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Breaking Up the Mono-Method Monopolies in Organizational Research*

Joanne Martin
Graduate School of Business
Stanford University

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Correspondence should be sent to Joanne Martin, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305.
Abstract

Recent discussions of methodology have been dominated by two arguments: that one methodology is generally better than another or that one methodology is better than another for the purpose of addressing a particular theoretical issue. Qualitative and quantitative versions of both these arguments are analyzed and refuted. Both arguments are shown to create blindspots in organizational theory. The difficulties of using multi-method alternatives, such as triangulation and the creation of hybrid methodologies, are acknowledged, and some solutions are proposed, including a methodological existentialism.
Breaking Up The Mono-Method Monopolies In Organizational Research

Recently a concerted effort has been made to improve the breadth and quality of methodological approaches to the study of organizations (e.g., Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Van Maanen, 1979; Mitroff and Mason, 1981; Hackman, 1982). Partially in response to such efforts as these, organizational researchers are discussing methodological issues more openly than before. Often one of two positions is argued. The first proposes that one method is generally better than another. The second argues that one method is better than another for the purpose of addressing a particular theoretical issue. Because these two positions have been advocated frequently, this paper explores both seriously.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative: A False Dichotomy

In order to discuss these issues, labels are needed to describe the different types of methodologies available. In order to facilitate discussion of previous work, this paper uses the terms quantitative and qualitative. The label quantitative is used here to refer to methodologies that primarily seek to express information in terms of amounts or counts. To use Daft’s (1980:623-4) terminology, quantitative methods rely on low variety research languages, such as analytic mathematics (e.g., calculus, dynamic equilibrium models), linear statistics (e.g., correlations, regressions), and categorization (e.g., frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations). Although associating quantitative methodology with specific techniques can
be misleading, statistical analysis of experimental, survey, and archival data is generally considered quantitative.

Qualitative methods, according to Van Maanen, are best defined in terms of axiom-like beliefs of the researcher (e.g., the importance of detailed observation; first-hand witness; studying normal, ordinary behavior; sensitivity to meanings and contexts) (Van Maanen, Dabbs, and Faulkner, 1982: 16). Qualitative methods rely on high variety research languages, such as verbal expression (e.g., open-ended interviews, reports of observations) and non-verbal modes of communication (e.g., photographs, videotapes, illustrations). A broad variety of specific techniques are generally considered qualitative, including participant observation, videotaping, formal and informal interviewing, ethnomethodology, historical and conversational analysis. (1)

Two caveats should be noted in order to avoid confusions often associated with these labels. First, some methodologies are difficult to classify. For example, some observational data can be counted and texts can be systematically content analyzed (e.g., Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest, 1972; Downey and Ireland, 1979). Thus, it is essential to conceptualize the qualitative vs. quantitative distinction not as a dichotomy, but as a continuum, with mixed methods at the midpoint of the scale. Secondly, these definitions are not meant to imply that quantitative research is objective, while qualitative research is subjective. Any research -- whether qualitative or quantitative -- must include subjective elements. (2)

Below quantitative and qualitative versions of some common
methodological arguments are presented. Although these arguments have been described and enacted by practicing researchers in more moderate and complex terms, this paper uses extreme examples in order to clarify and highlight the essences of these positions.

The Simple Mono-Method Approach

This position is mono-method because it considers one methodological approach to be inherently superior and it is simple because that superiority is said to hold across a broad spectrum of organizational research questions. There are currently quantitative and qualitative versions of the simple mono-method approach, both briefly illustrated below.

The Quantitative Version

According to this version, quantitative methods are superior to qualitative approaches, irrespective of the topic being studied. An exemplar is Blau's (1965) influential critique of the case study approach to organizations. In order for knowledge of organizational phenomena to expand, Blau argued that researchers should collect quantitative data from large numbers of organizations, rather than focus qualitatively on a single setting. The prevalence of this point of view is demonstrated by the steady increase in the proportion of quantitative papers accepted by the Administrative Science Quarterly between 1959 and 1979 (Daft, 1980: 629).

Because this position dominates the field, it is usually not necessary to state it explicitly. Instead, the quantitative
version of the simple mono-method approach usually remains a tacit assumption, the truth of which need not be explicated to those who already are true believers. It surfaces primarily when newcomers are being indoctrinated (as in some methods textbooks) and when some one has the temerity to use qualitative methods.

Naturally, qualitative researchers are put on the defensive. Discussions of qualitative methodology frequently focus on ways to make these methods less subjective, for example, by reducing sources of bias in the field worker and the informant (e.g., Van Maanen, 1979). The quantitative view is so prevalent that it is hard to imagine someone arguing that research should be more, rather than less, subjective.

The Qualitative Version

Because the organizational field is dominated by quantitative methods, qualitative researchers often are asked, or feel it helpful, to defend their unorthodox methodological choices. Understandably, these methodological discussions are often one-sided arguments for the superiority of qualitative over quantitative methods, as if the point were: "My method is better than your method."

These defenses often begin by extolling the advantages of qualitative approaches, citing for example the richness of the data, the strengths of a wholistic approach which eschews decompositions, and the ease with which contradictions and paradoxes can be explored. A classic example of the qualitative version of the simple mono-method approach begins: "Although questionnaires and interviews have their value, systematic
observation has a number of advantages for organizational analysis...." (Light, 1979:552).

Some proponents of qualitative research take their argument one step further by denigrating quantitative research. Those who take the epistemological stance that reality is a subjectively created phenomena are particularly likely to express discontent with all forms of quantitative methods: "...The large scale empirical surveys and detailed laboratory experiments that dominate much social research...become increasingly unsatisfactory and, indeed, inappropriate" (Morgan and Smircich, 1980:498).

As these examples illustrate, some proponents of the simple mono-method position discuss methodological choices as if they were lawyers presenting one side of a case. They catalogue the merits of their preferred methodological choice and the demerits of the unchosen alternatives, as if it would be unintelligent to give the opposition (such as a critical editor, reviewer, or reader) ammunition by admitting the strengths of the opposite point of view. This contentious approach to methodological discussions reinforces the simple mono-method position and makes it less likely that adherents of this approach will draw on research findings obtained using non-preferred methodologies. Thus, the simple mono-method approach impedes the sharing of knowledge about organizational phenomena.

The Complex Mono-Method Approach

Many theoretical problems are characteristically addressed with a single methodology. For example, a review of articles
published in key organizational journals during the last decade yielded a list of sixteen frequently-studied topics (Campbell, Daft, and Hulin, 1982). Most of those topics were addressed predominantly with one methodology. Studies of macro-level issues, such as organizational structure, technology, and size, generally relied on archival data. Goal-setting and expectancy theory usually were studied using experimental laboratory methods. Surveys were the preferred mode of assessing job attitudes.

The complex mono-method position justifies these observed affinities between substantive areas and methodological choices by arguing that some methods are better than others for addressing particular kinds of theoretical problems. The tone and content of these arguments can be more clearly understood if a substantive example is presented. The discussion below examines the complex mono-method justification for qualitative approaches to the study of culture. This substantive example was chosen because methodological disagreements are currently surfacing in this domain, but similar disputes have focused on other substantive issues, such as decision making, organizational symbolism, and cognitive approaches to the study of organizations.

The Complex Mono-Method Justification for Qualitative Culture Research

Some organizational culture researchers argue that research on culture should depend predominantly on qualitative methodology. For example, Daft (1980) categorizes the study of
organizational culture as a research topic of the highest order of complexity. He states that "low variety" research languages, such as quantitative methods, are not suited to the study of such a complex topic, due to the danger of oversimplification (Daft, 1980:632).

Smircich has made a similar argument. Defining culture as a network of shared meaning, she states: "Networks of shared meaning do not lend themselves to study by methods of detachment and objectivity" (Smircich, 1980: 9), so that qualitative methods such as "...participant observation for significant time periods with interviews conducted after some time in the setting is the favored strategy for data gathering (on this topic)" (Smircich, 1980:19). Although others may not express the complex mono-method position as explicitly as these two researchers, qualitative methods have dominated culture research to date (e.g., Jelinek, Smircich, and Hirsch, 1983; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge, 1983). Two justifications for this methodological preference are frequently given.

First, qualitative research methodology is said to be particularly appropriate for topics about which little is known. Perhaps the best-known presentation of this view is Mosteller and Tukey's (1968) contention that qualitative methods are best suited for exploratory research, while quantitative methods such as experimentation are more appropriate when knowledge has advanced to the point that hypotheses can be articulated. Research on culture is clearly in an embryonic stage. Accordingly, quantitative methods are said to be inappropriate for addressing the unformed questions that will arise in this
relatively uncharted research domain.

A second reason for preferring qualitative approaches to the study of this topic stems from the advantages of "thick descriptions" of cultures (Geertz, 1973). According to this point of view, the researcher must attempt to study cultural phenomena in context. The nuances of socially constructed meanings should be recorded in rich detail. Presumably, qualitative approaches are better suited than quantitative methods to capture the complexity of cultural phenomena. Below these two arguments are challenged.

A Critique of the Complex Mono-Method Approach to Studying Culture

There is nothing inherent in quantitative methodology that restricts its use to empirically familiar territory. Even novel or empirically unfounded questions can also be explored using quantitative methodology. For example, little is known about the culture creation process. Periodic collection of questionnaire data could provide a dynamic model of this process. Similarly, it is unnecessary to limit the usefulness of qualitative methods by restricting their use to exploratory studies. For instance, qualitative methods could be used to examine the impact of humanitarian cultural values on productivity. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used for both exploratory and confirmative research.

However, even if a researcher believes that qualitative methods are best suited for exploratory studies, some aspects of culture research are relatively well established and could be further explored using quantitative methods. For example, a
A number of researchers argue that organizational cultures generate employee commitment by such means as passing on stories that illustrate the institution's values or philosophy of management (Selznick, 1957; Clark, 1970; Wilkins, 1979; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Because most of the evidence supporting this culture-commitment proposition is qualitative, the accuracy of the proposition is questionable on a number of grounds.

First, this proposition posits a causal relationship between cultural activities, such as the sharing of stories, and commitment. Many qualitative researchers are not committed to establishing causal relationships (cf. Bateson, 1979), in part because it is extremely difficult to demonstrate the existence and direction of causality using qualitative data. In this case, it is possible that employees in the organizations studied were already highly committed to the values in question, independently of any story sharing activities.

Qualitative data make it difficult to disentangle the effects of potentially confounding variables. For example, the relationship between cultural activities and value commitment may simply be due to length of employment. Employees who have worked longer at a particular organization may be more committed to its values and, simply because they have been around for a long time, may also know more about that organization's shared stories.

A third difficulty stems from the fact that qualitative research seldom includes adequate control or comparison groups.
Thus, for example, the available data do not demonstrate that cultural phenomena, such as the sharing of organizational stories, cause more commitment than other means of communicating information, such as the presentation of statistics.

Finally, there is the question of generalizability. Many qualitative researchers aim to present a detailed, "thick" description of a single setting, rather than to collect data which will serve as a basis for the construction of abstract, generalizable theories. The culture-commitment proposition, however, claims to be a generalizable statement. The time and effort involved in qualitative research makes the systematic study of large numbers of organizations difficult. As a result, the qualitative evidence that supports the culture-commitment proposition comes either from large numbers of organizations, not studied in systematic depth, or from more detailed investigations of a relatively small number of settings. As a result, the generalizability of this proposition is questionable.

Quantitative methods can be used to facilitate generalization, explore comparisons and controls, disentangle potential confounds, and establish the existence and direction of causal relationships. For example, laboratory experiments have examined the relationship between one cultural activity, sharing stories, and commitment (e.g., Martin, 1981).

A brief description of one of these experiments illustrates the types of information this methodological approach can, and cannot, provide. In one study, M.B.A. subjects read about an organization's humanitarian values and then were randomly assigned to read one one of three types of information indicating
that these values had been translated into practice: a story about a single employee, statistics about many employees, and the story and the statistics combined. These humanitarian values, the story, and the statistics were drawn from a qualitative case study of an actual organization (Wilkins, 1979). After reading the materials, the subjects were asked questions about their commitment to this kind of value and their reactions to this particular company.

The results of this study demonstrated that this cultural activity, the sharing of organizational stories, caused higher levels of commitment than other means (such as statistics) of transmitting the same sort of information. The experimental evidence, unlike the qualitative evidence on this issue, demonstrated a causal relationship unconfounded by the effects of long term employment. To find these results in an experimental laboratory study, as well as in a series of qualitative field studies, is powerful evidence of generalizability.

In summary, quantitative approaches to the study of culture provide information that is difficult to obtain using qualitative methods. However, on a more abstract level, this discussion so far has simply replaced a qualitative justification for a mono-method approach to culture with a quantitative one. This is unfortunate because quantitative approaches also have their limitations. Below, the merits of both complex mono-method approaches to the study of culture are debated, until another alternative emerges.

Transcending the Limits of Mono-Method Approaches
Imagine that two culture researchers are continuing the argument introduced above. One is an experimental psychologist, who favors quantitative approaches, and the other is an anthropologist, who prefers qualitative methods.

Anthropologist: "Quantitative methods have difficulty providing "thick descriptions" of cultural phenomena. There are two aspects to this problem: cultural phenomena are taken out of context and their complexity is reduced. The implications of the first of these issues can be illustrated with the experiment described above. A cultural manifestation, in this case a story, was taken out of its natural context and studied in a laboratory. The experimental subjects knew nothing about the organization from which the story came. The subjects had no histories of interaction with organizational members to serve as a source of relevant interpretative information. Thus, the story inevitably lost some of its symbolic meanings. In contrast to actual employees at the organization where the story was told, the experimental subjects undoubtedly had a different, probably more simplified interpretation of the story."

Psychologist: "There is another side to this issue. If culture is such a rich and complex phenomenon, then any analysis which captures this complexity will have difficulty separating the interwoven strands of organizational history and personal relationships. For example, when an employee hears an organizational story from a superior, the employee's reaction will be influenced by the history of interaction between these two people. If the relationship has been troubled, the employee
may dismiss the story as corporate propaganda, particularly if
some story element serves as a symbolic reminder of past
disagreements. Quantitative methods can focus on the impact of
the story, independent of the complicating effects of personal
and organizational history. For example, in an experimental
setting subjects can be strangers and organizational history can,
in effect, be erased. The effects of other potentially
confounding variables can be statistically controlled or
dispersed through random assignment of subjects to experimental
conditions."
Anthropologist: "No matter how many potentially confounding
variables are studied, quantitative methods inevitably restrict
attention to a subset of variables, in effect reducing the
complexity of cultural phenomena. This problem is particularly
acute for experimental methodology. Most experimenters hesitate
to manipulate more than three independent variables in a single
study. Thus, quantitative methods lack the conceptual breadth
necessary for encompassing a phenomena as complex as culture."
Psychologist: "Yes, but there are good reasons for narrowing
one's attention to a few variables at a time. It is important
for the development of theory, irrespective of the percentage of
variance accounted for in a complex field setting, to understand
the relationships that would occur in the absence of confounding
factors. There are also practical considerations, such as the
difficulty of interpreting n-way interactions and obtaining
adequate cell sizes. Furthermore, a sequence of experiments can
build a carefully expanded theory, incorporating a larger range
of variables than can be examined within a single study."
Anthropologist: "With such a narrow approach you risk discovering relationships that may be insignificant, may not even exist, in complex natural settings."
Psychologist: "But the richness of your qualitative data is an invitation to conceptual chaos."

This debate, like many mono-method arguments, ends in a stand-off. The same points, however, could be made in the context of a discussion of inevitable trade-offs. Qualitative approaches to the study of culture have unavoidable weaknesses and irreplaceable strengths. Quantitative methodology also has unique advantages and inescapable disadvantages for the study of culture. The next section of this paper develops a more systematic analysis of trade-offs among inherently imperfect methodological choices and argues that the relevance of this trade-off analysis is not restricted to the topic of culture research.

The Research Dilemma: Inevitable Trade-offs

McGrath (1982) presents a systematic analysis of the inevitable trade-offs that underlie the choice of any one methodology. He examines eight "pure" or idealized methodological techniques: laboratory experiments, experimental simulations, field experiments, field studies, computer simulations, formal theoretical exercises, sample surveys, and judgment tasks. While some of these techniques fall on the "mixed" or "variable" mid-point of the qualitative-quantitative continuum, others are defined by McGrath in terms that are clearly quantitative (such as laboratory experiments) or
qualitative (non-experimental field studies). Each of the eight techniques is classified according to the extent three criteria are maximized: controlled and precise measurement of behavior, generalizability across subjects, and detailed knowledge of contexts. (3)

McGrath argues that the methodological choices which maximize any of these criteria will reduce the other two; and that the choices that would "optimize" on any two will minimize on the third. For example, non-experimental field studies, as defined by McGrath, are as unobtrusive as possible. They take place in settings that are existentially real for participants. Thus, realism of context is maximized, at the cost of precision and generalizability. In contrast, laboratory experiments involve deliberately contrived settings. Realism of context and generalizability are sacrificed in order to maximize precision of measurement. Although space limitations make it impossible to summarize McGrath's more complex analyses of the trade-offs involved in the choice of methodological techniques that involve a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, these two examples illustrate his fundamental conclusions: any method has inherent weaknesses; no method is perfect. Moreover, one method's strengths are another method's weaknesses.

If methodological choices do have complementary strengths and weaknesses, the simple and complex mono-method positions are misguided. The simple version ignores the weaknesses of the preferred method and does not allow the accumulation of knowledge to benefit from the strengths of the non-preferred methodologies.
The complex mono-method position suffers from similar problems. If research on any one topic, such as culture, relies on any one method, such as ethnography, the inherent weaknesses of the method will cause blindspots in knowledge about that topic. Thus, both the simple and the complex mono-method positions inhibit the development of knowledge.

These conclusions have implications for the behavior of researchers. First, the simple mono-method approach should be discarded. One-sided, "my method is better than your method" discussions of methodological choices are oversimplified and, to the extent they are persuasive, dangerously misleading. The complex mono-method approach is equally misleading, although within the narrower constraints of a single topic area. It too should be abandoned. Instead, multiple methods should be used to address topic areas, so that the weakness of one method would be compensated for, over time, by the strengths of other methods.

Multi-method approaches have been frequently advocated and, less frequently, practiced. If the argument above is correct, it is important to understand why such eminently sensible practices are avoided.

Triangulation and Methodological Hybrids

Perhaps the most familiar of the multi-method techniques is triangulation. According to classic definitions, a successful triangulation study uses different methods to come up with the same answer to a single theoretical question (cf., Fiske & Campbell, 1959). McGrath's analysis suggests a different, perhaps equally desirable outcome. Because different
methodologies must address somewhat different aspects of a problem, they may well yield divergent answers. Rather than invalidating each other, such conflicting results may offer insight into different aspects of the problem. (4)

Even if researchers see the risk of divergent results as a desirable outcome, there are a number of practical reasons why they may avoid triangulation. Its execution is conceptually and technically difficult, time consuming, and costly (cf, Jick, 1979). Even when these problems are resolved, it is often impossible to publish the results in a single journal article, so that discrepant findings can be discussed in the context of detailed information about the methodologies used. Journals have stringent space limitations and, in a few cases, are practitioners of a mono—method approach. Thus, the hard—earned insights gained from triangulation are often buried in a footnote which begins: "A survey concerning these issues was also administered..."

Advocates of triangulation often stress the advantages of selecting "pure" methodologies which are as different as possible (e.g., Runkel and McGrath, 1972). A second multi—method approach uses a quite different strategy. Rather than using several different methodologies, the researcher develops a hybrid method which has a blend of strengths and weaknesses uniquely suited for addressing a specific topic.

Because organizational researchers must be able to relate the results of their work to what goes on in organizations, they have developed a variety of hybrid techniques. For example, laboratory experiments have used full-time employees as subjects,
adapted stimulus materials from organizational archives, and structured the experimental context to approximate subjects' normal working environments (e.g., Fox and Staw, 1979; Salancik, 1978; Staw and Ross, 1980; Zucker, 1977). Materials from a qualitative observational study of culture have been used to create a standardized survey, designed to assess systematically knowledge of, and commitment to, some aspects of an organization's culture throughout all levels of the institution (Siehl and Martin, in press). Unobtrusive measures and systematic sampling procedures have been used to integrate quantitative techniques into the traditionally qualitative case study approach (Campbell and Stanley, 1963; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest, 1972; McClintock, Brannon, and Maynard-Moody, 1979; Van Maanen, Dabbs, and Faulkner, 1982).

Hybrid methods such as these involve trade-offs, because some advantages of the "pure" forms of these methodologies are sacrificed. It is often difficult to make these choices, particularly if the trade-offs are to be uniquely suited for addressing a specific problem. Even if the choices can be made appropriately, to the researcher's satisfaction, others must also be convinced. In addition to these difficulties, there are broader reasons why multi-method approaches are often avoided. These are discussed below.

Garbage Cans and the Scarcity of Multi-Method Competence

Researchers who choose triangulation or who develop hybrid methodologies are making methodological choices in a well-reasoned, self-conscious manner. In accord with the procedure
described in research textbooks, these researchers are defining a theoretical problem and then letting the nature of that problem dictate their careful choice of an appropriate methodology. Unfortunately, the sequence of research decisions described in the textbooks may not be an accurate description of how research decisions actually get made. Instead, the research decision making process may resemble the garbage can model of managerial decision making (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972), so that the sequential assumptions of the research textbook model are suspended (Martin, 1982). Instead of theoretical problems always dictating the choice of a method, methodological choices may be determined by the availability of resources, the preferences or limited skills of a researcher, or even the likelihood that particular results may be found. Indeed, the textbook sequence may be reversed, so that methodological preferences dictate what theoretical problem is studied. For example, some of the projects of Michigan's Institute for Survey Research, such as the Detroit Area Study, can be characterized as a method (survey) in search of a theoretical problem to address.

There is considerable evidence that the garbage can model may be more accurate than the textbook model in its portrayal of how methodological choices actually are made (e.g., Webb and Ellsworth, 1975; Ellsworth, 1977; Campbell and Cook, 1979; Knorr, 1979; McGrath, Martin, and Kulka, 1982). If this is so, it may be very difficult to convince researchers to make methodological choices in the complex, well-reasoned, self-conscious manner that is a prerequisite for the multi-method approaches advocated
A second difficulty is that triangulation, and to a lesser extent hybrid methodologies, require that a researcher become a jack-of-all-trades, adept in several different methodologies. Most researchers are adequately trained in one, or at best a few, methodological techniques. Multi-method approaches may require changes in skills and attitudes that are unlikely, perhaps impossible.

Methodological Chameleons

There is another alternative. Researchers could become more appreciative of, and more able to judge the merits of, studies in their field of interest that use unfamiliar or non-preferred methodologies, so that the results of these studies could be integrated into their own work. This open-minded stance is rare. Even in an openly interdisciplinary, multi-method field such as organizational behavior, theoretical integration of results obtained using different methodologies is proceeding in a slow, crude, and inefficient fashion (Roberts, Hulin, and Rousseau, 1978).

Methodological open-mindedness may be rare because some people feel that a complex or simple mono-method position is the only intellectually honest alternative — that one methodology is, in fact, superior. This tendency may be particularly strong among those who believe in a single epistemological point of view and feel that point of view justifies a simple or complex mono-method approach to research (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

All too often methodologies are discussed as if they were scientific
religions—each one labeling itself the one true faith. (6)

Methodological — and perhaps even epistemological — conflicts could be overcome by drawing from existentialism. As atheists, the existentialists disavowed belief in all ideologies except that which asserted that no ideology was valid. Regarding the void left by the absence of any kind of faith, existentialists felt themselves faced with a brutal choice: to commit suicide or to act as if they believed in something. Those that chose the latter alternative aspired to act in accord with some of the ethical principles of religious ideologies, even though they had discarded some of the basic premises of religion, such as a faith in God (cf., Camus, 1948; Hartt, 1962).

It is possible to take an "existential" approach to methodological choices by admitting that no alternative is free of flaws or superior to the others. The researcher who believes this is faced with a choice. He or she could stop doing research. Or, he or she could continue to do research within the constraints of a methodological paradigm, but with full awareness that those constraints and that paradigm have no monopoly on truth; other paradigms may well be equally valid (and equally invalid).

A researcher who adopts this position would be a methodological chameleon. While conducting a study, the researcher would act like — perhaps even temporarily become — an advocate of one of the mono-method positions. When reading completed studies, even his or her own, the researcher would evaluate the results with the scepticism of a methodological atheist, with no belief in the supremacy of any mono-method
position. In this state of mind, the existential methodologist could draw on research results using any well-executed methodology.

It is difficult to adopt an existential approach to research. We seem to need to believe in the superiority of the methodological approaches we use, perhaps because otherwise we might have to question the worth of doing research at all. Like religious faiths, mono-method justifications are comforting, making multi-method appreciators, if not practitioners, an all-too-rare phenomenon.

Breaking Up the Monopolies

The difficulties of designing triangulated studies and creating hybrid methods should not be minimized. Such difficulties are compounded by the prevalence of the garbage can approach to making methodological choices and the scarcity of methodological existentialists. However, until the mono-method monopolies are broken up, the field of organizational research will remain riddled with unnecessary blindspots.
Footnotes

(1) Some qualitative researchers take the position that the search for general laws of social behavior is misguided because each social event is unique. Thus, qualitative methods can yield a deep understanding of a unique event, even though there is no possibility of extracting general laws. Others argue that both quantitative and qualitative techniques can uncover general laws concerning stable, reproducible phenomena (cf., Gergen, 1976). Ontological questions such as these are beyond the scope of the present paper.

(2) Some philosophers of science have observed that data that appears to be objective inevitably has subjective elements (e.g., Popper, 1959; Kuhn, 1970; Feyerabend, 1975; Bateson, 1979). This position is consistent with the social construction of reality argument that social knowledge is a subjective rather than an objective phenomenon (cf., Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Similarly, sociologists have demonstrated that a researcher’s historical position, socio-economic status, and/or ideological commitments may influence the content of research findings (e.g., Ossowski, 1963; Stark, 1967; Horowitz, 1968), possibly explaining the pro-management bias found in much organizational research (e.g., Frost, 1980).

Ratcliffe (1980) offers an articulate variant of this point of view. He observes that numbers, like words, are symbols. Thus, whether words or numbers are used to describe or re-present an experience, the process inevitably and always involves a translation from one logic system (experience) to another.
(symbolic). There is always an interpreter between an event and recorded data.

Even the act of studying a phenomenon can change it. For example, the traces left by atomic particles in a cloud chamber are not the particles themselves; "The particle must be inferred by the researcher, and that inference is a qualitative process" (Ratcliffe, 1980:2). In experiments animals are more likely to behave in accord with hypotheses if the person running the experiment is aware of the hypotheses and the conditions to which the animals had been assigned—even when that person is unaware of having done anything to influence the animals' behavior (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969). Campbell's observation on this point is relevant to all types of quantitative research, although he refers specifically to experiments: "... much of what we think of as experimental measures, recorded on the occasion of pretest and posttest for both experimental and control groups, are in fact quantifications of subjective judgments" (Campbell, 1974:17 quoted in Ratcliffe, 1980:3-4). Because of these considerations, the present paper does not associate the qualitative-quantitative distinction with judgments about degree of subjectivity and objectivity.

(3) It is unclear whether, as McGrath argues, it is desirable to maximize all three of these criteria (see footnote 1 above). Agreement on this issue, however, is not a prerequisite for agreeing with the results of McGrath's analysis.

(4) I am grateful to Richard Daft for this idea.

(5) Burrell and Morgan (1979) have argued that methodological
choices necessarily reflect epistemological philosophies. According to this point of view, because epistemological philosophies conflict, it would be intellectually difficult, if not illogical, to endorse more than one methodological approach. Although a necessary association between epistemologies and methodological choices is debatable, (perhaps an integrated epistemology is possible), Burrell and Morgan's analysis does convincingly indicate that some researchers believe in a single epistemological approach and feel that that approach justifies a mono-methodological approach.

One might expect a more catholic methodological tolerance from researchers who believe that knowledge is "knowable" only from within the context in which it is embedded. Even researchers working within this epistemological paradigm (e.g., Spender, 1983) are generally unwilling to admit that their own context has limitations no less significant than the limitations of other points of view (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:395).

6) Burrell and Morgan suggest a solution to the difficulties posed by conflicting epistemologies. They argue that advocates of a minority point of view should stop reacting to the dominant position and, instead, isolate themselves in order to develop the strengths of their chosen approach to its fullest potential. This solution might have some desirable effects. Isolation may give adherents to minority paradigms a short term means of strengthening their chosen approaches. The development of mid-range theories might be facilitated. However, in the long term this strategy would hinder the transfer of knowledge across paradigm boundaries, thus impeding the development of organizational theory.
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