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## Editorial: A reexamination into the significance of qualitative research

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Since my early days of doing research, I have been told (and I used to tell people) that I am a quantitative researcher. I did quite a lot of number crunching myself and the tables and figures puked out of this process took the miraculous form of research papers. Then, why did I choose to edit a qualitative journal in the services area?

As a culture, we are classificatory. We classify researchers and label them for life. Unfortunately, many researchers proudly buy those classifications and perform their best to live up to those classifications. Self-reflection upon the labels attributed to oneself is unlikely to occur as long as the labelling transforms one into a member of a generally agreed upon prestigious club. Actually, only a very basic level of self-reflection is plentiful to question the merits of labelling researchers blindly as qualitative or quantitative researchers.

The argument I advance here is that *all researchers are qualitative researchers and the soul of good research is always qualitative*. The mathematical-statistical computations that you do upon a dataset are not research. Your ability to perform number crunching does not make you a quantitative researcher but only a quantitative data analyst. In a society crazy after numbers, the critical gap between the roles of a researcher and that of an analyst is conveniently forgotten.

A lot of my previous research deals with scale development; without scales, we cannot 'measure' the number value of something and scales are a foundational building block in the quantitative tradition. And, most scale developers are the so-called quantitative researchers. If you apply an elementary level of introspection, you will understand that the heart of scale development is essentially qualitative. Major processes in instrument development such as identifying the potential presence of a new construct in the web of knowledge, searching for item statements that would represent aspects of that construct, identifying the underlying commonality in meaning among a set of item statements and christening them with representative names, etc. are all qualitative processes. If researchers neglect the aforementioned stages and entirely concentrate up on analysing the numbers (say, reliability analysis, factor analysis, etc.), the same is very unlikely to result in a valid instrument. Development of hypothesis, the other foundation of traditional quantitative research is also an intensely qualitative process. It is not that I am unaware of analysts proposing hypotheses merely based on correlations in an extant dataset: serious quantitative researchers would scoff at such mechanical 'hypotheses manufacturing' systems.

The only persistent difference I see between the qualitative and the quantitative camps is that the former is largely made up of researchers interested in searching the

nuances that make a situation unique and different. Even while they generalise, their universe is very small – quite unlike that of their counterparts bent upon finding non-excludable principles that apply seamlessly across the universe of the entire humanity or at least substantial segments of it. However, the good news is that an increasingly large number of quantitative researchers understand the futility of this approach and stay away from such adventure. It is not that there can be nothing common that unites the psycho-social lives of humans around the world (and our gods and those alien species we might encounter in the future) but what is at fault is the fundamentalist belief that all scientific principles should thus be stretchable. With this, I should also warn against the ultra-orthodoxy among some in the traditional qualitative camp that resist against finding any kind of commonality or pattern across texts or contexts. This camp believes that it is doing a great job this way by not letting a field of inquiry from maturing and settling down. We need a rich blend of stability and change: while creative destruction is at the core of science, its pursuit will be of no use to man if scientists are not able to come up with stable models that are applicable at least in the mid-range of space and time.

When the inaugural issue of *International Journal of Qualitative Research in Services (IJQRS)* is released, this is what I wish to communicate: *IJQRS* is not uniquely dedicated for pre-labelled qualitative researchers to publish their research but it is, rather, a platform for every researcher to publish the relatively more qualitative elements of their research. Its focus on qualitative research in the services area is a deliberate attempt not to try to become everything for everyone; moreover, services constitute a major (and still growing) component of the global economy and it merits concentrating upon this important area. Finally, services share characteristics such as heterogeneity and variability which can better be illuminated by qualitatively rooted inquiry. With this thought, I wind up this editorial and invite all researchers studying services to consider submitting their qualitatively oriented insights and findings for our editorial consideration to be included in *IJQRS*.