

# Feature Topic for ORM: “Templates in Qualitative Research Methods”

Organizational Research Methods  
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## Background and Purpose

One of the core strengths of qualitative research methods is that there is much variety among different approaches, for example, with regard to the underlying epistemological and ontological traditions (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018; Gephart, 2004), the data and materials that can be analyzed (e.g., text, numbers, pictures, graphs, audio files, movies, objects, etc.), the content that is assessed (e.g., the discourse between people or in the media, team dynamics and processes, narratives of people’s life or experiences, etc.), or the way in which the data are treated and coded. In addition, qualitative research methods are flexible and adaptable. Qualitative research tradition norms encourage researchers to engage in bricolage and adapt the methods to their respective research question, the sample, or the context in which they collect data (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Gehman et al. 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Yin, 2017). This can entail adaptations in data collection procedures or differences in data analysis (e.g., the specific coding approach chosen). In that way, qualitative research methods represent a very powerful tool for researchers because the researcher can mold them to the needs of the data and the sample.

However, recent trends in the field of management have been worrisome. One of the core concerns expressed by journal editors (e.g., Michael Pratt, Bill Harley, Bob Gephart, Mikko Ketokivi, Pratima Bansal, Wendy Smith, and Eero Vaara) is that the field seems to be coming to some form of convergence on a template for qualitative research. This means that there now seems to be an expectation of what qualitative research methods should look like, what they should entail, and how they should be written up. This greatly limits the power of qualitative research methods for discovery, exploration, and refinement.

Part of the underlying issues is that when it comes to qualitative research, many researchers and reviewers are unable to clearly articulate what rigor means, how it should be operationalized, and how trustworthiness in the application of the method can be established. Worse, many researchers seem to assume that rigor in qualitative research should follow the same definitions and

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operationalizations as rigor in quantitative research to create trustworthiness of the findings and conclusions (e.g., Harley, 2015). The inability to define and understand rigor in qualitative research has led to a number of issues that need resolution. These include, among many others, the mechanistic application of templates for conducting qualitative research; the increasing role of qualitative researchers as glorified reporters of participant perceptions and experiences rather than interpreters and critical evaluators of underlying tensions, dynamics, and processes; the selection of quantifying qualitative data over delving deeply into the rich qualitative data; or the preference for certain qualitative methodologies and approaches over others without fully evaluating their respective merits and purposes. The time is ripe that we step back, reevaluate, and reset current trends regarding how the field applies qualitative research methods.

## Aims

The goal of the current feature topic is to stimulate conversation among management researchers about these contemporary trends and tensions and elicit thoughts about ways forward, away from template convergence and toward a diversity of approaches. We want to demonstrate how many of the challenges that qualitative researchers face on a day-to-day basis can be reframed and integrated into overarching developments in qualitative research in particular and our field's approach to scientific inquiry more generally. In this feature topic, we want authors to discuss issues regarding standardization and rationalization trends as they relate to formalized research design. In addition, in the feature topic, we want to (a) highlight and celebrate the diversity and flexibility of qualitative research methods (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, and discourse analysis) for application to a broad spectrum of management topics and (b) discuss recent advances and developments with regard to these commonly used qualitative methods. This involves highlighting traditions for different methods, introducing new developments for each methodology to showcase the diversity and utility of these approaches, and providing guidance for the application of these methods. We would also like to see discussions of differences in discipline conventions; for example, are there different conventions in the way that a particular methodology (e.g., case analysis) is used in operations management versus organizational behavior versus entrepreneurship versus international business? To explore this question, we invite researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, research topics, and educational backgrounds as well as diverse qualitative method expertise.

## Format

The feature topic will contain papers by invitation and papers by submission to this open call for papers. The invited papers currently cover topics related to: existing author motivations to use templates; how do templates develop and how are they maintained; relationship between templates, rigor, scientific reasoning, and the unintended (negative) consequences for theorizing and scientific advancement; and devising scientific, rigorous, and innovative approaches to qualitative research that improve transparency and theoretical development.

Authors interested in submitting a contribution to this open call for papers are thus encouraged to choose topics other than the ones already covered by the invited papers. Open topics include but are not limited to the following questions: Are these trends toward convergence in qualitative research creeping, or do they have a strong foothold in other disciplines? Has there been pushback against this convergence, and if so, how? Is the move to templates driven by stage of career, doctoral training, country of origin, and so on?

Interested authors are advised to keep the length of their submissions to 30 pages (double-spaced), including references, tables, and figures, and follow *ORM's* general formatting guidelines.

Submission deadline: April 30, 2019

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