'360 DEGREE DELIBERATIVE INTERVIEWING' AND ETHNOGRAPHY TO INCREASE VALIDITY AND INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

This article presents reflective critical analysis of a mixed method research project that affords methodological learning and implications. The research project is used here as a case study in research design and operationalization, rather than for its findings and conclusions. Therefore, the research objectives, research questions, methods, and operationalization of the project are explained insofar as they inform methodological analysis and conclusions. The literature reviewed in this article also pertains to research design and methodology rather than the disciplinary field of the research project used as a case study. In the research project, a series of time-interval interviews with multiple participants associated with the same activities— referred to here as *360-degree deliberative interviewing*—and ethnography were used to extend, deepen and, in some cases, challenge the findings available from traditional social science research methods. The affordances of the approach taken, which borrowed from deliberative polling and applied triangulation with ethnographic and statistical data, are reported along with some limitations such as increases in time and cost of research. However, this analysis indicates that the advantages in terms of validity and depth of insights outweigh the costs.

Keywords: Deliberative interviews, ethnography, validity, insights, mixed method

INTRODUCTION

After a period of 'paradigmatic wars' during which the 'scientific method' of research, which relies on quantitative research, and interpretivist and naturalistic approaches, which rely primarily on qualitative methods, were viewed as in competition and incompatible (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), both qualitative and quantitative research methods have advanced. Also, mixed method research has emerged as a productive combination of approaches (Creswell, 2009; Jensen, 2012).

Paradigmatic shifts and new technology have led to considerable innovation in research methods in recent decades. Digitalization, in particular, has enabled a range of new or modified methods of research such as online surveys, online *social network analysis*, and *netnography* (online ethnography). In the field of quantitative research, computerization and the increasing availability of data, including so-called 'big data', have led to new approaches to economic modelling (Brand Science, 2016) and *cost-benefit analysis* (Boardman, Greenberg, Vining, & Weimer, 2010). Specific survey techniques such as *Net Promoter Score* (NPS)[1] have become commonplace (Zaki, Kandeil, Neely & McColl-Kennedy, 2016). Content analysis, long argued to be both a quantitative and qualitative method, has seen new statistical methods such as *latent dirichlet allocation* developed as an alternative to traditional human or machine coding of texts (Blei, Ng, & Jordan, 2003). Also, digital technology has led to a number of automated research and analysis tools. In the field of communication, these include

automated sentiment and tone assessment of text, some of which are criticized for their use of secret algorithms, referred to as 'black box' methods (Paine, 2014). As well as growing use of *netnography*, qualitative research also has expanded with methods such as *action research* and *participatory action research* (PAR) gaining increased attention (Dick, 2000; Chevalier & Buckles, 2013).

However, while experiments such as random controlled trials (RCTs) are held to represent the 'gold standard' in quantitative research (Akobeng, 2005, p. 840; Hariton & Locascio, 2018), even a cursory review of journal articles reporting research in the field of communication and media studies shows that the most common quantitative research methods are surveys and content analysis. In qualitative research, interviews and focus groups remain pre-eminent qualitative methods (Creswell 2009, pp. 16–17).

The purpose of this article is to report on the perceived benefits of a specific mixed-method approach, rather than attempt the overly ambitious task of reviewing and comparing the range of research methods available. However, some observations and reported limitations of common research methods are noted because they were the basis of searching for the alternative approaches reported here. Also, definitions of some key concepts and terms are briefly noted as part of framing this analysis.

Following these definitions and a brief but salient discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of some of the most common traditional research methods, this article describes the methods developed and employed to gain detailed insights into communication practices and processes in a large multinational non-profit corporation headquartered in the Netherlands, with offices across Europe and Australia. Because the purpose of this analysis is to identify benefits and limitations of the 'hybrid' research methods used, the focus of this article is on the methodology and methods employed, rather than the findings of the research project. Findings are discussed only to the extent that they illustrate benefits and/or limitations of the methodology and methods used. In this sense, the following is a case study analysis of doing research (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELIABILITY, VALIDITY AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS IN RESEARCH

In order to discuss the modified and hybrid research methods used in the case study reported and identify benefits and limitations, it is necessary to clarify some key concepts and terms used. Because these are well established in research methods texts and generally well-known to researchers, only the most salient elements and characteristics that inform the following analysis are noted.

Reliability applies to quantitative research and refers to the consistency of a measure taken by an instrument or scale, and thus the reproducibility of results if repeated measurements using the same method are undertaken. Reliability in the same sense is not possible in qualitative research, which seeks deep insights into specific cases and contexts, and uses smaller samples than quantitative methods. However, this is not to say that qualitative research is unreliable. Although Bryman (1988, 2012) and some others claim that well-selected cases in qualitative research can produce findings that have a broad generalizability to particular contexts, Lincoln and Guba (1985), Shenton (2004) and others prefer to refer to this as *transferability* of qualitative research findings. Other important characteristics of qualitative research are variously referred to as *credibility*, *dependability* and the overall *trustworthiness* of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton (2004).

Validity, which broadly means truthful, is important in both quantitative and qualitative research, as it gauges the extent to which the research measures what it is intended to measure. In quantitative research, validity is assessed in a number of specific ways such as identifying content validity, construct validity, and/or criterion validity (Neuman, 2006, p. 193). In qualitative research, validity refers to authenticity, a fair and balanced approach, and plausibility. As Neuman says in *Social Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*:

> Qualitative researchers are more interested in authenticity than in the idea of a single version of truth. *Authenticity* means giving a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it every day …most qualitative researchers concentrate on capturing an inside view and providing a detailed account of how those being studied understand events. (Neuman, 2006, p. 196) [Original emphasis]

Benefits and limitations of surveys and interviews

Surveys are widely used as a quantitative method of communication and media research, both offline (e.g., in printed form) and increasingly online, and offer a number of benefits. The uses and benefits of surveys are extensively explained in research methods texts and articles, so they will not be discussed in detail here. It is important to acknowledge however that, when *probability* sampling is used and sufficient sample sizes are obtained, surveys can provide:

1. *Reliability*—surveys can identify means, modes and medians within data sets with a moderate to high level of statistical reliability, referred to as confidence interval (e.g., up to 95% confidence level);

2. *Generalizability*—the findings can be generalized to the population from which the sample is drawn;

3. *Cost-effectiveness*—survey instruments can be distributed at relatively low cost, particularly online, and software applications such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) can be used to analyse data quickly compared with other methods such as text analysis.

Notwithstanding, despite their wide use, surveys suffer from a number of limitations that can make findings misleading even if they are statistically reliable. These include the following.

1. Survey responses are self-reporting. Respondents fill out survey questionnaires themselves with no verification that they are telling the truth and no supporting evidence. It is well established that people exaggerate when rating themselves and their practices on positive attributes, whether it is in relation to their skills, knowledge, proficiency, professionalism, or ethical standards. Thus, surveys are prone to 'response bias', which can produce exaggerated and even false findings.

2. Structured surveys ask mostly closed-end questions and therefore do not tell the whole story and often leave much unsaid by participants.

3. Unless surveys are conducted face-to-face or by telephone, there is no capacity for the researcher to query, challenge, ask for clarification, or seek more information to confirm responses, as there is in open-ended interviewing.

4. Some research has found that surveys are often not completed by the sampled persons. For example, surveys of senior executives and heads of households are often passed on to an assistant in organizations or a child in households (Reichheld, 2008, pp. 81–82). Also, the sample of online surveys is often not controlled.

5. Analysis of surveys focuses on *means* (i.e., averages), and sometimes *medians* and *modes*. Average calculations produce findings about hypothetical cases that often do not necessarily exist in reality – they are a statistical calculation that identifies a middle point in a data set. Modes are better than means in this respect in that they at least identify the most commonly occurring response. But by virtue of focussing on averages, most statistical analyses exclude what are called 'outliers' in a data range, which can be a sizeable proportion of the population studied. While calculation of statistical significance (*p* values) and standard deviation (*SD*) can ensure statistical reliability of what is reported, it is what is *left out* of quantitative findings that is perhaps the most significant limitation. In addition, a number of scientists question the use of statistical significance, arguing that statistical significance (e.g., a *p* value higher than 0.05) does not prove some hypotheses and statistical non-significance does not prove a null hypothesis (Amrhein, Greenland, & McShane, (2019).

6. Exacerbating the previous limitations is that many if not most respondents to surveys have undertaken little or no preparation and may not be well informed, or even be uninformed about the issues explored. Critical analysis of polling has revealed the tendency for respondents to give 'top of their head' responses with little if any thought (deliberation), which has led to the development of *deliberative polling* and deliberative surveys (Fishkin, Luskin & Jowell, 2000)[2]. As the Centre for Deliberative Democracy (2019) says: 'Deliberative polling is an attempt to use public opinion research in a new and constructive way' (para. 2).

Some particular types of surveys such as Net Promoter Score (NPS) questionnaires, which are now widely used by private and public sector organizations, accentuate the above limitations. NPS is a single score out of 10 provided in response to a question along the lines of 'How likely are you to recommend [product or service name] to your friends and colleagues?' Scores of 9– 10 are classified as 'promoters', scores of 7–8 are considered to be 'passives', and score of 6 or below are regarded as 'detractors'. NPS surveys are criticized as simplistic and highly reductionist (Mandal, 2014; Kristensen & Eskildsen, 2011).

Qualitative research also has its limitations. It does not produce statistically reliable findings and thus its findings are not generalizable to the population studied. As advocates of naturalistic and interpretivist methodology point out, that is not its purpose. Whereas quantitative research produces aggregated and averaged data, qualitative research seeks to provide deep insights into human thinking, perceptions, attitudes, and interpretations in particular contexts and situations and to explore beyond the *what*, *where* and *how many* to understand *why* and *how* situations exist and/or might be changed.

In-depth interviews are most often conducted once only with small qualitative samples. Similarly, focus groups (referred to as small group interviews by some) usually involve participants in only one discussion on a topic. Just as respondents to a survey can lie, or exaggerate, or leave out important information—unintentionally or intentionally— interviewees and focus group participants can similarly provide misleading or incomplete information. Furthermore, as in surveys, interviewees can be uninformed on an issue, or even misinformed, which skews their responses and limits the capacity of interviews to provide credibility, plausibility and balance.

With these benefits and limitations in mind, the following research project was designed and undertaken during 2018 and 2019.

THE CASE STUDY: OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, FRAMING, AND METHODS

The research project that is the subject of this reflective critical analysis in relation to methodology examined communication practices and processes in a large multinational non-profit corporation headquartered in the Netherlands and its subsidiaries in Europe and Australia. The corporation and subsidiaries will not be named for reasons of confidentiality and because this is not significant in terms of examining the research conducted. For context, however, it can be reported that the group (referring to the corporation and its subsidiaries) employed 14,500 staff and had 13 million customers, as at the end of 2018. It operates in the financial services sector, selling financial products such as insurance and superannuation through a number of subsidiary companies and brands in various countries, which in turn sell products through sales agents and independent brokers (the sales channel) and directly online. The group operates major call centres for customer inquiries and complaints in several cities, as well as websites tailored to each country and brand. The group uses a wide range of marketing and corporate communication including paid media advertising; public relations such as media relations and publicity; social media engagement; events for its sales channel, customers and employees; and electronic direct mail (eDM). It sales channel—sales agents and independent brokers—are key intermediaries who interact with customers on a regular basis.

Research objectives and research questions
The overarching objective of the research was to evaluate and, if necessary, improve the communication and engagement between the group and its key stakeholders including brokers and sales agents (the sales channel), customers, employees, and business partners. These are collectively referred to as stakeholders in the following, except in specific discussion of particular sectors. In particular, the research was commissioned to explore the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the existing methods and sites of communication and engagement between the group (head office and subsidiaries) and various stakeholders?

RQ 2: How effective is communication and engagement between the group (head office and subsidiaries) and various stakeholders through these methods and sites?

RQ 3: How can the group (head office and subsidiaries) improve communication and engagement based on evidence collected, in line with its policy of performance improvement?

Theoretical framing
The objective, research questions, theoretical framework, and methods of the research project were informed by contemporary human communication theory and by definitions and theory in relation to engagement. Because the focus of this article is on reflective critical analysis of the methodology, these are briefly summarized here.

At a macro level, the research design of the research project used as a case study noted that contemporary literature conceptualizes communication as a two-way process focussed on meaning making and meaning sharing, rather than one-way transmission of information and messages as represented in early information models (Craig & Muller, 2008; Littlejohn, Foss

& Oetzel, 2017). The research was also theoretically framed within definitions of communication as listening as well as speaking, as noted by Craig (2006), Couldry (2009), and others. Without listening – by the organization as well as stakeholders – communication and engagement fail to achieve two-way meaningful status. In this regard, the research drew on studies of organizational listening (Macnamara, 2016, 2018). In addition, listening by the group is a practical consideration to understand the needs and concerns of stakeholders (referred to in marketing and PR as *audience insights*) and to monitor their perceptions of and satisfaction with the group and its products and services.

Underpinning this approach is a body of communication and management literature that shows effective communication with key stakeholders is essential for customer, employee and sales channel retention (i.e., stability); for new customer, employee and sales channel recruitment (i.e., growth)[3]; for sales channel and employee productivity; for creating and maintaining trust; and, ultimately, for organizational sustainability. For example, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, p. xii) say that companies that 'listen to … their audiences' will thrive. Addressing the 2015 World Economic Forum, chairman of Baker & McKenzie, Eduardo Leite, said that 'in business, trust is the glue that binds employees to employers, customers to companies—and companies to their suppliers, regulators, government, and partners' (Leite, 2015, para. 6).

In addition, this research was theoretically framed within engagement literature that identifies engagement as much more than attending events and likes and follows on social media. Instead, studies in organizational psychology identify engagement as involving *cognitive* activity (thinking about), *affective* (emotional) connection, and *empowerment* through participation of some kind (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

Accordingly, the research set out to examine two-way communication, including listening as well as transmitting information and messages, between the group and its stakeholders, and to evaluate effectiveness from the perspective of stakeholders as well as the organization.

Methods
The research project used three primary research methods as follows:

1. In-depth interviews (qualitative);
2. Ethnography—observation of a range of practices and processes (qualitative);
3. Surveys of customers and employees (quantitative).

Secondary research involving comparison of findings with existing statistical data and ongoing evaluation studies was used to support the primary research as explained in the following.

DISCUSSION: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The research questions of the study reviewed required qualitative research, although quantitative data available from annual customer satisfaction surveys, annual employee satisfaction surveys, regular NPS surveys, customer complaint rates and trends, and other statistics offered useful information for comparison and evaluation. Therefore, a mixed method approach was adopted. During planning, it was agreed that this would include interviews with managers and office staff responsible for and/or involved in relevant functions, such as customer relations, sales, and social media monitoring, and a sample of field staff and external stakeholders.

In addition, access was given to all existing survey data and other statistics such as sales figures, insurance policy cancellations, inquiries and complaints to call centres, staff retention and attrition rates, and traditional and social media metrics over the previous year including sentiment/tone ratings. Furthermore, to gain deep understanding of the practices studied, a period of observation was requested and built into the research design. Ethnography was supported by gaining access to examine relevant documents such as internal reports from various functional units, transcripts of calls to call centres, and the group's strategic and operational plans.

Interviews
The first challenge that arose in the mind of the lead researcher was the limitation of interviews for gaining authentic, plausible, balanced (i.e., valid) information, particularly in relation to RQ 2 and RQ 3. This was not based on aspersion towards those involved, but rather on two considerations in designing the research to meet its objectives:

1. A potential bias caused by the group nominating or expecting senior managers of each communication and engagement related function to be interviewed. While this sample could authoritatively respond to RQ 1, management could be expected to communicate an organization view and give comments that are promotional or defensive of existing practices. Thus, they would provide a one-sided and potentially inaccurate view in relation to RQ 2 and RQ 3;

2. If the sample for interviews was extended beyond managers and other nominated interviewees, it was likely that some or many of those interviewed would not be well-informed about the issues and practices to be discussed. For example, some complaints by customers are based on misunderstanding on their part.

In order to address the first consideration above, and gain an authentic, plausible, and balanced understanding of the group's communication and engagement with its stakeholders, interviewees were selected purposively from relevant management; office staff working in relevant functions (e.g., customer relations staff and call centre operators); field staff such as group representatives responsible for interacting with agents, brokers and customers; and a sample of business partners. For example, partners of the group's health and motor vehicle insurance divisions include medical clinics, hospitals, and motor vehicle repair businesses, which interact directly and extensively with the group's customers. Direct interviews with customers were not conducted due to the availability of substantial customer feedback through partners, agents and brokers and via recorded telephone calls to call centres, as well as the time/cost of engaging with a suitable sample from the group's 13 million customers.

It was considered that interviews across this range of internal and external stakeholders afforded a 360-degree view of the group's communication and engagement, particularly when interviews were complemented by observation and access to relevant statistical and recorded voice and textual data as discussed. This prompted the term '360 degree interviewing', as it gained views from all sides. While this is not unusual in qualitative research, the second consideration above—ensuring interviewees were well-informed—was addressed by conducting two rounds of interviews separated by a time interval during which interviewees were provided with information and given time to reflect and deliberate on the issues discussed.

In the first round, 96 face-to-face interviews ranging from 45 minutes to 1.25 hours were conducted over a period of two months in 2018 in Australia and two European countries in which the group operates. Approximately one-third of these were conducted with managers in the group's main office in each country. Two-thirds involved employees directly involved in

functions such as sales, customer relations, market research, social media monitoring and field staff such as representatives responsible for liaison with brokers, sales agents, and business partners.

Ethnography

While ethnography optimally involves an extended period of observation—up to a year or more in the view of some researchers (Tedlock, 2008, p. 151)—the two months full-time spent in the first round of this research, followed by a third month in the second round of research as discussed in the following, added a level of what Geertz (1973) called 'thick description' of the practices studied. As Tedlock (2008) notes, ethnographers 'live in a community or group for a considerable period of time' and directly observe people and practices (p. 151), which affords 'very detailed description ... from the viewpoint of an insider' (Neuman, 2006, p. 381).

In this study, as well as being based full-time inside the group companies studied, the lead researcher visited call centres, which are owned but operated separately to the group's main offices, and spent time talking informally to staff and sitting in booths listening to customer calls and inquiries through headphones. Also, the researcher visited motor vehicle repair businesses that deal directly with the group's customers, and talked to insurance brokers about their experiences, feedback that they as intermediaries received from customers, and their perceptions of the group's communication and engagement. In the group's offices, as well as reading social media analysis reports, the researcher directly observed social media engagement staff interacting online and spent time online viewing posts and comments from customers and other stakeholders, referred to as *netnography*.

Deliberation

Following the first round of interviews and ethnography, participants were provided with additional information in relation to the group's vision, objectives and policies and, in particular, with information designed to expand and improve communication and engagement with its stakeholders. This included distributing the findings of the first round of research, which were presented in a detailed 70-page report that contained 41 recommendations. Relevant sections were provided to functional units and teams, such as customer relations and staff responsible for engaging with insurance brokers and sales agents.

Group managers and staff were not compelled to adopt the recommendations of the first round of research, but as part of the research plan they were requested by senior management to discuss and give consideration to the findings and recommendations, as well as other information provided to them. In the case of shortcomings in communication and engagement identified in the first round of research, teams of staff were assigned to investigate these thoroughly and propose options if improvement was agreed to be necessary or desirable. As part of *agile management*, which has been introduced in the group, cross-functional teams are assigned to develop or revise products or processes, referred as *accelerator* teams. These use techniques such as *scrums* and *sprints*, which involve periods of intensive focussed debate designed to effect coordinated change when solutions or initiatives are agreed (Paquette & Frankl, 2016). Accelerator teams addressed a number of communication and engagement issues raised in the first round research report and engaged in internal discussion as well as consultation with agents, brokers and business partners.

Re-interviewing

A second round of interviews was conducted in 2019 in the same countries involving many of the same managers, staff, and partners, or their equivalents in situations in which appointments had changed. While this involved fewer interviews than the first round, a substantial sample of 60 interviews were completed. These interviews followed-up on issues identified in the first

round, as well as exploring new and additional issues. This second round of interviews afforded two key benefits.

First, as could be expected, it facilitated comparison with the findings of first-round interviews to identify change that had occurred in relation to the communication and engagement studied. This allowed identification of improvements made as well as challenges that remained unmet. For example, in the first round of research, management reported that office staff interacting with customers had access to the group's *customer lifetime value* (CLV) data—an estimate of the total value to a company of a customer over time, including purchase of multiple products. This identifies high value customers, to whom staff are encouraged to give extra attention and premium service. However, interviewing a number of staff responsible for handling customer calls in relation to health, life and motor vehicle insurance revealed that customer records were held in different databases and some staff in the various business units (e.g., health insurance) could not access other databases or a total customer profile as claimed. This revelation led to a review of policy and staff access to data involving management, the IT department, and business unit managers and staff. Second round interviews found a much streamlined process.

A second major affordance of the two-stage interview process separated by a time interval in which deliberation was facilitated was that the second round of interviews produced some different responses than those received in first-round interviews and unearthed information, perceptions,` and suggestions not previously provided. This occurred because the interviewees had time and the opportunity to become more informed in relation to the issues being researched and to discuss and debate relevant matters. In the second round interviews, many interviewees had much more to say and more specific information to support their perceptions; some had altered their previous positions; and a few changed their minds completely. As a result, some of the findings from the first round of this research were found to be unsupported and some were considered erroneous after deliberation and additional information was provided. In turn, this resulted in some of the recommendations based on the first round of research being misguided or inappropriate. This experience caused the researchers involved to engage in critical reflection in relation to research methodology.

The use of agile management techniques as discussed above provided a heightened focus on deliberation in this case. But, even if accelerator teams conducting scrums and sprints are not available, allowing a period for deliberation as well as reflection between interviews provides much more informed and considered responses, and thus increases the validity of qualitative research by ensuring greater authenticity, plausibility and balance. Furthermore, the period of deliberation between interviews resulted in much deeper insights being gained in the second round of research, compared with some 'top of mind' and 'off the cuff' comments garnered in the initial interviews. This was particularly important in formulating findings in relation to RQ 2 and RQ 3—evaluating the effectiveness of the group's communication and engagement with its stakeholders and identifying the most appropriate methods for improving communication and engagement.

This use of what can be called *deliberative interviewing* borrowed from the emerging practice of deliberative polling and deliberative surveys that seek to gain more valid and more insightful findings than single-shot instruments by incorporating a period of deliberation before data collection. Thus, while it is not a new approach in research, it expands qualitative methodology and increases the validity and depth of insights gained from interviews. When combined with ethnography, a second qualitative method, validity and the depth of insights are increased further.

Accessing quantitative data available in the group showed the benefits of mixed method research. This included the volume of inquiries and complaints over time by category, traditional and social media content analysis, ratings from customer and employee satisfaction surveys, and NPS scores from more than two million customers over a two-year period. Interviews were able to probe stakeholders in relation to matters that were the subject of a high volume of complaints and low survey ratings to gain increased understanding. Also, a 'closed loop' methodology was introduced to the group's NPS surveys in which outbound calls were made by call centre staff to 'detractors' (customers giving low scores) to attempt to resolve their concerns, after which a second NPS survey was conducted among detractors a few months later. In the 12 months following its introduction, this 'closed loop' approach resulted in a significant increase in NPS scores among detractors.

A limitation of the deliberative interviewing approach used in this research is that it took twice the time involved in single-shot interviews and, therefore, was more expensive. When combined with other intensive qualitative methods such as ethnography, and/or mixed method research, the time taken increases further, which further increases the cost of the research.

However, the importance of validity of qualitative research, which arises from authenticity, plausibility and balance leading to credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton (2004), warrants reconsideration of the value of interviews and focus groups conducted without deliberation by participants. It is clear that validity of this study was established and its authenticity, balance, credibility and trustworthiness increased substantially by the deliberative interviewing described and ethnography. Beyond paradigmatic and methodological debates, the reflection and acknowledgement that a number of the findings and recommendations of the first round of this research were ill-informed, demonstrates a material advantage of more in-depth qualitative approaches.

Time and cost can be constrained by designing a single stage of research preceded by deliberation, as is often done in deliberative polls in which participants are provided with information and asked to think about and talk with friends and colleagues about the issue or issues being researched prior to completing the survey. Nevertheless, this still requires a two-step process incorporating the principles of deliberative democracy as well as research. Also, it can be difficult to achieve deliberation without a significant stimulus such as participation in an initial round of research. In this case, distribution of findings and recommendations from the first-round interviews and ethnography provoked participants to think, debate, and in some cases argue against or propose alternative actions based on deeper reflection and critical thinking. In addition, the two stages of research provided comparative data to track change over time.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

The design and implementation of this research project adds support to the benefits of mixed method research, with statistical data gained from satisfaction surveys, NPS surveys, and internal reports identifying high points and low points in terms of stakeholders' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour. Qualitative research involving depth interviews and ethnography garnered expanded understanding and insights in relation to the reasons for these high points and low points in statistical data, as well as providing stakeholder feedback and suggestions on ways to improve communication and engagement.

However, this case study of mixed-methods research illustrated a key limitation of single-shot instruments and research processes, whether they be surveys, interviews, focus groups, or other methods. While single-round research among experts in a field may yield valid and trustworthy

findings because participants are likely to be well informed and knowledgeable on the subject or subjects explored, research conducted with a broader sample is likely to encounter participants who are not well informed or even ill informed or misinformed. They also may be unprepared or ill prepared to participate in the research, despite agreeing to or being requested to take part in interviews, focus groups or other methods.

This research project showed that significant benefits in terms of validity and depth of insights can be gained from designing and implementing a period of deliberation prior to data collection through interviews—referred to here as 'deliberative interviewing'. This may be done as a two-step process (deliberation followed by data collection), or as a three-step process with deliberation facilitated between two stages of research. Interviewing a range of participants with different interests and perspectives on processes—in this case managers, operational employees, partners, and key intermediaries such as agents and brokers—afforded a 360 degree view, leading to the term '360 degree deliberative interviewing'. Ethnography also contributed to the validity and trustworthiness of the qualitative research by providing direct observation of processes and practices, rather than relying on participant reporting. In some cases, what was claimed to be done was not done in observed practice. Ethnography also revealed that some things were done differently to how they were reported.

The extra time taken in research methods such as 360 degree deliberative interviewing supported by ethnography greatly added to the comprehensiveness and trustworthiness of findings from qualitative research and substantially expanded knowledge gained from quantitative studies. As such, the hybrid methods used in this project make a contribution to the ongoing search for refined and improved methods of inquiry.

Theoretically, this critical analysis adds to methodological understanding of in-depth qualitative research and, in particular, how validity, credibility, and trustworthiness can be established. While qualitative research methods claim to produce deeper levels of insight than that available from generalizable quantitative studies, this analysis shows that this cannot be taken for granted. Even in-depth face-to-face interviewing can produce erroneous or incomplete findings because of lack of preparation and forethought by participants, or because of the evolving process of learning (i.e., perceptions and understandings change over time—even over relatively short periods if information is made accessible).

This reflective critical analysis also confirms the importance of triangulating multiple data sets to verify findings. Even statements made by participants who are directly involved in processes can be found to be incorrect through methods such as observation of the processes, or comparison with relevant statistical data.

At a practice level, this analysis confirms the benefits of mixed method research and identifies benefits that can be obtained by taking more time to allow for dissemination of relevant information to participants and deliberation among research participants, as well as soliciting responses from multiple perspectives on the same issues. Thus, it informs sampling for qualitative research and suggests a rethinking of the concept of *information saturation* or *redundancy*—the point at which no new information is being received and, therefore, qualitative research stops. As demonstrated in the case study analyzed, proceeding with additional rounds of interviews after deliberation produced some new responses including some that revised or even refuted themes and patterns that had emerged.

It is pertinent to reflect on the origin of the term research from the Latin *cercier* meaning to search and the Latin *re* meaning again.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[1] The NPS metric was developed by and is a registered trademark of Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company, and Satmetrix.

[2] James Fishkin has trademarked the term Deliberative Poll®.

[3] The controversial nature of the neoliberal narrative of economic growth is noted, but is not the focus here.