Ethics and Writing

The problem
- Qualitative research produces *specific* knowledge
  - unlike in statistical research, the subject (esp. company) is easy to identify
  - in a good qualitative study, the report gives information that is specific enough to give the reader a vivid sense of the subject
    - in particular, big companies are easy to identify!

- Ethical question
  - outsiders can use this knowledge to their advantage, and even to harm the subject
    - in business studies, these outsiders are typically powerful enough: other companies, government, etc.

- Confidentiality
  - subjects may be worried about such effects, and not give permission for a study

Thus the question, how to
- protect the subject (ethics)
- guarantee the subject about how the report impacts him/her/it

Standard ethical procedures
- Consent
  - acquire the subjects’ consent to participate
  - “informed consent” means that before the subject commits him/herself to the study, the researcher ought to
    - inform him/her about what s/he is doing
    - how her/his study is published
    - how data is maintained and archived
    - how likely it is that it will impact him/her
Specific communication about aims
– when doing research, the researcher may have to tell about his/her aims in detail
– prepare a
  • “elevator talk” (30 seconds)
  • a set of presentations (5 and 15 minutes, the latter on a coffee break)

Report as the epitome of attention
– changing identifying details is normal (changing names and identifying details)
  • but don’t do this automatically, comparability disappears easily with this practice!
– using “types” in the study: “Rolf” in text is an amalgam of 5 managers…
  • doesn’t really help

But ethics is not just about protecting subjects…
– The above-mentioned procedures decrease the accuracy of the report
– Researchers have duties to the scientific community as well
  • accuracy is one of the most important ones
  • reports cost typically anything from €100,000 upwards: they have to be useful for future readers and researchers alike

The job of science is not to tell glorifying stories only:
– keep in mind the Enron and the Parmalat scandals
– a body of knowledge is not science if it shows only the PR side of things!
– a good deal of ethical debate comes from medical research, physics and chemistry
  • social sciences may effect the subject, but seldom irrevocably

People survive: all they have to do is to label the researcher as incompetent or politically motivated
• The world changes: is the company studied still in existence in 2010, when you publish your main findings?
Still...

- Esp. in studying business and institutions
  - keep in mind the press and bourse: bad news may drop company values even when if they come from research
  - accidents: giving out information of a prototype may lead you to the courtroom

Confidentiality negotiations

- Specify some things with companies on paper before the study
  - what you give:
    - what you agree to protect (be specific: technical details, agreements, prototyped, programs, etc.)
    - what kinds of “screening” rights you give to companies
    - who owns data; how there rights are renegotiated

- what the company should give:
  - right to publish even negative information after screening the specified details: never give the company a right to decide what you can publish
  - who else than you can see the data?
    - Your professor or other tutor? Your thesis committee, or thesis examiners?
  - who reads your papers; a schedule for reading
    - don’t put your names to NDAs (non-disclosure agreements) without a very careful consideration

...some tactics...

- listen first, but then tell the standard scientific expectations and reasons behind them
- be specific:
  - with big companies, you typically negotiate with experienced attorneys – you lose if you hurry!
  - reserve enough time for negotiations
- aces in your sleeves:
  - priority rights to first findings, training workshops, consultant-type relationship at the end of the study
  - promising extras like these may help you to get better conditions and access with relatively little extra work

Writing Qualitative Research

Normally...

- Qualitative reports follow the ordinary “IMRD” formula
  - I: Introduction (typically intro, literature review, theory section)
  - M: Methods
  - R: Results
  - D: Discussion (or results and discussion)
Some say that qualitative reports ought to follow the structure of research better:
- qualitative researcher works like a detective: finding small cues, following them, creating the explanation
- the report ought to look like a detective story (P. Alasuutari)
- Others liken text to poetry or to Brechtian Entfremdung:
  - the text ought to break the reader’s ordinary perception, make him struggle with the text

Finally, some question the “politics of text”:
- ...and try to avoid the typical formats used to "seduce" the reader into believing the story (like narrative)
- ...or bring out the “polyvocality” of text by, say,
  - placing long quotations from a variety of people to the text
  - instead of telling the whole story from the researcher’s point of view only

Evaluating these claims:
- They are right to certain extent, no doubt
- but:
  - IMRD is efficient and accurate:
    - few readers want to spend weeks with one text
    - it controls the reader, but in research, we do not believe what we read anyway before hearing several other opinions
  - what’s the point in competing with poets and playwrights in expression and accuracy of language?

At “micro level”,
- qualitative research works like any other scientific text:
  - any paper poses a question, reviews existing knowledge, tells why these answers do not work, and creates an own answer
  - sections and paragraphs typically follow this format as well

Quotes are data:
- readers want to see them to be evaluate your claims
  - just like in statistics, you report tables, equations, and significance levels for each parameter

Finally, timing:
- When writing a qualitative report...
  - reserve more time for writing than in statistical reporting
    - writing and analysis coincide
    - writing qualitative research is not just reporting
  - the hardest parts are the introduction and the discussion sections; they are typically written several times
Sources

**General**

**Writing**
((See also Alasuutari’s book in Lecture 1.)

**Thick Description**