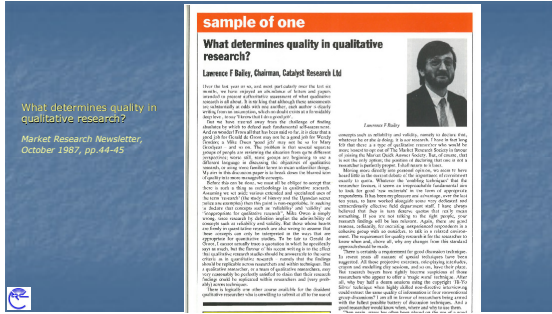


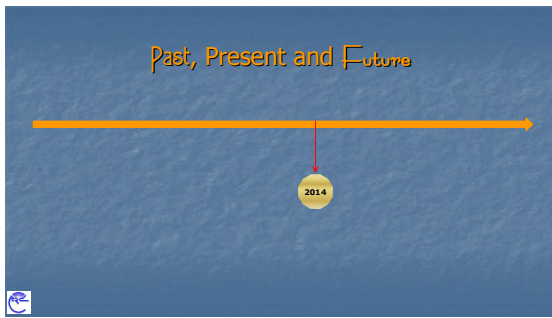
# The MRS/IJMR Lecture on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: WHAT DETERMINES QUALITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Lawrence Bailey

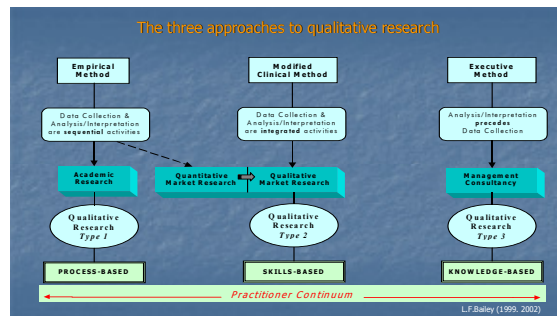
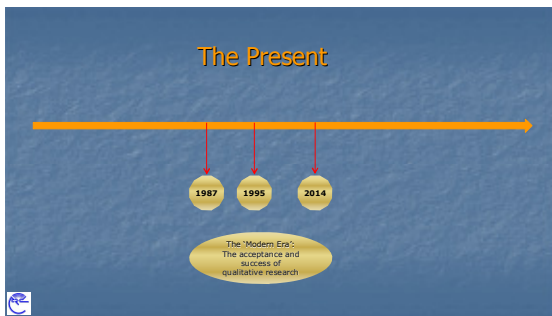
## Additional Notes and Commentary



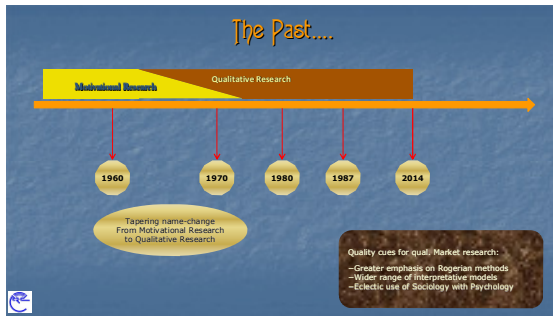
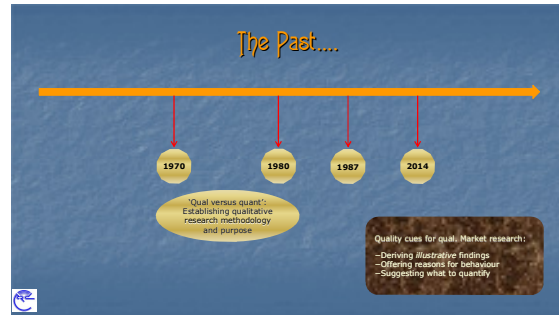
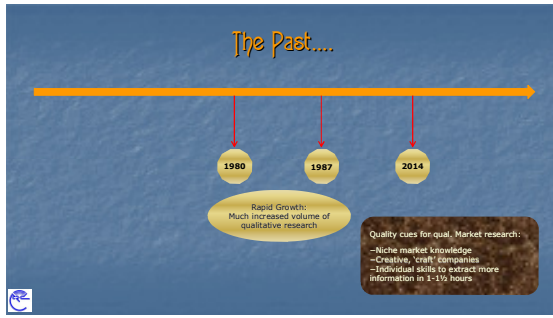
If you want to read the 1987 article – you can! Those nice people in the Library at Leeds Metropolitan University (now renamed as Leeds Beckett University) have made it generally available. Just go to [www.lfbailey.com/Links.htm](http://www.lfbailey.com/Links.htm) and follow the link.



A further factor influencing the perception of quality, which changes according to personal context, is *what it is that you feel you should achieve*. Sometimes, a provider and the user of qualitative work may agree that a 'good job' has been done; but if neither knows much about qualitative research, the quality level may in fact be low.



It's interesting that qualitative researchers have founded Associations that reflect in their names the 'flavour' of qualitative research that they identify with. Thus, academics in the UK have the QMiP Section of the British Psychological Society – that's Qualitative Methods in Psychology: emphasis on methods. Qualitative Market Researchers founded the Association of Qualitative Research Practitioners (AQRP) in the UK; in the USA, it's the Qualitative Research Consultants Association: the emphasis in both cases is on the qualities of the *people* carrying out the research.



The greater use of Rogerian methods represented an enormous advance. Freud liked to see his clients ('patients') at least once a week, over an extended period; early motivational researchers compensated (in part) by carrying out a very large number of depth interviews. Respondent-centred, non-directive interviewing, loosely in the style of Carl Rogers, proved at least

as effective in market research, in a much shorter period of time. It was thus more time-effective, and more cost-effective: arguably, therefore, improving quality...



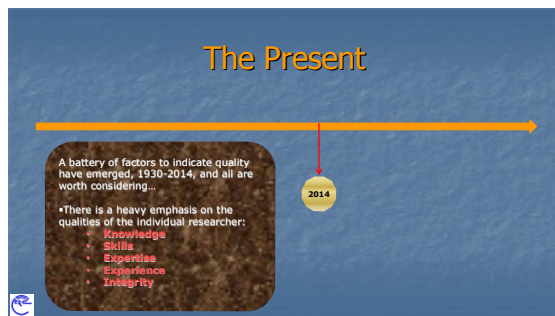
Dichter's great success in finding new ways to advertise was achieved via the new focus on subconscious motivation. Earlier thinking was much influenced by the behaviourist, J.B.Watson, who worked for the J Walter Thompson advertising agency after his academic career. This early phase in advertising stressed repetition as a tool for success, with related concern for scheduled 'reinforcement' of the advertising message.



Lazarsfeld's laundry project illustrates the potential effectiveness of relieving people of guilt, especially via the defence mechanism of rationalisation: a phenomenon and process that has echoed down through the history of qualitative research. Vance Packard would probably have seen this as a

sinister demonstration of how to make people do things, by manipulating the subconscious. A credible alternative, and more complimentary verdict would be that the outcome actually made people happier.

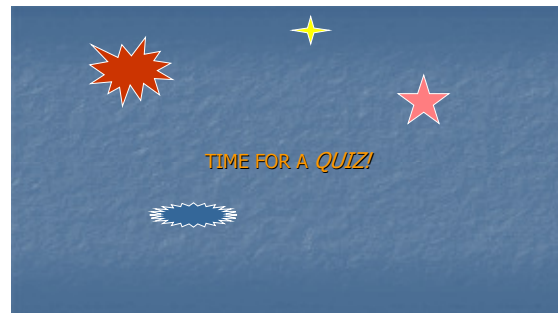
A question left 'in the air' in the lecture was asking why it had to be Dichter who became the great populariser of motivational research, and not Lazarsfeld. At such a remove in history, no definitive answer can be found, but the following facts may be relevant. Dichter became 'all American'; he enthusiastically embraced consumer culture and supported the drive for success by the big corporations. He took lessons to lose his Austrian accent. Lazarsfeld's mother had kept a welcoming house in Vienna for communists. Lazarsfeld himself leaned towards socialism. He never lost his Austrian accent. This was the era of McCarthyism.



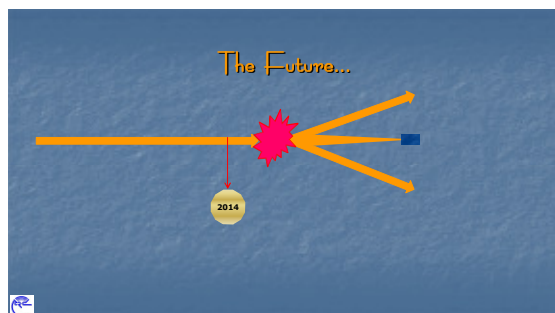
Recognising the importance of the researcher in attempting to establish likely quality suggests a need to assess the attributes of the researcher. Any one-off practical assessment would show poor research design, given the proven value of the personal factors shown in this slide. An assessment of these factors implies a need to examine what has been achieved by an individual researcher over potentially a long

period of time.

The slides for the 'Quick Quallie Quiz' give the questionnaire in full. See the pdf copy of the slides, obtainable via: [www.lfbailey.com/Links.htm](http://www.lfbailey.com/Links.htm) .



As with any 'exam', as soon as the questions have been revealed, a new set of at least some of the questions will be needed next time. The formula used here was to provide 3 questions on 'Process' (3, 8 and 11) with total value 9 points; 2 questions slanted towards 'Skills' (2 and 4) with total value 18 points; 4 questions centred on 'Knowledge' (1, 7, 10 and 12) with total value 15 points; and 3 questions relating to 'Experience' (5, 6 and 9), with total value 13 points. The highest loading is for Question 4, with a value of 10 points.



The first-named author of The Social Psychology of Telecommunications (1976) is John Short.

There would seem to be little or no chance that qualitative market research as currently understood would actually fade away entirely. What is suggested here is that it may well decline, in favour of a simpler

form of Qualitative Enquiry, as demanded by some clients, and a premium-quality, substantial form of qualitative work that could be called Explanatory Research.

**Research Censorship or Just Research Myopia?**

Neil McPhee – Nuance Research Ltd

...should have been at ESOMAR, Valencia, November 2013

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**Briefing stage...**

"There's no point asking that group, they don't use our product..."

Omits context and comparison  
Attempts to control findings

**Pre-fieldwork stage...**

"Just read the topic guide, don't add anything else, we're not interested in anything else..."

Omits context and scope  
Attempts to control findings

**Fieldwork stage...**

"We'll have to change the moderator; we're not getting what we want..."

Omits context and scope  
Attempts to control findings

**'Preliminary' Presentation stage...**

"We need to edit this down for the board. They'll never understand it..."

Omits context, depth and flavour  
Attempts to control findings

**'Preliminary' Presentation stage...**

"If you present these results, we'll never use your agency again, because we'll lose the (ad) account..."

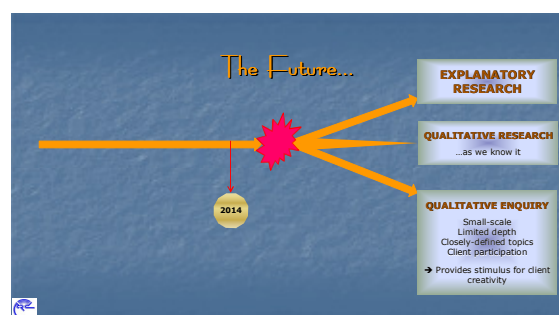
Outright attempt to control findings

Taken together, these slides, courtesy of Neil McPhee, illustrate genuine client points of view that take us away from research methodology. A service is being supplied and bought, but the suggestion in the lecture is that this service needs a name that does not invoke the associations that attach to "research".

**From 'What Determines Quality in Qualitative Research?' (1987)...**

"There is logically one other course available for the dissident qualitative researcher (...), namely to declare that whatever he or she is doing, it is not research."

©



## The Future...

### EXPLANATORY RESEARCH

- \* Will be practiced by very senior researchers
- \* Will be secured in expert knowledge, experience, skills and sound method
- \* Will use a range of research techniques and a sufficiently substantial volume of fieldwork
- \* Will report the 'state of the product' with context
- \* Will use an interpretative structure to explain behaviour, beliefs, attitudes and reactions
- \* Will charge by daily rate
- \* Will be expensive. It has to be.



We may anticipate that some vigilance will be needed if the concept and practice of Explanatory Research is to be maintained. It would be easy (especially for large market research companies) to claim that they offer explanatory research, but in fact deliver a cheaper service via relatively junior researchers; carrying the project through by relying on reputation that appears to offer a guarantee of sorts... My entirely personal view is that I'd like Explanatory Researchers who score at least 70% on the quallie scale!

THE END



**Lawrence Bailey**  
**June 2014**