50 years of International Business research
How far have we come?

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Today’s presentation

- Background: long-term trends in 50yrs of IB research
- Positive: increasing reporting of methods... But still...
- **Transparency** concerns and introduction of DA-RT – also coming to *JIBS*
- The example of qualitative research: debates about ‘analytic transparency’
- Institutionalized practices and norms we should be rethinking
50 years: the progress narrative

– RM-SIG has been reviewing methodological practices in JIBS since the first volume in 1970

– One clear trend: greater transparency:
  1. Emergence of a ‘cookbook’ for reporting
  2. methods section became a standard in the journal, with more methodological details being reported – especially marked for qualitative data analysis

– BUT this trend is not so surprising given
  • Changes to journal article length
  • Flourishing of methodological scholarship:
  • Rise of ‘audit culture’ in academia

– Currently, the push is to go further…
All is not well…The drive for DA-RT (coming to a journal near you…)

– Journals across the social sciences are currently reviewing their data access and research transparency (DA-RT) policies
– Also currently underway in JIBS
  – **Production transparency**: Researchers providing access to data they themselves generated or collected, should offer a full account of the procedures used to collect or generate the data.
  – **Analytic transparency**: Researchers making evidence-based knowledge claims should provide a full account of how they draw their analytic conclusions from the data, i.e., clearly explicate the links connecting data to conclusions.
– Why is transparency important? Academic fraud, replication…

**Source**: [https://www.dartstatement.org/2012-apsa-ethics-guide-changes](https://www.dartstatement.org/2012-apsa-ethics-guide-changes)
Implications for qualitative research: the debate in political science

– DA-RT and qualitative research: are they on a collision course?
– Assumptions about disclosure and transparency based on natural not social sciences
– A lot of concern about data access vs ethical obligations to research informants
– Also potential downsides of e.g.:
  – replication and
  – pre-analysis plan registration
– 50 years of greater analytic transparency in JIBS … But are we as transparent as we think we are?
The paradox

Institutional push for more analytic transparency... but our own institutionalized practices undermine this goal

Three examples of contemporary qualitative research conventions in management/IB:
1. Writing up conventions: deductivism
2. Templates: e.g. most recently, Gioia template as the ‘AMJ style’
3. Rhetoric of certainty vs importance of doubt
1. Deductive template: the current ‘cookbook’ for reporting

Source: Yom, 2015
The management journal article as ‘ritualized fiction’

‘Adhering to the conventional introduction/methods/results/discussion format, the author presents science as a logical and cumulative sequence of activities…

In reality, of course, science is seldom, if ever, so neat. Plainly stated, by fictionalizing the nature of scientific thought, the scientific article in its orthodox form is pure fiction: a fraud.

Indeed, the institutionalized narrative devices of the contemporary scientific article not only conceal but actively misrepresent the thought processes that lead to scientific discoveries.’

- Source: Bedeian (1997): 841

But the shift from essay to experimental report as the standard in management a relatively recent phenomenon (Strang & Siler, 2017)
2. Templates promising data transparency eg Gioia

Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013
The problem with imposing a template: Gioia example

- One size does not fit all: Many different qualitative traditions, many way to present qualitative data (see e.g., Reay et al., 2019)
- Gioia template of its time i.e. traditional grounded theory
- i.e. imbued with certain assumptions
- Any template has weaknesses not just strengths. Advantage is claimed to be the transparency of theory-data link: but how transparent is it, actually? (Reay et al., 2019)

Forthcoming special issue of Organizational Research Methods on “Templates in Qualitative Research Methods”
3. The problems with social scientific rhetoric

– Modelling our rhetoric on a particular view of the natural sciences: use of an objective scientific language, dealing in facts
– Yet doubt is an essential part of generating novel theoretical perspectives
– e.g. remaining sceptical (to existing theory and to interviewee accounts), reacting to puzzles and surprises, pursuing hunches, questioning conventional understandings all part of the theory development process
– We might present a solution to empirical puzzles but all we can claim is a plausible explanation

On doubt see Locke, Golden-Biddle & Feldman (2008)
What is to be done?

1. Greater range of reporting practices
2. Use of online appendices e.g. to report the actual research journey
3. Using templates as guides and inspiration only for showing data-theory linkages
4. Acknowledging the interpretive, fallible basis of our work

In seeking transparency we need to remember:
‘Rigid criteria for assessing the value of a scientific contribution inadvertently, although predictably, can encourage misrepresentation…’ (Laitin and Reich, 2017: 173)

Our analysis of 50 years of JIBS shows that institutionalized norms and practices do change over time – but it is up to us to change them
References


Watch out for forthcoming special issue