

Chapter 10

Expanding Organizational Research Methods: Analyzing Ruptures in Qualitative Research

Sarah Jane Blithe
University of Nevada, USA

Anna Wiederhold Wolfe
Texas A&M University, USA

ABSTRACT

Collecting qualitative data in organizations is a complex and messy process which produces subjective, performed, and partial data. In this chapter, the authors argue that analyzing “ruptures” in organizational interview data—paying attention to absences, exits, unspoken feelings, and temporal shifts--can enrich the researcher’s understanding by making visible multiple aspects of the data which might otherwise have been overlooked. Examining ruptures draws attention to jarring disjunctures and previously unseen angles often missed through traditional data analysis. Drawing from interview data with brothel owners and sex workers in Nevada’s legal brothels, the authors present two main contributions to qualitative organizational research: (1) the benefits of analyzing ruptures in organizational interview performances and transcripts and (2) a challenge to organizational researchers to take seriously their emotions during the interview performance.

INTRODUCTION

Interviewing has quickly become one of the primary ways qualitative researchers in organizational communication gather data (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Silverman, 2001; Tracy, 2013). The benefits from the method are clear—interviews help elucidate the lived experiences, motivations, stories, and perceptions of interviewees (Tracy, 2013); they capture a range of topics, are adaptable, and work well for private or politically charged talk (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002); and they can capture data not accessible through other methods (Silverman, 2004). However, interviewing as a method remains rife with complexity and produces data which are subjective, performed, and partial.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2823-4.ch010

In organizational spaces the stakes are high for giving interviews; power and hierarchy influence individual responses to interview questions, and the threat of damaging organizational reputation or individual livelihood is acute (Alvesson, 2003; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). Put simply, individuals giving interviews in organizations may have a number of reasons to reveal particular data while concealing other data; they might feel compelled to speak freely or they may feel constrained, all of which depends on their position in the organization and their relationship to the topic of study. Further, much activity occurs in organizational interviews, making it difficult for researchers to observe and analyze all aspects of the data. Taken together, collecting interview data in organizations is a complex, messy, and necessarily partial process (Alvesson, 2003).

In this chapter, the authors argue that analyzing “ruptures” in interview data—paying attention to absences, exits, unspoken feelings, and temporal shifts—can enrich the researcher’s understanding by making visible multiple aspects of the data which might otherwise have been overlooked. Examining ruptures draws attention to jarring disjunctures and previously unseen angles often missed through traditional data analysis. The authors present two main contributions to qualitative research: (1) the benefits of analyzing ruptures in organizational interview performances and transcripts and (2) a challenge to qualitative organizational researchers to take seriously their emotions *during* the interview performance.

INTERVIEWS AS PERFORMANCE

Traditional thought conceived of interviewing as a tool with which researchers could extract informational “truths” from interviewees. However, many scholars have embraced an alternative perspective that instead considers interview data as socially constructed through the interview process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2004; Mishler, 1986; Silverman, 2001). Briggs (1986) described interviews as communicative events. Through this view, the meaning of interview data is rhetorically constructed by both the interviewer and the interviewee (Briggs, 1986; Tracy, 2013). When interviews are seen as a mutually constructed process, it becomes problematic to assume that interviews can generate authentic accounts or objective “truths” (Miller & Glassner, 2004).

In what Denzin (2001) called the “performative turn,” researchers usefully considered interviews as a performance by both interviewer and interviewee. In 1957, De Sola Pool described interviews as a drama with a plot. Like a performance, an interviewer is interpreting the meaning which arises through the interaction of an interview (Denzin, 2001; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). Organizational interviewees have constant audience pressure. In some cases, managers or customers might physically overhear interviews. However, individuals participating in private organizational interviews may feel the pressure of an imagined audience in the form of managers, executives, coworkers, direct reports, or customers.

The dramaturgic metaphor is particularly useful for interviews because it extends to the interview participants (actors and audiences), the predetermined questions and macro discourses which guide the interaction (scripts), and the interview location (setting). In this way, qualitative interviewing is most like an improvisational performance (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). More recently, Tracy (2013) recommended drawing from Burke’s 1945 dramatistic pentad as a useful way to analyze interviews. This would include analyzing the “Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose” (p. 211). This approach becomes incredibly useful when considering interviewees as engaged, active participants who influence the data. Goffman (1959) extended the theatre metaphor in considering the performative aspects of everyday life. His dramaturgical insights suggest that interviews might have a front stage (scenes interviewees want

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