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QUALITATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AUTHORSHIP: ANTECEDENTS, PROCESSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper reports on a systematic review of the writing practices and experiences of scholars who have published qualitative papers in the field of entrepreneurship. It evaluates existing knowledge about how ‘well-published’ entrepreneurship scholars go about writing up qualitative research. It identifies the antecedents, processes, and consequences of qualitative research authorship as self-described by authors.

Approach: Scholars, who had published qualitative papers in five top ranked entrepreneurship journals over a twenty year period, were asked to complete a qualitative survey about their writing practices. A qualitative analysis of 37 usable replies was undertaken.

Results: Entrepreneurship scholars perceive their qualitative research writing to be more enriching and philosophical than quantitative research. They feel strong connections with their research subjects. They find qualitative research difficult and time consuming to write up. It is hard to bridge the gap between working with large amounts of transcribed data and the editorial requirements of journals, without losing the vitality of data. Qualitative research and subsequent writing skills have often been learned by trial and error. Many are inspired by specific texts, which may include novels, poems or plays.

Implications: This work shows how useful it is to discuss qualitative writing processes so that we may learn from the “blood, toil, tears and sweat” of those who have already successfully navigated both the writing and publishing of qualitative research.

Originality: Although there is a vigorous debate within the entrepreneurship literature about the prevalence and suitability of different methods and methodological approaches, there is no explicit discussion of how researchers engage with writing up qualitative research for publication. The paper addresses this gap and shares insights and guidance from our community of practice.

Key words: Qualitative entrepreneurship research, Qualitative research, Writing qualitatively, Story telling

QUALITATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AUTHORSHIP: ANTECEDENTS, PROCESSES AND CONSEQUENCES

1) Introduction

The increasing institutional pressure to publish in top ranked 3 and 4 star journals is a pressing concern for scholars in both the UK and elsewhere. This is the perennial problem, of “publish or perish” (Finn, 1999; Lussier, 2010). Failure to publish can prevent academics from getting a faculty position, tenure and promotion. A track record in publishing can and does increase salary potential. The pressure is very real and has the potential to blight promising careers. Anecdotally, Professors, Readers and Lecturers are being told not to conduct research that is not capable of being published in top flight journals, and not to submit manuscripts to less ranked journals. As some of these journals have a rejection rate of 90% or above, then this poses a very real dilemma to scholarship. As such advice becomes institutionalised, it is shared by senior members of the profession, and passed on as knowledge about our community of practice, to graduate students and junior faculty alike. The often informal nature of such “education” makes the message more powerful, not less so. Notwithstanding this, Finn (1999) stresses that ‘Seeing your work in print is one of the more rewarding outcomes of graduate study. However, getting your work published is often one of the most frustrating aspects of early academic life’ and as we will see in this paper, this is particularly apposite for those scholars who engage in qualitative research. As confirmed advocates of a more contextualised approach to entrepreneurship research, it seems to us that there is no little merit in uncovering the practices which well-published authors of such work have learnt to deploy, in their pursuit of article acceptance. This can be seen as a way to celebrate those who have managed to overcome the undoubted hurdles which alternative scholarship faces, and to share their knowledge of how to tackle the bastions of the discipline. We recognise, of course, that deploying a head-on assault of the top-ranked journals is just one strategy open to heterodox researchers. Our aim here is, simply, to better arm ourselves and others for this assault.

This then is the gap in the research. What are the barriers and challenges that qualitative researchers face in getting their research to final publication in top ranked journals? In order to respond to the research question we explored ways in which by gathering, evaluating and developing existing knowledge about how published entrepreneurship scholars go about writing up qualitative research. We also wanted to identify good practices and processes in qualitative research authorship.

Additionally, we were curious to explore ways in which top scholars learned, or were trained, to write strong qualitative manuscripts.

The article is structured as follows. We first discuss, briefly, the role of qualitative research in entrepreneurship, and we then present our methodological approach. We follow this by providing a discussion of our results, in terms of the antecedents, processes and consequences of qualitative entrepreneurship authorship. We conclude by discussing the limitations of our approach before making some suggestions for qualitative research scholars based on the results and insights from our participants.

2) Writing qualitatively in entrepreneurship: keeping the discipline open.

Research in the areas of entrepreneurship and small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has been identified as both a growing (Gibb, 1992; Gibb, 2000) and an increasingly important (Grant and Perren, 2002; Hisrich and Drnovsek, 2002) area of academic activity and output. The academic discipline of entrepreneurship and its related fields of small business management and business innovation are currently catered for by over 50 journals, although only few of these feature in the recognised journal rankings. This suggests that opportunities for publication of research output are numerous, but that the highest pinnacles of recognised academic achievement remain both limited and competitive, for entrepreneurship scholars.

Early review articles included those of Hornaday and Churchill (1987), Wortman (1987), Low and MacMillan (1988), Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) and Aldrich (1992). Such reviews concentrated on issues of definition, research typologies; statistical methods; research prospects; and implications as one would expect in a nascent and developing field. A collective overarching theme of the reviews is that there is no coherent structure or style of research, albeit quantitative studies predominated. Despite an increase in the number of published studies over the next decade, Ratnatunga and Romano (1997) argue that there was still no coherent structure. Similarly, Shane (2000) noted that rather than becoming more explanatory, entrepreneurship research had broadened in outlook. Likewise, Morris et al (2001) bemoaned the lack of theoretical development in the field, whilst Grant and Perren (2002) reported on the structural functionalism of much of the research which made theory development problematic.

Several scholars have interrogated samples of the entrepreneurship literature in a hunt for ontological traces and preferences. Grant and Perren (2002:201) demonstrate that within

entrepreneurship there is a paucity even of ‘conscious effort to approach such philosophically challenging efforts’, and that most entrepreneurship literature is characterized by what Rorty (1998) calls ‘naive realism’, unexamined and uncritical. Nevertheless the strong preferences for specific methodologies in entrepreneurship can be associated with contrasting ontological positions. The majority of ‘harder’ quantitative researchers espouse (albeit usually tacitly) a positivist stance, and the minority of ‘softer’ qualitative researchers hold fast to a contextualist, phenomenological position. Typically, however, (Grant and Perren, 2002:201), these philosophical underpinnings are left inchoate, implicit, and tacit.

***** *et al.* (2005) report the findings of a survey into the methodologies and methods utilized by authors published in the top five journals in entrepreneurship (ERD, ETP, ISBJ, JBV, JSBM) over a twenty-year period (1985 – 2004), from which they draw some conclusions at the level of ontology. As previous studies have indicated (Chandler and Lyon, 2001; Coviello and Jones, 2004, Grant and Perren, 2002, for example), entrepreneurship research is largely dominated by ‘methods consistent with logical positivism’, most notably quantitative techniques applied to data gathered using large-scale mail surveys. Ogbor (2000:622) accuses entrepreneurship of being ‘obsessed with and haunted by’ a form of Platonism, that believes in an ideal reality accessible to us not through context, social structures and processes, but only as reified into ‘numbers, ratios, averages and other mathematical notions’. McElwee and Atherton (2005) also found that quantitative articles predominate, suggesting that qualitative methods continue to be less preferred for publication than quantitative methodologies. The evidence, then, suggests strongly that entrepreneurship as a discipline is, still, heavily dominated by an unexplored form of tacit (logical) positivism, by inchoate crude realism, which sees quantitative studies as the optimum research tool.

The story thus far, then, is of an emerging discipline where, in spite of a publishing history dominated by quantitative approaches, and an associated positivist ontology, nevertheless, no one structured all-encompassing theoretical frame has managed to win broad support. It is perhaps fair, then, to argue that *other* perspectives on entrepreneurship have played an especially important role in keeping the discipline still open, unstructured, and creative. A particularly vital minority voice, challenging the dominant positivist – quantitative orthodoxy, has emanated from those entrepreneurship scholars whose qualitative work was strong enough to demand publication in the field’s leading journals.

We believe these colleagues have been critical in building a sustained corpus of outstanding context-driven, finely-grained, and rich scholarship. Furthermore, we would argue it is the strength and influence of this work which has led to so very many recent calls for a more open approach to qualitative, or pluralist, or contextualised, or narrative entrepreneurship scholarship (Cope, 2005; Chandler and Lyon, 2001; Coviello and Jones, 2004; Down, 2010; Gartner, 2004; Gartner, 2010a., 2010b, Grant and Perren, 2002; Jones and Spicer, 2005: 236; Ogbor 2000: 622; Steyaert, 2005: 7; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Steyaert and Katz, 2004, 189). However, as a minority heterodox tradition within entrepreneurship, codification and dissemination of these authors' knowledge has been limited. Our desire was to address this limitation, to gather together, reflect upon, and share the skills and experiences of these leading colleagues, so as to help ourselves, and others, follow in their footsteps, to continue their quiet revolution.

3) Methodological approaches and dilemmas

Our aim was to unearth data from like minded colleagues and peers on how they wrote and published qualitatively. We are interested in the views of our peer group who had published qualitatively in entrepreneurship journals and we do this by investigating whether there is something inherently different in authoring qualitative work, and what that might be. Asking questions such as these produces some very interesting findings. We also seek to establish whether the participants were prepared to share their writing and authorial processes with us. We expected to establish a 'benefits' or 'advantages' style response to balance the problems encountered and were initially concerned that this constituted a bias. We were careful to avoid questions about the politics and practices of writing and placing qualitative research. There were three stages to our research approach.

Stage one Compiling a data base

We created a database of approximately 300 scholars who had published qualitative papers in five top ranked entrepreneurship journals over a twenty year period. See appendix 1 for details of how this database was developed. The journals are Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, International Small Business Journal, Journal of Business Venturing, and Journal of Small Business Management. The qualitative / quantitative classification of articles was drawn from earlier work on this database, reported more fully in xxxxxxxx, 2004. As we suggested in the introduction, these journals were selected because those who wish to 'succeed' may well need to aspire to publish in these journals and a review of these journals suggests that

published manuscripts are generally perceived to be based upon quantitative methodological approaches. Again we accept that this rationale may well be considered to be instrumental and one which legitimises the hegemonic position of such organisations as the Association of (British) Business School (ABS) journal rankings published annually. Nevertheless, it seemed instructive to consider those qualitative papers whose authors had indeed managed to overcome the (perceived) hurdles in achieving this target.

Stage two Questionnaire design and distribution

Each of the authors has run workshops and seminars on the theme of 'Publishing qualitative research'. A set of the type of questions which consistently emerged from these events were compiled and in each of our respective institutions we 'piloted' the questions with a colleague. From their feedback and suggestions we then selected what we regarded as a manageable set of questions. We designed a questionnaire consisting of 10 open questions, detailed in appendix 2. We then sent an email to all of the identified scholars asking them to complete the questionnaire about their writing practices. We distributed the questionnaire in July 2010. We note that some qualitative scholars may regard this approach as slightly paradoxical, but inviting authors to write about their writing also has a certain resonance.

Stage three Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis of 37 usable replies was undertaken. Of the 37 participants 27 were male and 10 were female. Of these internationally renowned participants, sixteen wished to remain anonymous. In the interests of fairness, we took a decision not to name the other participants who comprise American and European Scholars. All are senior, well respected figures in the field of entrepreneurship. They include many professors and journal editors. We have opted for a restorying approach rather than to engage in quantitative reductionism. Reading, and re-reading, the answers we received, the research team moved from rough notes and comments, through several iterations, until a patterned framework appeared which allowed us to present and reflect upon the dataset effectively. This pattern, presented below, moves from considering the antecedents of qualitative authorship, through the iterative elements of the authorial process, to a consideration of its consequences. When carrying out our own writing-up, we have tried hard to use, wherever possible, the actual voice of our participants, in an attempt to maintain the spirit of their collaboration with us.

Appendix 1 shows the breakdown of the countries of origin, and other relevant details about our participants. As Figure 1 shows, the proportion of their research which they classified as being essentially qualitative varied quite substantially, but accounted for more than half of the research carried out, for just over half the respondents.

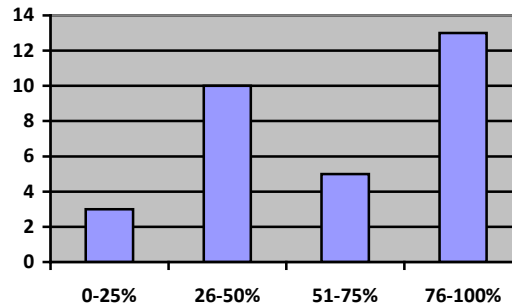


Figure 1: Proportions of qualitative research undertaken by participants

4) Analysis and findings

Reading, and re-reading, the questions and answers we had gathered together, we began to build up a picture, and abstraction, of the practices and philosophies of this community of practice. First we considered the “inputs” which scholars brought to their work, most notably their rationales for choosing qualitative research, and their own training. Next, we explored matters to do with process, with the “how” of qualitative authorship - practices, techniques, and methods deployed. Thirdly, we analyzed those answers which told us about the consequences of qualitative writing, both personal and professional. Finally, we combined these three stages into a single framework, to provide an holistic overview.

Antecedents

Without wishing to lean too heavily on a mechanistic metaphor of the research process, we wanted to find out what it is that brings scholars to qualitative research, and what it is that they themselves bring to the process. What reasons draw them to perform such work, and what training readies them for it?

Rationale

In answer to our question concerning the rationale for qualitative research¹, we received a variety of responses, which can be grouped into reasons of a theoretical imperative, of personal enrichment and identity, and, finally, of a desire to perform subject-centred research.

Table One: Rationales for Engaging in Qualitative Research	
Theme	Illustrative Example
Theoretical Imperative	“You want to take a look inside, and get a handle on causal mechanisms”
	“As part of theory building...to allow for richer data”
Personal Enrichment	“Fits with who I am, and the nature of my intellectual curiosity”
	“More interesting for me as a researcher”
Subject-centred scholarship	“Greater sense of understanding the phenomenon in question”
	“Interest in hearing the stories behind strategic decisions”

We received many responses expressing a desire to explore the issues and develop theory; looking inside and getting a handle on causal mechanisms. One informant emphasised that theory building helps “*explore what the more specific research questions might become*”. These responses tended to be related to personal research interests and niche areas of interest. One informant remarked “*The nature of the problem is too complex or unfamiliar, and the key variables are either not sufficiently known, or their complexity not fully explored*”. An underdeveloped theoretical base was highlighted by one informant as a reason for using qualitative methodologies. There was talk of subjectivity, emotions and exploring the inner world of entrepreneurs. A focus of the activity was “*reflective or subjective work on areas that could lead to further research*”; this appears to be related to theory building, which was specifically mentioned by three participants. These theoretical imperatives are an important group of rationales for the selection of qualitative approaches.

Another key theme to emerge from the responses was to do with the intellectual and practical benefits to the scholar. These included a search for understanding as in a personal *verstehen*, personal exploration, thinking and intellectual curiosity. There was discussion of developing “*insights and understanding*”. One informant remarked “*Discoveries, new ways of looking at things are the main rewards*”. Practical applications were also highlighted. One informant found qualitative methodologies helpful in developing useful material for pedagogical purposes and to

¹ Q 2: “When you have chosen to undertake qualitative research, what was your main reason for doing so?”

prepare future practitioners of entrepreneurship for what to expect. Thus qualitative methodologies appear to fit our participants' personal identities and weltanschauung.

Finally, some rationales expressed a subject-centred approach to scholarship, with qualitative work offering the "best-fit" with entrepreneurial processes, persons, and phenomena. There was an understanding that the qualitative process was a dynamic one characterised by change. One informant articulated that qualitative methodologies permitted exploratory studies of small communities wherein understanding culture is important. There were also elements of pragmatism identified. Two participants articulated that the subjects they were researching were inherently qualitative, so that data could only be generated through qualitative approaches. This was amplified by a lack of available data on their subject areas. Gender was highlighted as a deeply qualitative area of research in that in reflecting "*the feminist perspective, the positivist scientific reproduction of knowledge has effectively marginalised and subordinated women*". Methodological alignment was also a factor as in possessing an interpretivist stance which dictated that a qualitative methodological approach was inevitable. One informant argued that the qualitative aspect allowed for richer data to emerge, sometimes to use in partnership with quantitative data.

Training and Learning

Answers which bore upon the issue of how scholars had learned to write up qualitative research were found to centre around three main themes: socialisation and enculturation (typically in disciplines other than entrepreneurship!); learning by (repeated) doing; and, very importantly, learning from others.

Research skills are often picked up in first degrees (outside entrepreneurship) where methods courses are compulsory and the opportunity to conduct "*ethnographic dissertations*" was more widely available. There is a strong sense that these scholars were not schooled in restrictive business school cultures. Working with sociologists and others from more established disciplines such as history, anthropology and sociology featured in the answers. One informant noted that the literature review skills they obtained during their PhD stood them in good stead. Working with Ph.D. students, or with other 'qualitatively' oriented colleagues also featured. It thus seems that the graduate education of entrepreneurship scholars, especially those of us who are rooted in diverse academic origins, as well as ongoing engagement in teaching and learning about research, may play a substantial role in the selection of qualitative research approaches. One informant noted that their interest in biographies helped them in this respect. This suggests that early socialisation into the

methodologies is a key determinant of propensity to engage in a particular epistemological approach, implying that the participants had undergone an ontological development towards the use of qualitative methods. The importance of education, training and becoming encultured into a community of practice is clear.

Table Two: Training and Learning for Engaging in Qualitative Research	
Theme	Illustrative Example
Socialisation and enculturation	“Geography as a discipline has a very strong tradition in getting out of the building and talking to real people”
	“Had a supervisor who was doing qualitative research long before it was as accepted as it is today”
Learning by (repeated) doing	“The only way to learn how to do research is actually to do it”.
	“Trial and error”
Learning from others	“I picked up some of the more formal notions by working together with sociologists”
	“Try to continue learning by reading, analyzing and reviewing the work of others”.

In terms of learning by doing, and, indeed, by repeated doing, the most frequent response was by “*trial and error*” (5 participants). Practice and learning by doing or experience featured in the responses – this can be summed up by one informant who cited the 3P’s of “*Practice, practice, practice*”. Learning from supervisors and peers also featured. A mixture of themes was expressed by one informant who wrote - “*I’ve come to the conclusion that the only way to learn how to do this is learn from what other people have done and by writing numerous drafts*”. Sheer persistence is also an over arching theme. As one informant stresses – “*In doing this, having papers refused.... and persisting it forced me to try to understand what it was that was bad in my way of writing. I had interesting results but I didn’t know how to present them and how to exploit the results for a strong discussion*”. Indeed, the advice of reviewers and editors featured heavily. One informant wrote of being asked “*Why would anyone want to read this*”? This kindly quip made him aware that he was “*engaging in a conversation with a particular academic community*” and needed to tailor his work accordingly. Another example of such advice was proffered by one informant who wrote “*This wasn’t direct advice, it is what I’ve observed: Pursue the path you believe will work, and be persistent and adaptable. Your ideas and findings will get visibility, but it might take a while*”. However, the final word goes to the informant who noted that they learned to write qualitatively through – “*Blood, toil tears and sweat*”.

Perhaps, however, the most dominant theme, in terms of learning and education about qualitative authorship, was an enormous openness to learning from others. There was ample evidence of humility and one informant remarked – *“I am still not that good but see all studies as opportunity to learn”* whilst another remarked that they learned by *“consultation with colleagues”*. Yet another informant advised authors to *“Start early, and work closely with someone who will tell you when you're losing touch with the data OR with a addressing a real issue in the literature”*. Similarly, very many of our respondents were also involved in facilitating this process in others, through coaching and mentoring. Some participants teach and mentor young research students and post graduates and run workshops for those wishing to enhance their competence in writing academic papers.

Process

At the heart of our study were questions to do with process, which asked what is it that our fellow researchers *do*, how do they approach the task of writing up qualitative research? We saw a patterned process, rather unpredictable and chaotic, but which nevertheless saw scholars moving from a basis in theory and research questions, on to engagement with entrepreneurs and their stories, before hunting for patterns, and then re-storying the work. Importantly, scholars seem to start in any one of the first 3 boxes, and then move back and forwards between them, so that inspiration and iteration lead to transparency, cohesion and consistency (see Figure Two).

System fuzziness and contingency

It was very quickly obvious that there is a high degree of contingency, flexibility, and fuzziness around the systems which leading scholars use to analyze and write up their qualitative studies. There were clear patterns which we could identify, but also a great deal of insistence that no actual system was followed, or that approaches varied dramatically. This lack of order does not equate to sloppiness, but has perhaps not been much celebrated in the methods literature. When we asked scholars to describe for us their approach to writing up qualitative research, we received several responses along the lines of *“it depends”* and *“it is tough”* and *“it varies according to the project in question and the resources available”*.

There was a collective appreciation that there was no perfect system or approach as articulated by the informant who remarked – *“I'm still looking for the magic approach”*. This informant nevertheless talked of coding data, writing up a research question, summing up broad patterns of outcomes and of observing and providing illustrative examples. This is evidence of system and

procedures, although clearly the informant felt uncomfortable with such a rigid label. This was accompanied by an explanation that some “*journal editors and referees like this, others don't...*”. This denial of system was echoed by a informant who noted “*I don't think I have an ‘approach’ I simply try to report what I have found*”.

Very similar responses were provided when participants were asked directly (Q5) whether they had “a system, process, habit, which you routinely follow when writing up qualitative research”. The most succinct responses were “No”, and “*Not really*”, whilst another remarked “*Not really - it does depend on the nature of the study*”. One informant noted “*Each project is different, so I don't really have any one approach to follow*”, Another stated “*No I don't, I am trying Action Research and it is hard to write up*”. And it is, of course, not only writers who can be ambivalent about this topic; one informant advised that “*There is no one way, and reviewers may not do it your way*”.

And yet, in spite of all this denial, fuzziness and contingency, it was very clear that four elements were implicated in a generic system, which included setting a firm theoretical basis, engaging with stories in the field, hunting for patterns within stories and theories, and then restorying the patterned data. Scholars entered the process at different points, and re-visited the elements repeatedly, in varied sequences, and perhaps even simultaneously in later iterations. There was considerable evidence of planning and preparation with the word *before* featuring in many sentences. Thus, in spite of sustained, heartfelt doubts and denials, when the dataset was viewed as a whole, a quite clear common process for tackling the fraught task of writing up qualitative entrepreneurship literature was evident, and identified independently by all members of the research team.

Theoretical basis

One informant was “*Very much guided by research questions*”, and another similarly explained it thus – “*It starts with a set of basic theoretical notions and then you try finding out if the stories match the framework*”. Another remarked “*It's an interactive process, you start with very broad outline with questions and hypotheses and then you go to your data and again back to the theoretical part*”. Another informant advised writers to “*Start from a solid conceptual framework*”. A different approach to grounding in the literature was adopted by the informant who wrote “*Before I write my papers, I always consult and read with attention a few good (I mean those I consider as good ones) research papers published and using the specific method I used for my research that I can find in good journals*”. Similarly, another informant stressed that they improved their writing by reading “*good qualitative research papers published in the journals I wanted to submit my own*

papers". This enabled them to "*find good examples, see how other researchers are doing this*". Here, it is the methodology applied, rather than a specific conceptual basis, which forms the reference point in the literature.

Stories and engagement

One respondent talked of conducting interviews and putting together a case describing the situation faced to develop research questions and notes. Another expressed a penchant for "*using multiple case histories to build a degree of external validity for conclusions*". Yet another opined "*The opening is often to contrast findings with received theories and then to unfold the dynamic pattern, which then comes to occupy the spaces that were formerly taken by theory*". Here, the stories come before the theoretical basis, illustrating that this process has several entry-points, so that, rather than beginning with the theory, several participants seem instead to "*interview/studying a situation – reflect- write*". Another scholar bases their approach very much on that of Pratt (AMJ 2009:856), which proposes that one should "*first, put out at least some of the evidence – the story; Second, describe how representative this is across other cases; Third, interpret what is going on, using current theory as much as possible, and where it is not, suggesting new insights that are demonstrably grounded in the evidence.*"

One informant was adamant the secret was to "*hold off on comments and leading questions during the interviews, so the informant can present their own stories/perspectives*". Another articulated a need for having a high quality set of data, especially good if longitudinal and triangulated but stressed that one should try and picture oneself "*telling a story (rather than simply giving facts)*". One informant provided sound advice when responding thus "*Save everything: I have found it useful to have every scrap of paper, every notebook, anything that reminds me of what I was finding out in the field*". Another informant similarly remarked that the most important learning point of a qualitative study was "*what we really can learn from the data*". Yet another advised writers to "*balance analysis and description of the 'show and tell' approach to describing information (show) and linking it to theory (tell)*". Hard work was a theme identified, as articulated by one informant - "*You have to show your evidence. It's hard when that runs into hundreds of pages/hours of transcriptions. But that's the challenge*".

Looking for patterns

One informant noted *“It took me long to learn to write the process and outcome of process as an interacting dynamic among players, and yet to let this dynamic get patterned into a systemic figuration”*. Another remarked *“I try to keep the aims and propositions of the research clearly in mind and map the information on to these”*. Another category of artistic (or conceptualist) scholar was discernable in relation to the response of one scholar who wrote *“I draw a boxes-and-arrows framework that emerges from the analysis of interview transcripts, then I find illustrative quotes for each box; try to tell a story that emphasizes the unexpected”*. Again there is a link to storytelling techniques.

Some participants were clearly process-driven as epitomised by one philosophical informant who noted that *“I have all my interviews transcribed, themes identified, data coded when possible, but then I just reflect on the material with my co-researchers and try to identify what we've learned, the unexpected questions, patterns or informations that have come up, etc”*. Another informant noted - *Before I write up my findings, I try to develop at least one table, or figure, that serves as a ‘road map’ for readers and for myself as I set up the paper. Of course, before this happens I need to study the data very closely, looking for patterns etc”*

Participants were rather divided on the benefits and usefulness of using software to assist in the hunt for themes and patterns. The use of technology featured as indicated by the response of another informant noted *“Before 2000 I adopted old fashioned methods of transcribing tapes, photocopying multiple copies, scissors and paste, and using search routines in WORD. Since then we are committed to use a modern package such as NVIVO”*. This is evidence of changing times and practices as well as being indicative of a learning issue. However, another informant was *“not very keen on this as it can just reproduce counting and categorising”*.

For one, rather atypical, respondent, the need to count and categorise drove their search for patterns within qualitative data: *“My approach to writing up qualitative research is to convert the qualitative data into some kind of quantifiable data, and draw inferences from the latter”*.

Restorying

The obvious storytellers are epitomised by one informant who remarked *“I try to present my findings so that they tell a rich story in a reader-friendly and economical way”*. Another informant talked of *“trying to tell a coherent story”*. One particularly novelesque response noted *“I always*

look for rounded characters, and prefer voices, narratives and ethnographies to describe characteristics of entrepreneurship - which, btw, cannot be disembodied”.

Some of the restorying advice related to crafting papers as in the following response - *“Relate the methodology to the research question so it is clear why a particular approach is the most appropriate for the project. Always think about the balance between description and analysis, it is tempting to focus on the former, not the latter. Look for the 'power' quotes - those which really make a statement and the 'proof' quotes which qualify it”.*

Inspiration and Iteration

Throughout this process of moving from theory, through engagement, patterning and restorying, participants found a range of inspirations which shaped their journey. Iteration was also very evident, with some sense of narrowing, as if through a vortex, gaining focus and precision as stage were revisited. The advice of another informant resonates with us - *“Once you have found a clear trend, regard it with scepticism and reread the cases or notes”*

Transparency, Coherence and Consistency

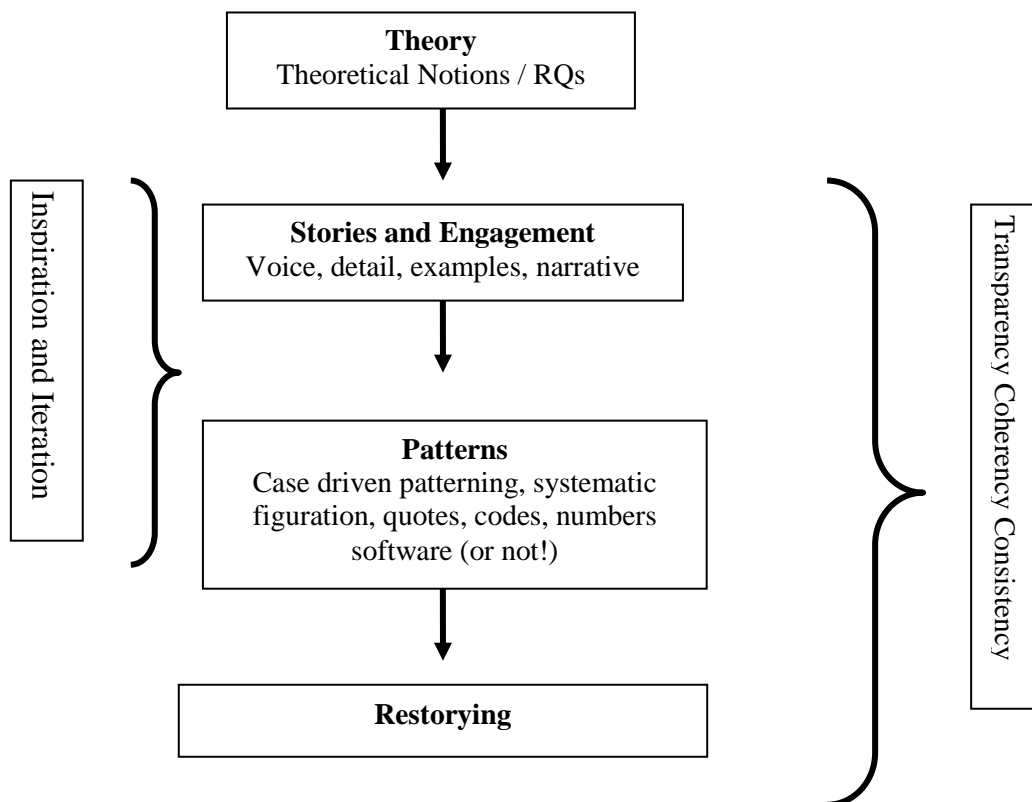
Throughout their journey through the four process elements, a strong commitment to the strength, the integrity of their work was made clear by our participants, largely through maintaining transparency, coherence and consistency. Combining the advice of several participants, this was expressed as - *“be thorough”, “be flexible”, share your drafts, especially with your own participants - “make sure that they recognize themselves in/through your writing”.* The process of engagement featured again, as being able to justify the use of qualitative methods whilst knowing very well the rules for doing it rigorously, was advice proffered by one informant. One informant noted a tension between dynamics and theories. According to this informant good writing should *“bring the two worlds together (social science and the world) and create the conditions for being mutually useful”.*

Achieving these goals, however, is neither pain-free nor unproblematic. Indeed, struggling with the writing up process was a significant issue for our respondents. The main problems identified were craft based and included dealing with *“too much information”;* *“finding the most appropriate methods (including quantitative ones) of analyzing the data and drawing legitimate inferences”;* and having an *“overall uncertainty about one’s interpretations”.* Another problem identified was *“in getting readers to really experience the path I took and how I arrived at the insights”.* Other

problems included adhering to “*word limits*”; *maintaining “focus*”; and “*resisting engagement with the 'interesting fact' just because it is interesting*”.

One informant articulated a problem of trying to present insights to readers who do not have the same intimate knowledge of the matter being written about. Another informant spoke of experiencing problems in “*how to balance the quotations of participants*”, particularly when writing case studies. Frustration and tension were key themes and these were amplified when dealing with addressing reviewers comments. One informant found problems in “*making the conceptual links that reviewers ask for*”. This informant felt that “*sometimes that no matter what I do, reviewers working within a quantitative paradigm (to whom my work is sometimes sent) will not think my approach is legitimate*”. Another informant wrote of the frustration in writing “*up the result in a way that will please one editor and two or three referees in the confine of 8,000 words*”.

Figure Two – The Process of Qualitative Authorship in Entrepreneurship



Time was identified as an important factor and as one informant noted “*It takes heaps more time than quantitative*”. This time aspect is linked to pain and was articulated succinctly as “*the bastard can take a long time coming*”. Another informant spoke of the down side of qualitative research as being “time consuming and not well rewarded in terms of publication potential, especially in US based journals”. This point echoes previous questions as the most major problem identified by our participants was “*getting published*”. One informant wrote of the problems of not being able to use their mother tongue when writing for international audiences. Another informant told us that “*It is easier to write chapters of books or books because you have more space to reflect on field data that are generally very rich and more complex to present*”. This brings the issues of losing touch, or losing the plot into play. One informant remarked philosophically – “*When the richness and detail get too much, go and play golf. Eventually you will start to see the wood from the trees*”. One informant with an editorial role noted that, despite perceptions to the contrary, it is hard to get anything published in a top journal, no matter what the underlying methodology and that a huge proportion of quantitative papers also get rejected”. However, the final remark goes to the informant who wrote – “*If your work is not getting rejected you are not shooting high enough*”.

Consequences

Presenting what scholars found to be the key outcomes from the qualitative writing process, we see these as being threefold in nature. Firstly, there are (mostly) positive research outcomes, in terms of understanding multi-faceted complexities, but also in generating fine-grained richness. Scholars also exhibited an ability to cope with the limitations of qualitative work, when, for example, a study did not yield the anticipated fruits, or in terms of an inability to produce generalise. Equally, we found evidence of personal consequences, such as enhanced knowledge and enrichment, albeit laced with some genuine frustration. Finally, groundedness, being rooted in the real world of the entrepreneur, was also reported as a major positive consequence to emerge from the process of conducting and writing qualitative entrepreneurship research.

Table 3: Consequences of Engaging in Qualitative Research		
Research Consequences	Personal Consequences	Groundedness
Understanding multi-faceted complexities	Enrichment	Relevance and realism
Generating fine-grained richness	Frustration	Stories
	Fun and Confidence	Engagement

Research Consequences

The research benefits of qualitative research were clearly articulated, in terms of both understanding multi-faceted complexities, and generating fine-grained richness. One informant noted achieving *“Huge leaps in understanding of complex and difficult situations, particularly when ethnography is used over a long period”*. Another informant mentioned developing *“insights and understanding”*, there was talk of *“gaining in depth understanding”*, and *“better understanding of the phenomenon leading to more insightful inferences”*. Discovery and sharing were recurring joyous themes as in *“capturing the insights of interviewees and organizational settings”*.

The development and application of theory also featured twice. One of the benefits of qualitative research was given as *“It provokes thought and discussion”*. As another informant remarked *“I was able to explore subjects not traditionally covered by analysts working in my area”*. Moreover, qualitative methodologies permit cross cultural understandings to occur. Again pedagogy featured in the responses of three participants with one informant remarking *“I like to use my case studies in the classroom”*.

Scholars were also well aware of that some of the consequences of qualitative authorship carried inherent limitations. Five participants discussed difficulties in achieving acceptance in the best ranked journals which according to one informant *“have a strong inclination to favour quantitative research”*. There was a complaint of *“being encouraged to use more positivist approaches”*. Over writing can be a problem as noted by another informant who stressed that qualitative papers have a tendency to be too long and that editors usually demand that explanatory models describing methodology are removed.

The strengths of qualitative work were also highlighted as also being potential weaknesses i.e. the rich data can cause imprecision; there are difficulties regarding generalisation; and transferability of findings; the toughness in processing and analyzing such data; and finally *“at times, working hard on data collection and analysis, then finding that the emergent issues are somewhat trivial”*. One informant incisively remarked *“It's not science”*. Another noted a darker side, in that *“the dangers of ethnocentrism and preconceptions are actually even greater when conducting qualitative research”*. The same informant warned of the usefulness of one-to-one interviews being limited. One informant was careful to point out that the joy in obtaining insights is a feature of quantitative studies too.

It was when we asked participants about the most memorable feedback received on “their qualitative writing from an editor / reviewer / publisher” (Q10), however, that the clearest professional consequences became evident. An example of this was provided by one informant who noted that it was “*Being told to take a deductive approach for what was clearly (in my mind) inductive and exploratory research (i.e. start with some hypotheses ...); it is the clash of paradigms that is memorable, the feeling that somehow someone does not "get it" ... or they think my approach is not legitimate*”. Accusations by reviewers such as “*Where is your hypothesis?*” - are also common. One senior and well respected informant told a story about seeking to present his ideas about enactive research but being told by a reviewer to read more about research being done by scientists who distance themselves from their research. The down side was frequently being asked the “So What” question and conflicting critiques. One informant articulated this as well when he spoke of a rejection of a paper which another leading colleague considered to be “*one of the most revolutionary studies he had ever seen*”. The article was published without any changes in a prestigious journal immediately after. Inconsistency and conflicting reports by referees was identified as a recurring issue. One informant provided the following vignette where one reviewer said “*why don't you tell me more about your research methodology*”, and the other scolded him “*for giving him too much detail in this respect*”. Another informant highlighted the difference between work being qualitatively sound and being publishable.

Nevertheless, there were also plenty of positive responses to this question. Often the advice comes in the form of a compliment in the editorial section of journals and special issues. The advice from editors can be both candid and conflicting as in the reviewer who opined “*I would never publish data like this - You have told it as it is - I really like your study*”. Some participants mentioned having their work critiqued kindly by a leading scholar; being told they write well; or being asked to guest edit a thematic issue of a leading journal. Another informant shared the following comment from an editor as being pleasing – “*This is compelling!*” There was evidence of editorial support as evidenced by the informant who wrote thus - “*A supportive editor wrote, while rejecting a paper – you have the data to respond to the reviewers!*” Another informant told us of having been encouraged by a leading editor to write up qualitative material he delivered at a conference and to eventually having it published.

Personal outcomes

Scholars talk of passion for research and an appreciation that the joys are personal, as well as professional. In relation to the joys one informant remarks “*The best thing is having one's own*

voice and the chance to give voice to others". Another informant remarked that one of the joys was seeing *"the emergence of new insights and discoveries, and reliving the fieldwork, which is always enjoyable"*. One informant remarks that the joy was *"playing with words, finding the right one"*. Curiosity and learning from conducting research were mentioned. Indeed one informant talked about qualitative research being an *"enriching experience"*, whilst another remarked experiencing *"deeper insights into causal processes and mechanisms"*. Yet another remarked - *"I like gathering and puzzling through the analysis of qualitative data. It gets me up in the morning"*. One informant articulated it thus - *"Qualitative research offers more satisfaction, is more motivating and stimulating"*.

Groundedness

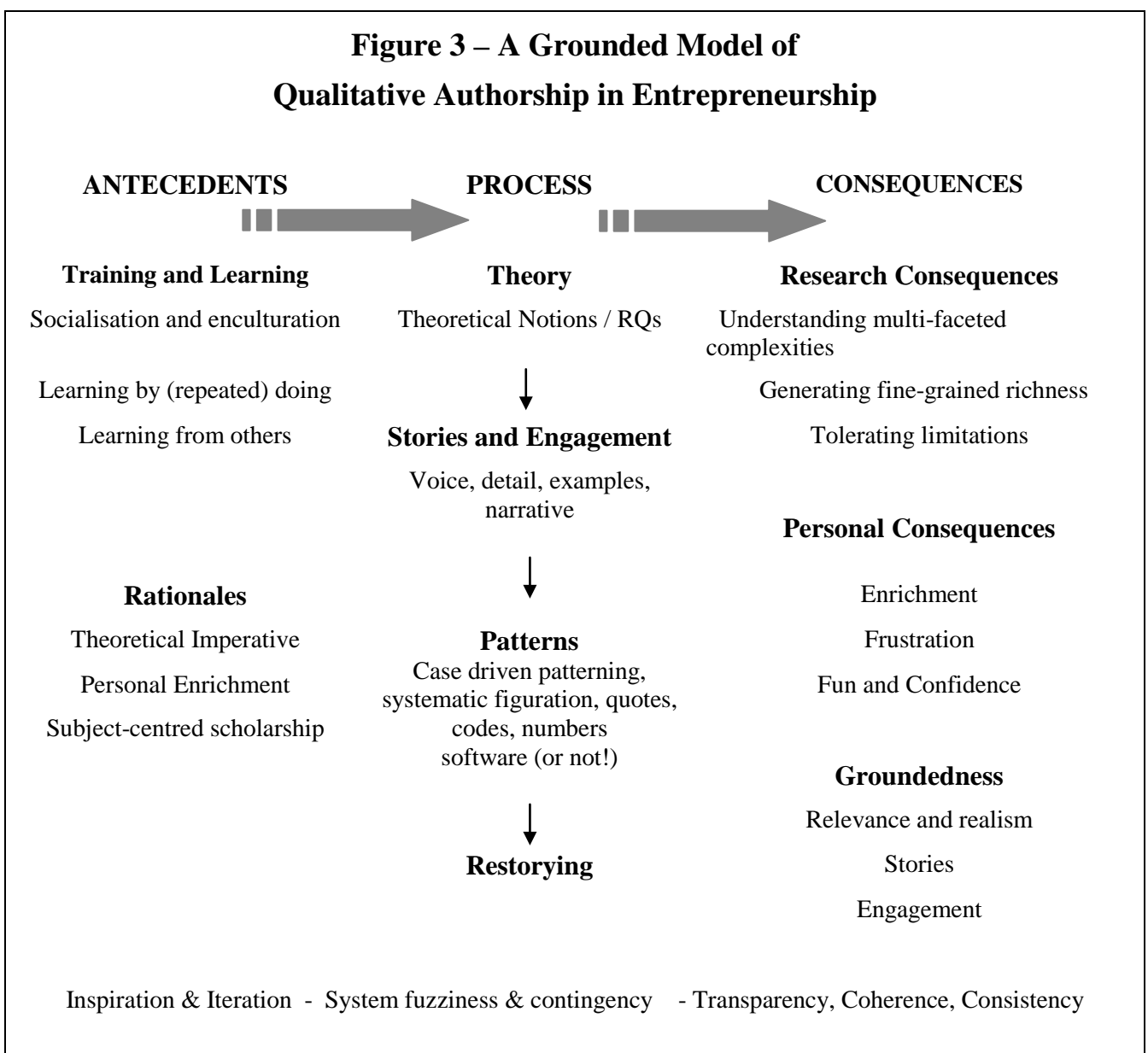
One remarked - *"I suppose the main benefit is arriving at useful answers and satisfaction in doing so"*. Another mentioned *"getting deeper insights into the 'real world of the small business owner'"*. Being in communion and communication with participants and to gain an insight into their lives and how they are intertwined with larger processes was a rather philosophical explanation provided by one informant. Similarly, other scholars noted that they had gained a *"clearer understanding of processes and details of entrepreneurship"*, and an of *"phenomena which have previously not been well represented"*; Pragmatism linked to learning also featured. One informant remarked *"I have found out how firms actually work"*, whilst others noted an *"engagement with subjects"*; and *"sharing life experiences"*. This too was a joyful consequence of qualitative research: *"I love getting to know my research subjects and where they come from. Networking and being in communion with participants and networking as in meeting and talking were described as enjoyable aspects of qualitative work. One informant articulated it as developing "closeness to data sources". Gaining comparative insights into how shared entrepreneurial realities "reflect theoretical constructs and arguments" was one joy mentioned by a informant.*

However, engagement-as-storytelling was never far from the surface - as one informant remarked *"the gradual emergence of some kind of structure or a coherent story from a welter of confusing scraps"* was the essence of why qualitative research was joyous. Another informant echoed the joy of *"making sense out of stories told"*. There was a sense of turning stories into testable theories. Nevertheless, one informant also advised potential qualitative authors against *"becoming too immersed in the subject world such that one becomes a sort of advisor and mentor"*. The final word on the joys of doing qualitative research goes to the informant who wrote *"I enjoy the stories that people have told me about their lives as business owners; sometimes I feel they would make*

wonderful characters in a novel (in the hands of a real author), and it feels like a disservice to the story to relegate it to a technical report that few will read". In this short sentence we read of the joys and the sorrows of writing and publishing qualitatively.

5) Value, implications and concluding remarks

Figure Three pulls together the various patterned findings presented thus far into a unified model, which, whilst naturally an abstraction from the lived experiences which our participants shared with us, nevertheless helpfully summarizes and connects these experiences. Founded firmly in the themes which emerged from our dataset, this is thus a well-grounded model.



We hope it may serve as both an inspiration, and a practical tool, for ourselves and our colleagues, as we work to emulate these leading heterodox colleagues in writing qualitative work which is simultaneously true to its values, but also able to achieve publication in top-ranking journals. Unless we continue to be a part of that discourse, the voice of the contextualised, pluralist, qualitative scholar can never achieve its full potential in terms of contributions to our understandings of entrepreneurship.

It is now time to take stock of the stories told and determine whether we have met our stated aims and objectives. We have gathered, evaluated and developed existing knowledge about how well-published entrepreneurship scholars go about writing up qualitative research. We have gained some valuable insights, but our journey continues. We have also identified good practices and processes in qualitative research authorship. More importantly we have gained valuable insights into ways in which top scholars learned, or were trained, to write strong qualitative manuscripts. In this paper we hope to share these insights with other entrepreneurship scholars and students. We believe some of these insights also suggest ways in which higher level enterprise education can help the new generation to learn these critical writing skills. Indeed, we argue that there is a need to conduct writing classes for qualitative scholars in entrepreneurship, for teaching materials on writing practices in entrepreneurship. Harris (1996) adopts a strongly qualitative call for student (and participants) to “*form their own voices as writers and intellectuals*” (Harris, 1996: 116). Adopting a qualitative approach to writing entrepreneurship, or re-writing it, permits scholars to form their own voice. We believe this typifies what Steyaert (1997) meant when he wrote of the elaboration of new practices of researching. To us this entails writing qualitatively whilst telling better stories.

This innovative investigation into writing qualitatively for publication in the discipline provides a useful account of what help is there and acts as a springboard for initiating a cross disciplinary discussion. The article should therefore be of value to academics who are seeking to 1) improve their qualitative writing; and 2) to publish qualitative work in entrepreneurship journals. It may be of special interest to those engaged in the provision of graduate and developing training for entrepreneurship scholars. We offer the following advice to colleagues who are trying to hone the art of writing qualitatively:-

Our first piece of advice for aspirant qualitative researchers in entrepreneurship would be “stay open”. Successful authors valued openness to the entrepreneurial environment, to theory, to other academic disciplines, and to the experiences and wisdom of colleagues and co-authors.

Secondly, the importance of persistence, practice, and iterations of writing and analysis was very clear. Our second tip would thus be “write, write and write again”.

Our third tip is to “embrace disorder”, or, at least, to not fear it. Fluidity and flexibility in writing appeared to persist, even if scholars exhibit some squeamishness about this lack of order.

Fourthly, we found engagement with the narrative to be significant, both in terms of gathering stories, and then in re-storying these. Stories also helped researchers to stay grounded, and to balance theory and practice. Our tip, then, is “ground yourself and your research on narrative”.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, “maintain the uttermost integrity”. For our scholars, staying true to the experiences of ‘their’ entrepreneurs, to the theory, to analyzing with honesty and criticality was vital.

The value of this tentative study is that although there is a vigorous debate within the entrepreneurship literature about the prevalence and suitability of different methods and methodological approaches, there is no explicit discussion of how researchers tackle writing up qualitative research. In reporting on this research we address this gap, hoping to be of use to entrepreneurship scholars and doctoral students by sharing insights and guidance from a wider community of practice. There are obvious implications in that this work shows how crucial it is to begin to discuss qualitative writing processes with others so that in the words of one informant, we may learn from the “*blood, toil, tears and sweat*” of those who have already navigated both the writing and publishing of qualitative research with success. We are left of the abiding impression of the qualitatively inclined entrepreneurship scholar as entrepreneurs telling, or selling, stories.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Development of Sample and Breakdown of participants

The sampling began by identifying all the qualitative articles published in 5 of the most highly ranked entrepreneurship journals over a 20 year period. This list was developed from the source data for another study (XXXX 2005) which recorded the methods used in every article published in 5 top² North American (Journal of Business Venturing, Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice and Journal of Small Business Management) and European (International Small Business Journal and Entrepreneurship and Regional Development) entrepreneurship journals. This elicited a list of 438 articles which had some 686 authors associated with them. The full list of authors was developed into an email list by means of a combination of using existing contacts databases and performing extensive web searches. A small proportion of colleagues had retired or passed away, many more had changed institution but we were able to track down current emails for a total of 294 scholars. This group were all sent the invitation to participate in our qualitative study by email during February 2010. 30 replies were received. A follow up email was sent to the remainder of the scholars in May 2010 and this elicited a further 7 replies, giving us a response rate of 12.6%. The replies came from colleagues across the globe and are broken down as follows:

Region	Number of replies	% of replies	
North America	20	54	
Europe	13	35	
Asia	2	5	
Australia/New Zealand	1	3	
Other	1	3	

This is broadly in line with the regional variation observed in the full list of 686 authors (XXXX 2005).

² ISI impact factors were used to select the most suitable journals for each region

Appendix 2 - Questions

1: Can you provide a broad estimate of what proportion of your research work you would classify as qualitative in nature, and what proportion as quantitative?

Qualitative

Quantitative

2: When you have chosen to qualitative research, what was your main reason for doing so?

3: What have been the main overall benefits and disadvantages with qualitative research, for you?

The rest of this questionnaire focuses on writing up qualitative research

4: Can you describe for us your approach to writing up qualitative research?

5: Do you have a system, process, habit, which you routinely follow when writing up qualitative research? Could you share this with us?

6: How did you learn to write up qualitative research?

7: What is the single most important thing you've learned about writing up qualitative research?

8: What have been your personal joys and problems when writing up qualitative research?

9: What's the best advice you were ever given about writing up qualitative research?

10: What is the most memorable feedback you have received on your qualitative writing from an editor / reviewer / publisher? (This feedback may have been positive, negative, interesting, amusing, dazzling or dumb!)

Would you like your answers to remain anonymous?

Yes please: I would like to remain anonymous if my answers are quoted

No thanks: I am happy for my responses to be quoted and named

I'd be interested to see the results of this study once they're available

YES / NO