

Past, Present and Future: What determines quality in qualitative research?

Market Research Society / IJMR Lecture

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09 May 2014

What determines quality in qualitative research?

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sample of one

What determines quality in qualitative research?

Lawrence F Bailey, Chairman, Catalyst Research Ltd



Lawrence F Bailey

Over the last year or so, and most particularly over the last six months, we have enjoyed an abundance of letters and papers intended to present authoritative assessment of what qualitative research is all about. It is striking that although these assessments are substantially at odds with one another, each author's clearly writing from an assumption, which no doubt exists at a formidably deep level, to say "I know that I do a good job".

But we have steered away from the challenge of finding absolutes by which to defend such fundamental self-assessment. And no wonder! From all that has been said so far, it is clear that a good job for Gerald de Groot may not be a good job for Wendy Frowden; a Mike Owen 'good job' may not be so for Mary Goodyear - and so on. The problem is that several separate groups of people are reviewing the situation from quite different perspectives; worse still, some groups are beginning to use a different language in discussing the objectives of qualitative research, or using some familiar terms to mean unfamiliar things. My aim in this discussion paper is to break down the blurred notion of quality into more manageable concepts.

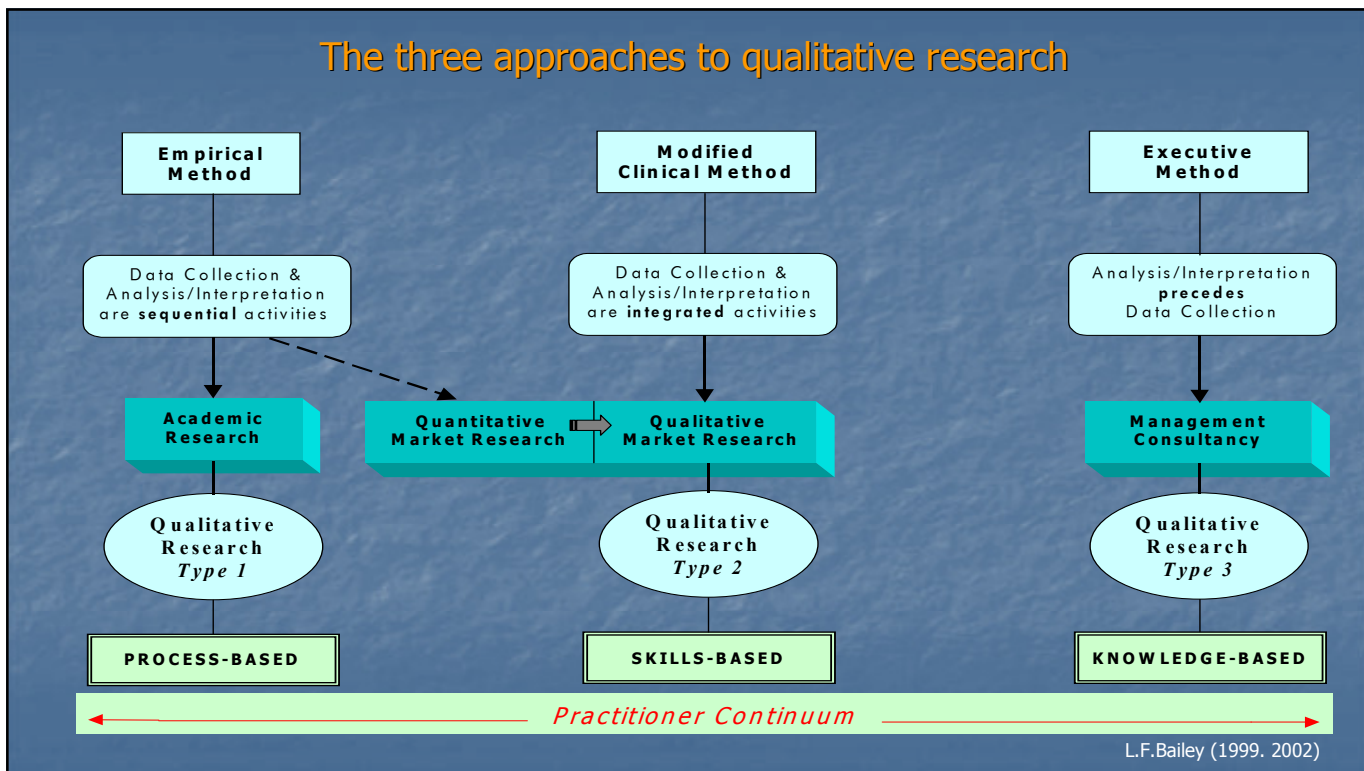
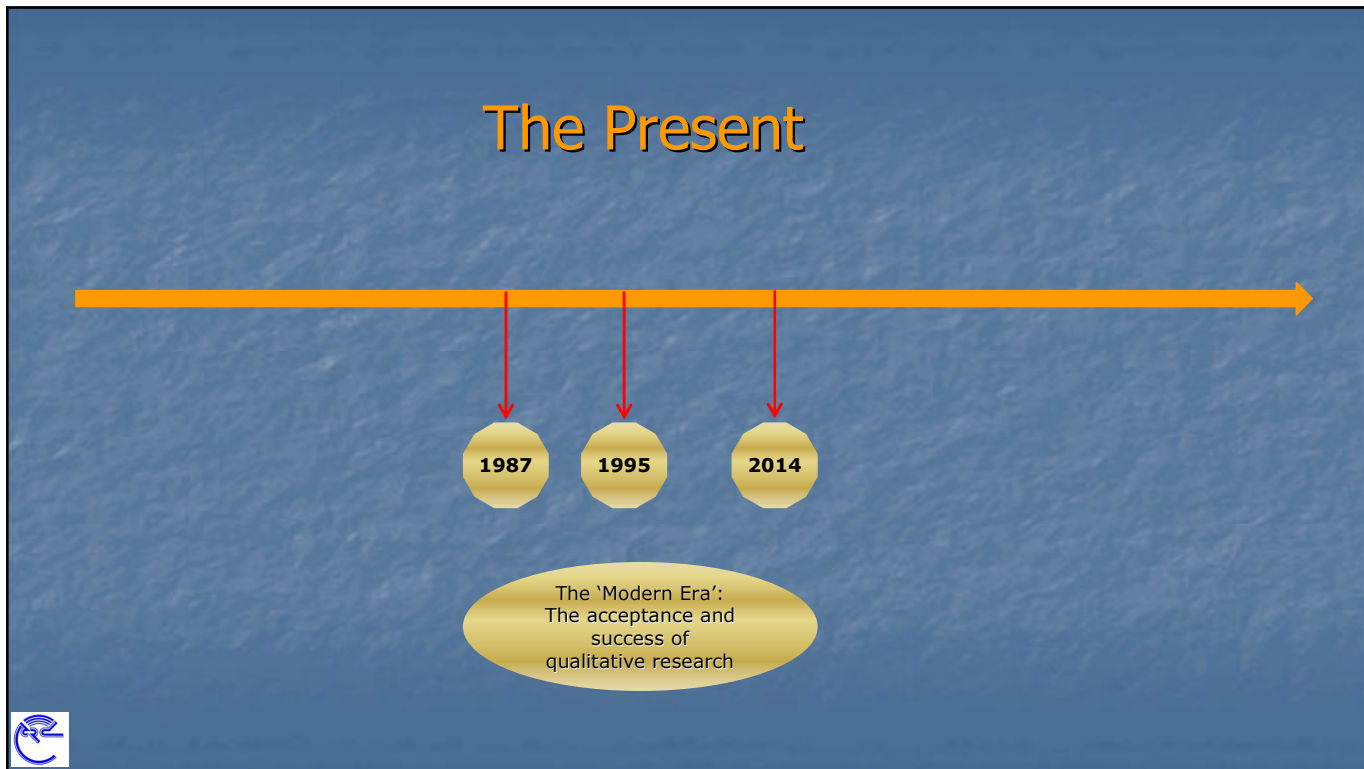
Before this can be done, we must all be obliged to accept that there is such a thing as methodology in qualitative research. Assuming we set aside various extended and specialised uses of the term 'research' (the study of history and the Ugandan secret police are examples) then this point is non-negotiable. In seeking to declare that concepts such as 'reliability' and 'validity' are 'inappropriate for qualitative research', Mike Owen is simply wrong, since research by definition implies the advisability of concepts such as reliability and validity. But those whose hearts are firmly in quantitative research are also wrong to assume that these concepts can only be interpreted in the ways that are appropriate for quantitative studies. To be fair to Gerald de Groot, I cannot actually trace a quotation in which he specifically says as much, but the flavour of his recent writing is to the effect that qualitative research studies should be answerable to the same criteria as in quantitative research - namely that the findings should be replicable across researchers and within techniques. But a qualitative researcher, or a team of qualitative researchers, may very reasonably be perfectly satisfied to claim that their research findings could be replicated within researchers and (very probably) across techniques.

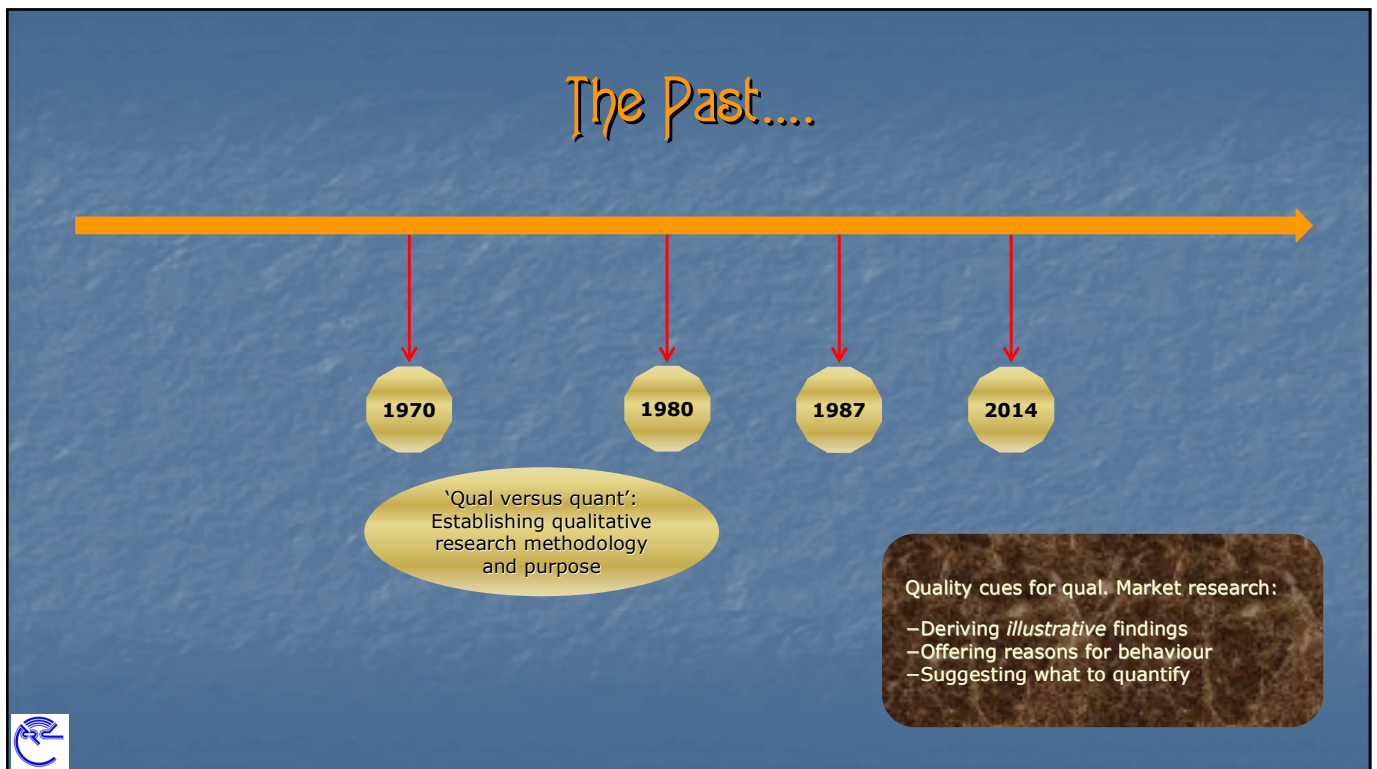
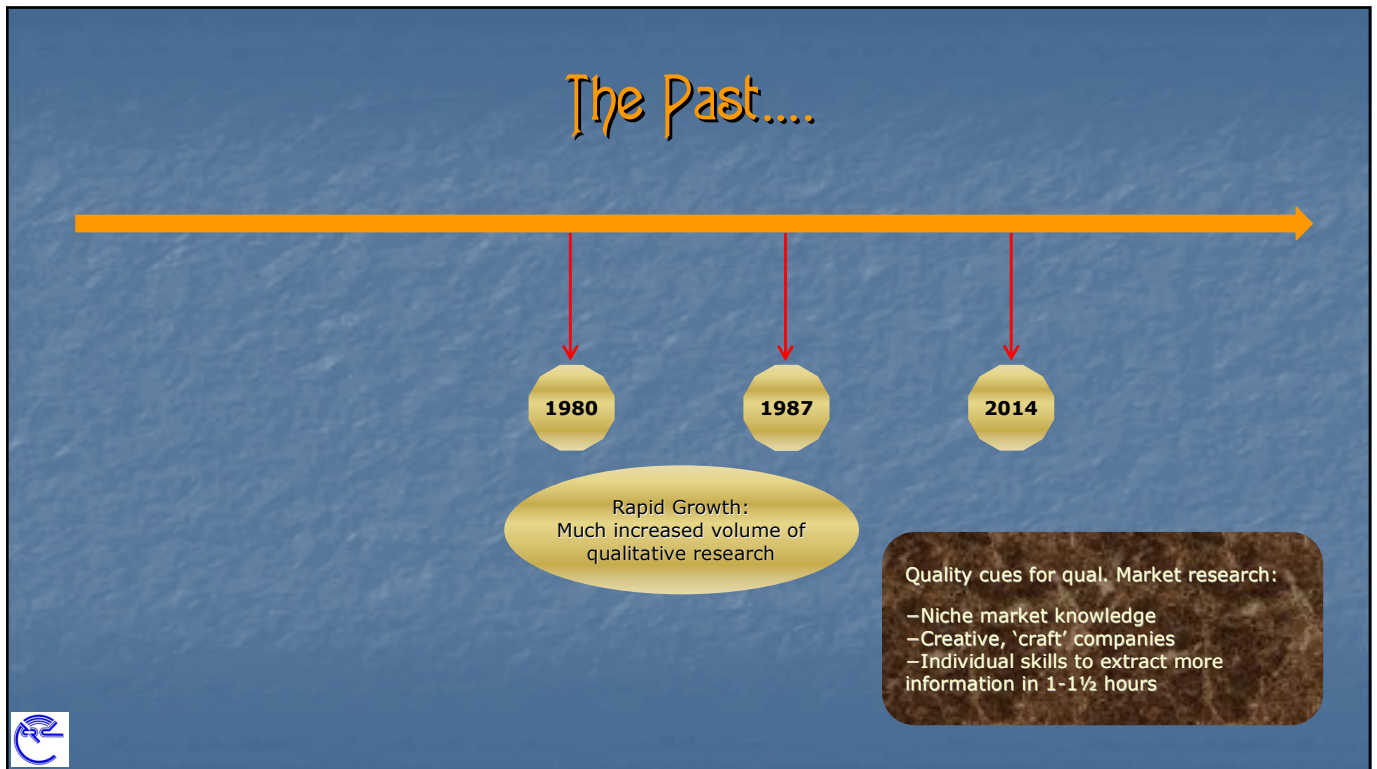
There is logically one other course available for the dissident qualitative researcher who is unwilling to submit at all to the use of

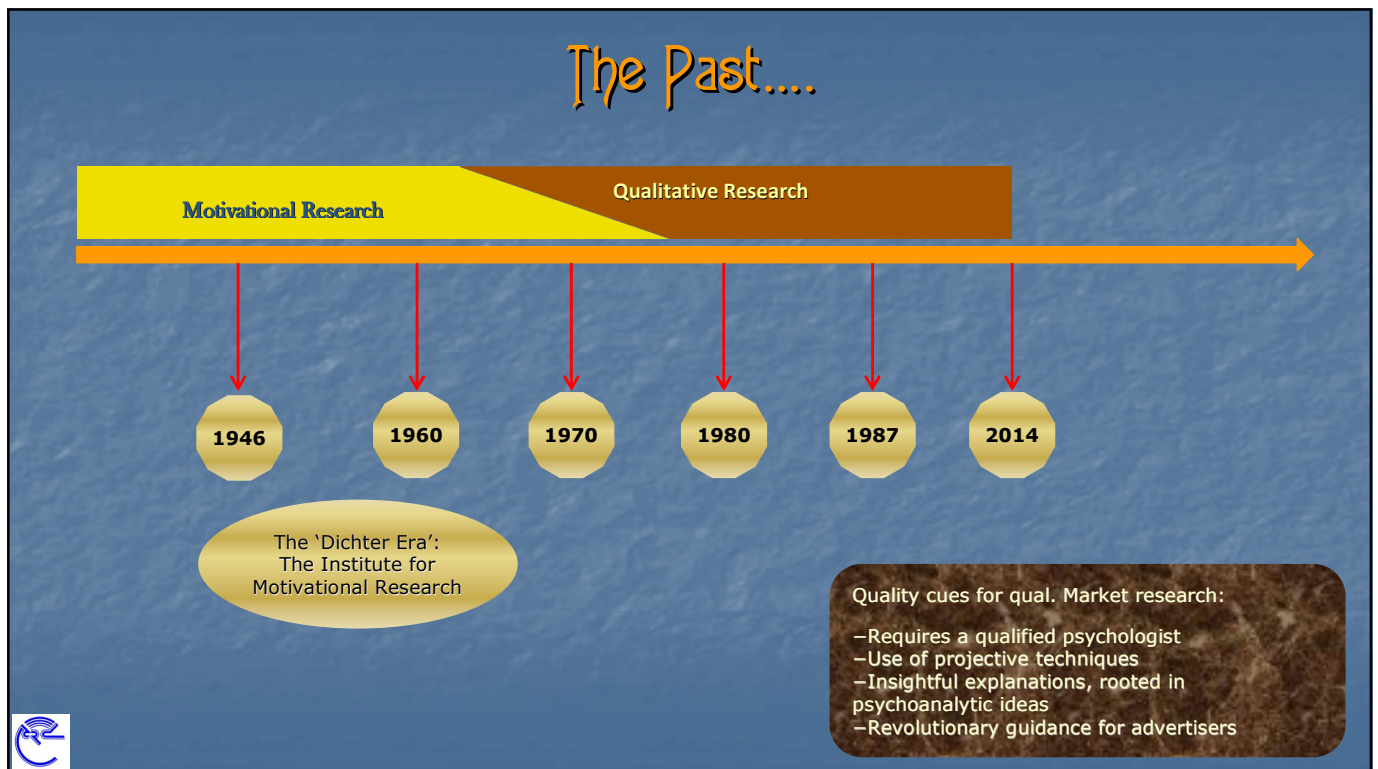
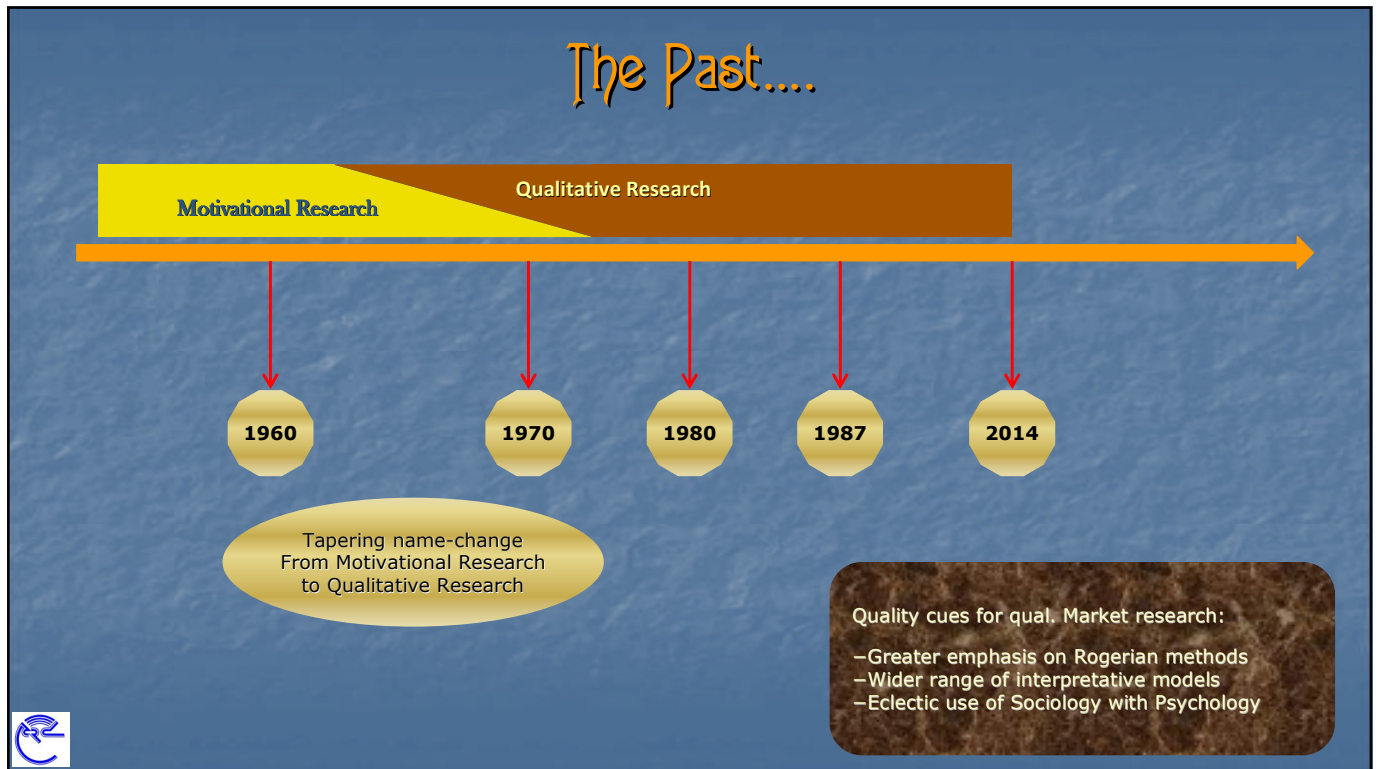
concepts such as reliability and validity, namely to declare that, whatever he or she is doing, it is *not* research. I have in fact long felt that there is a type of qualitative researcher who would be more honest to opt out of The Market Research Society in favour of joining the Market Quick Answer Society. But, of course, that is not the only option; the position of declaring that one is not a researcher is perfectly proper. I shall return to it later.

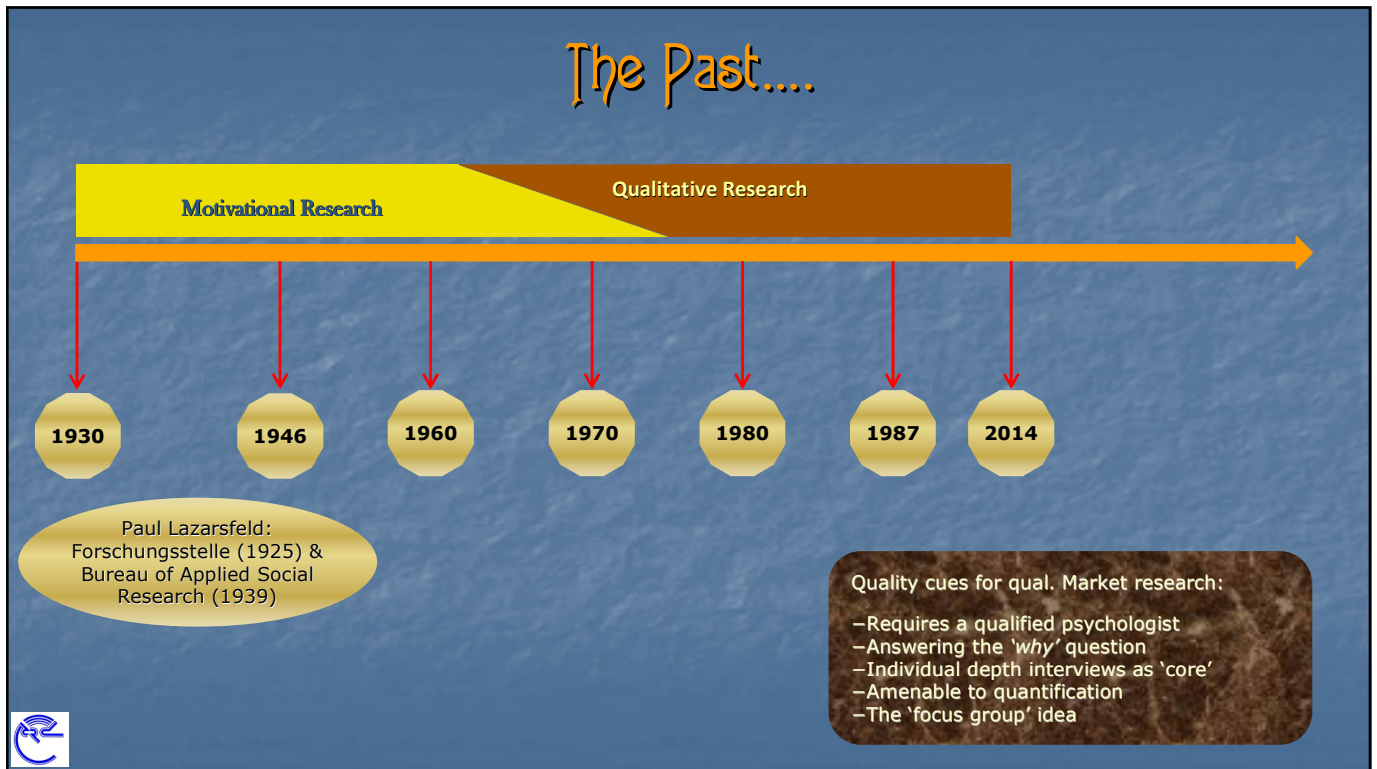
Moving more directly into personal opinion, we seem to have heard little in the current debate of the importance of recruitment exactly to quota. Whatever the 'enabling techniques' that the researcher favours, it seems an inapproachable fundamental aim to look for good 'raw materials' in the form of appropriate respondents. It has been my pleasure and advantage, over the last ten years, to have worked alongside some very dedicated and extraordinarily effective field department staff. I have always believed that they in turn deserve quotas that really mean something. If you are not talking to the right people, your research findings will be less relevant. Again, there are good reasons, ordinarily for recruiting experienced respondents in a cohesive group with no outsiders, to talk in a relaxed environment. The requirement for quality research is for the researcher to know when and, above all, why any changes from this standard approach should be made.

There is certainly a requirement for good discussion technique. In recent years all manner of special techniques have been suggested. All those projective exercises, role-playing interludes, crayon and modelling clay sessions, and so on, have their place. But research buyers have rightly become suspicious of those researchers who appear to offer a 'magic wand' technique. After all, why buy half a dozen sessions using the copyright 'Hi-Yo Silver' technique when highly skilled non-directive interviewing could extract the same quality of information in four conventional group discussions? I am all in favour of researchers being armed with the fullest possible battery of discussion techniques. And a good researcher would know when, where and why to use them.









A Quick Quallie Quiz...

1. Which of the following qualifications do you hold?

CHOOSE THE HIGHEST-RANKING ONLY

- Single subject degree in Psychology 8 pts.
- Combined subject degree in Psychology & *Other* ... 6 pts.
- Single subject degree in Sociology 5 pts.
- Combined subject degree in Sociology & *Other* ... 4 pts.
- MRS Diploma 4 pts.
- Degree in Economics *and/or* Degree in English Lit. 3 pts.
- Other degree *and/or* A-Level in Psychology 2 pts.
- A non-degree qualification featuring Psychology ... 1 pt.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

2. Which two of the following did Carl Rogers particularly recommend for depth-interviewing?

SCORE BOTH THAT APPLY

- Non-directive interviewing technique pts.
- Same sex interviewer and respondent pts.
- Casual clothing pts.
- A facilitative environment pts.
- Word-association exercises pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

2. Which two of the following did Carl Rogers particularly recommend for depth-interviewing?

SCORE BOTH THAT APPLY

Non-directive interviewing technique 4 pts.

Same sex interviewer and respondent 0 pts.

Casual clothing 0 pts.

A facilitative environment 4 pts.

Word-association exercises 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

3. Do you know how to use Grounded Theory?

Yes 3 pts.

No 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

4. Which of the following projective and enabling techniques have you used, in depth interviews or group discussions?

SCORE ALL THAT APPLY

Word association

(“What comes into your mind when I say...?”) 2 pts.

Brand mapping

(Sorting a set of items, by dimensions pre-selected or chosen by respondents) 2 pts.

Guided fantasy

(e.g. Life of a brand: where they live, what they eat, who their friends are, etc.) 2 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

4. Which of the following projective and enabling techniques have you used, in depth interviews or group discussions?

[cont.] SCORE ALL THAT APPLY

Picture sorting

(e.g. to select pictures which can relate to a brand) 1 pt.

Filling in thought or speech ‘bubbles’ 1 pt.

Psychodrawing

(e.g. drawing a product from memory, especially to examine relevant packaging elements) 1 pt.

Other projective technique(s) 1 pt.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

5. How many individual depth interviews have you conducted in your career to date?

SCORE THE HIGHEST LEVEL ONLY

More than 500	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	5 pts.
250 – 500	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4 pts.
100 – 249	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2 pts.
30 – 99	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1 pts.
Less than 30	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

6. How many group discussions (each comprising 6 or more respondents) have you conducted in your career to date?

SCORE THE HIGHEST LEVEL ONLY

More than 500	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	5 pts.
300 – 500	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3 pts.
80 – 299	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2 pts.
40 – 79	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1 pts.
Less than 40	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

7. Are you familiar with the provisions of either the Market Research Society's, or the British Psychological Society's Code of Conduct? (...or both)?

Yes 3 pts.

No 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

8. How familiar are you with Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), such as N-Vivo?

SCORE THE HIGHEST LEVEL ONLY

Have used CAQDAS in more than 5 projects 4 pts.

Have used CAQDAS in 1-4 projects 3 pts.

Have opened a CAQDAS program and browsed its features ... 2 pts.

Have heard of CAQDAS, but never opened a CAQDAS program 1 pts.

Have never heard of CAQDAS 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

9. After a qualitative research project, would you be able to suggest what to quantify in a follow-up survey?

Yes, definitely 3 pts.

Probably 1 pts.

No 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

10. Do you have particular expertise in any specific market sector (e.g. pharmaceutical, financial, automotive, a sector of society, etc.)?

Yes 2 pts.

No 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

11. Would you be able to specify a controlled experiment making use of qualitative techniques?

Yes 2 pts.

No 0 pts.



A Quick Quallie Quiz...

12. Do you understand the difference between Core Product, Formal Product and Augmented Product?

Yes 2 pts.

No 0 pts.



Add up your total score...



Find your Quallie Quotient (%)...

Score	QQ %	Score	QQ %	Score	QQ %	Score	QQ %
0	0	14	25	28	51	42	76
1	2	15	27	29	53	43	78
2	4	16	29	30	55	44	80
3	5	17	31	31	56	45	82
4	7	18	33	32	58	46	84
5	9	19	35	33	60	47	85
6	11	20	36	34	62	48	87
7	13	21	38	35	64	49	89
8	15	22	40	36	65	50	91
9	16	23	42	37	67	51	93
10	18	24	44	38	69	52	95
11	20	25	45	39	71	53	96
12	22	26	47	40	73	54	98
13	24	27	49	41	75	55	100



Research Censorship or Just Research Myopia?

Neil McPhee – Nuance Research Ltd

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



09 May 2014

Severe	
Very Dangerous	
Dangerous	←
Guarded	
Safe	

Briefing stage...

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

Omits context and comparison
Attempts to control findings

esomar qualitative valencia neil mcphee

Severe
Very Dangerous
Dangerous
Guarded
Safe

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

esomar qualitative valencia neil mcphie

Severe
Very Dangerous
Dangerous
Guarded
Safe

Fieldwork stage...

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

Omits context and scope
Attempts to control findings

esomar qualitative valencia neil mcphie

Severe

Very Dangerous

Dangerous

Guarded

Safe

'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

esomar qualitative valencia neil mcphie

Severe

Very Dangerous

Dangerous

Guarded

Safe

'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

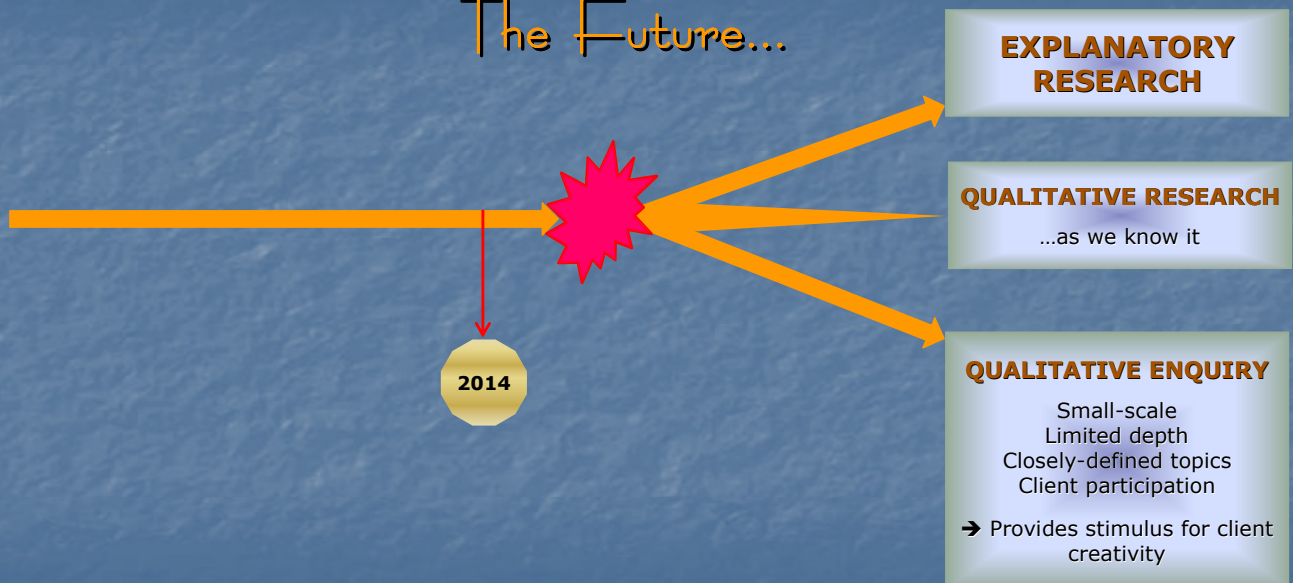
esomar qualitative valencia neil mcphie

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...



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.



See also:

Bailey, L.F. (1987) What Determines Quality in Qualitative Research?
Market Research Society Newsletter, October, pp. 44-45 [Available at:
http://repository.leedsmet.ac.uk/main/view_record.php?identifier=6532&SearchGroup=research]

Bailey, L.F. (2002) Decision Resource Consultancy: a convergence of disciplines that aid consumer marketing.
Journal of Consumer Behaviour, vol.1, 4, pp. 400-406.

LeedsMetUni: Bailey, L.F. (2011) Market Research Vaedictory Lecture: market segmentation, qualitative research and conversations across the garden wall (video). [Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdOREwSRu7g>]

Bailey, L.F. (2014) The Origin and Success of Qualitative Research.
International Journal of Market Research, vol.56, 2, pp. 167-184.



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