteristics to the research's reference organization. In the piloted winery, the semi-structured questionnaires were improved. For Dikko (2016) and Turner (2010), such instrument refinement activities and the pilot test are fundamental to ensure the achievement of validity in any research. Additionally, the researcher's perceptions were amplified due to the extended dialog with the owners and the *in-locus* visit. These perceptions allowed for better organization and refinement of the data collection method (Stage B of Figure 1).

According to Campbell (1982, pp. 59-62), "It is essential for scientific evidence and for every process of diagnostic knowledge, including the retina of the eyes...., the process of comparison, or recording of inferences and contrasts." Thus, the pilot test assists in the question of contrast and validity mainly by inserting an organization that can be compared, at least in the mental processes, with the reference company to be researched.

During the data collection and analysis phase, the triangulation technique was applied in different aspects: triangulation of the data within a single method (case study); theoretical triangulation using more than one theory, and the extensive exposure of the researcher in the field with more than 40 interviews. This allowed the researcher to reach a certain level of saturation (Stage C). Thus, triangulation and saturation are closely related, and both enrich and result in more in-depth data (Faris, 2017; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017; Fusch, & Ness, 2015). In addition, data saturation seems to represent a kind of gold standard to demonstrate the quality of the research (Saunders et al., 2017).

Finally, in the phase of obtaining the final text of the research (phase E), validity was reinforced through participation in a scientific event and by peer-review. According to Hammarberg, Kirkman, and Lacey (2016), peer-review represents one of the fundamental pillars of science, and reviewers can help build good practice that encourages more valid results. Two papers resulting from the thesis PhD dissertation were submitted and approved for presentation at an international conference. Additionally, the participation and feedback received during the conference served to refine the thesis discussion of the results further. Regarding the peer-review, three independent researchers (two PhD candidates in Business Administration and one PhD in Agribusiness) were asked to analyze the thesis critically. Critics, comments and suggestions were then discussed with the researcher to the point of resolution and/or satisfaction of those involved (Stage D).

The processual validity treatment in qualitative studies, especially when involving bolder studies, makes it possible to assure their quality and also to influence the final study results. This means assessing both the validity of the results and, more broadly, the validity of the entire research (Coenen-Huther, 2003; Newton, & Burgess, 2008).

Final Considerations

We believe validity is too important to be assessed only at the end of the research. The processual approach requires constant attention with a holistic vision and an integrated posture in the various stages of the research activity. Perhaps this pushes the validity forward, even from the demands of specific criteria for qualitative research. This approach then goes beyond the limits of pure theorizing and might require the development of new paradigms (Pfeffer, 1993).

A processual approach of validity seems more appropriate to fit with some of the processual theories and ontologies suggested by the organizational literature (Bosma, Chia, & Fouweather, 2016; Chia, 1998; Cooper, 2005; Nayak, 2008). Furthermore, it favors the proper customization of validity to the different styles, lenses and paradigms used in qualitative research (Royer, 2007). Only then can validity be useful as a guideline and/or safety guideline, thus moving qualitative research away from the accusations related to finding just what one wants to find and/or turning a blind eye to what one does not want to see (Johnson, 1997). If validity matters, serious researchers would be guided by Rivail's (1857) suggestion—it is better to reject nine truths than to accept a single lie.

Another benefit of validity as a process is the possibility of positively harnessing the tension between creativity and rigor by influencing the rhythm, the internal and external dialog, and the intuitions of pushing the research forward because the processual approach does not operate as a fixed methodological rule. In this way, there are no mechanical or messianic elements to fulfill the stage of validity, but there are actions, observations, reflections, and sometimes even withdrawing from the field to be able to start the examination again. Validity ceases to be a product that is verified only at the end using numerical tests and begins to serve as a learning instrument for the researcher himself. With this, the critical and intuitive reflection establishes an essential personal strategy (Wainwright, 1997).

The challenges for the researchers to improve the validity of their results lay on the time involved in the process in order to achieve mature results. Going through the phases of the process (A-E) requires calmness and the hard work of recursive analysis.

To continue the development of the field and to enable a better dialog with the quantitative and mixed studies, we recommend more functional studies whose primary focus is validity, to help scholars move beyond research that continues to consider validity primarily as a small complement to a final product. Furthermore, emphasizing the relationship between validity and theorizing itself in the organizational field allows us to enter the researcher's active role in managing his/her abilities and resources to reach the proposed objectives and to compose a coherent set of constructs, variables, and their relationships to explain and predict social phenomena. Due to the increasing importance of scientific knowledge, the challenge to theorize and implement the actions that originate from these specific bodies of knowledge also increases. In Tagore's words, "If you shut the door to all errors, the truth will be then shut out." (1917, p. 33) Thus, the natural way to influence validity and theoretical bodies is the requirements for fruitful and developing science, not transforming science into mechanical actions without room for intuition and creativity.

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