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Fitting Oval Pegs Into Round Holes

Tensions in Evaluating and Publishing Qualitative Research in Top-Tier North American Journals

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A study of qualitative researchers who have submitted and/or published their research in top-tier North American organizational and management journals reveals the evaluative criteria-in-use at these journals. Specifically, when asked to take the perspective of an (a) author, (b) evaluator (reviewer or editor), and (c) judge of the comparisons between qualitative and quantitative research, three publication tensions were evident. The author offers the metaphor of "fitting a round peg into an oval hole" as a means of capturing these tensions and as a vehicle for organizing the various ways these tensions can be managed.

Keywords: qualitative methods; evaluating qualitative research; publishing qualitative research; comparing qualitative and quantitative research

> In my experience qualitative and quantitative papers are evaluated in precisely the same way—both need to follow canons of good empiricism and logic.
> *Qualitative researcher on being asked about his or her criteria for evaluating qualitative research.*

> The problem is when it is not evaluated differently—when one standard is used for all research.
> *Qualitative researcher on being asked what the difference is between how qualitative and quantitative research is evaluated.*

At the crux of many debates over how to evaluate qualitative research are two central questions. First, "Should qualitative research be held to similar or different criteria than quantitative research?" Second, "Is it even appropriate to talk about a common set of criteria for examining all qualitative research?" Debates on these issues have been raging in several disciplines for a long time (e.g., in education, see Smith, 1983; Smith & Heshusius, 1986; Howe, 1988; Howe & Eisenhardt, 1990.) On the one hand, there has been considerable work detailing how to translate criteria used to evaluate quantitative research either by approximating these criteria, such as reliability and validity (see Kirk & Miller, 1986; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lee, 1999), or by offering alternate conceptualizations and terms for these criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that quantitative criteria are not applicable to qualitative

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research (Wolcott, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 1998) and that the compatibility between the two perspectives has been overstated (Smith & Heshusius, 1986; cf. Howe, 1988). Thus, in a revised position, Lincoln and Guba (2000) note that although the paradigms underlying qualitative and quantitative research share similar challenges, the hope that researchers from different paradigms can resolve their differences is dim and that "such a resolution appears highly unlikely and would probably even be less than useful" (p. 185). As noted below, some even doubt that we can arrive at a common set of evaluation criteria for qualitative research, even if they were distinct from quantitative criteria. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that qualitative researchers such as those cited in the epigraph are similarly divided on how to evaluate qualitative research.

Such disagreements have very pragmatic implications for researchers. One critical implication is that a lack of consensus around the evaluation criteria used for research means that it is difficult to publish qualitative research. Put another way, if we are not clear about what is good qualitative research, then how can we convince a reviewer or editor that it is worthy to publish? This article seeks to contribute to a small, but growing, body of research that centers on publishing qualitative research in organizational and management outlets (Gephardt, 2004; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, 1997; Lee, 1999; Suddaby, 2006). I focus on this aspect of the evaluation criteria debate as I take seriously Golden-Biddle and Locke's (1997) assertion that "we are at the core a profession of text writers" (p. 1). We are known, as a profession and as individual scholars, by what we write and what we publish. However, as a profession, we tend to be more forthcoming about how to conduct studies than we are about publishing them. Thus, the motivation for this article is to contribute to this conversation about publishing for the purpose of improving both the writing and evaluation of qualitative research.

Unlike many previous approaches to the topic, I focus on publishing in a specific outlet: top-tier North American organizational and management journals. The rationale for this choice is threefold. First, publication in these top-tier North American journals remains for many colleges and universities one of the key metrics of achievement and advancement in our profession—and thus ultimately for career success or failure. Second, publishing in these outlets is difficult, with top-tier North American journals often accepting fewer than 10% of the articles submitted.[1] Third, reviewing criteria may differ by journal and by the communities that publish those journals (e.g., European vs. North American management journals), just as criteria differ by discipline. I return to this argument toward the end of this article. In sum, a key motivation for this article is to better understand the evaluative challenges surrounding qualitative research in light of their ramifications for publication in top-tier North American organizational and management journals.

Drawing on the experiences of nearly 130 researchers (including my own) who have published in and/or have submitted to these journals, I have attempted to capture the experiences that qualitative researchers have undergone in this process. I focus on authors' experience of publishing for two primary reasons. First, as noted by Lincoln (1995), standards for evaluating and publishing qualitative research—for better or worse—are set by the inquiry community. For qualitative research, a critical component of this community is the set of authors of qualitative research. These researchers are likely the ones who read and often critique other qualitative articles. Second and similarly, it is qualitative

researchers who must ultimately accept or reject the standards imposed by journals for publication. Recognizing that all evaluation criteria are at least to some degree socially constructed (Smith & Deemer, 2000); to understand how qualitative research is actually being evaluated, it is critical to understand what criteria-in-use are currently being employed.

This article is comprised of five major sections. I begin by providing an explanation of my research methods. I then present my findings, in which I discuss the publishing experiences of those in my sample from a variety of perspectives (e.g., informant as author, informant as editor). These perspectives reveal several, often contradictory criteria in use that I summarize in a third section as three publishing tensions. I further describe these tensions metaphorically, as "fitting an oval peg into a round hole." In the fourth section, I move from a largely descriptive stance to a more normative one by offering some suggestions for fitting oval pegs into round holes. I conclude by pointing out some limitations of this article, as well as a few ironic reflections on its crafting.

Method

The goal of this research was to determine which evaluative dimensions are critical to publishing in top-tier North American journals. As noted above, I focused on top-tier North American journals as publishing in these journals is essential for achieving tenure in most North American business schools (see also Perrow, 1985). Moreover, because most of my own experiences are with North American journals, I had a better understanding of what questions to ask on the survey and could triangulate survey responses against my own experiences. Specifically, I focused questions on four of the most influential top-tier North American journals: *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ), *Organization Science* (OS), and *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ).

To enrich understanding of the qualitative publishing process, I polled several qualitative researchers. In preparation for the survey, I had two doctoral students identify the author(s) of every article that was either partially or wholly qualitative in nature that was published in AMJ, ASQ, OS, and SMJ from 1995 to 2005. *Qualitative* was broadly defined and encompassed a range of qualitative methodologies. From these articles, 336 unique authors (excluding myself) were identified. Of these, I was unable to contact 64 individuals, either because of e-mail issues (e.g., undeliverable messages), leaves (e.g., maternity, sabbatical), and/or because the researcher was no longer living. One person e-mailed me saying that they could not connect to the survey. Of the 272 remaining, I received responses from 111 individuals, for a 40.8% response rate. Of these 111 responses, 4 involved messages that said that they did not feel qualified or comfortable filling out the survey, leaving 107 usable surveys. To broaden the scope of my inquiry, I also put out a call on RMNet, the list server for the Research Methods Division of the Academy of Management, for all qualitative researchers who had submitted an article to a top-tier North American journal during this period. This garnered an additional 22 responses. Because this was an open call for responses, I cannot calculate a response rate. A description of the population of respondents can be found in Appendix A.

Surveys included both forced choice and open-ended questions. Building off my own experiences, as well as material written on publishing qualitative research (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, 1997), the survey asked respondents to consider various points regarding three broad areas of evaluation: study design, framing and contribution, and stance as a researcher. Study design assessed questions of the study's purpose, as well as various details surrounding the study's method. Framing and contribution assessed an article's relationship to theory and theoretical contribution, as well as issues surrounding a study's motivation and clarity of research question(s). Stance as a researcher assessed issues of representation, such as whether or not a researcher was believed as truly being "in the field" and adequately gave voice to his or her informants, as well as issues regarding how data was presented. A copy of the complete survey can be found in Appendix B.

At the end of each question about evaluative criteria, I allowed authors to add criteria or comment on those listed. In addition, I ended the survey with the following set of open-ended questions, including: (a) For those who have had their qualitative articles accepted at top-tier journals, briefly describe the top three to five reasons for your acceptance; (b) In what ways, if any, do you feel that qualitative research is evaluated differently than quantitative research? and (c) If you have been an editor or reviewer of a qualitative article submitted to a top-tier North American journal, please list three to five criteria that you feel are the most important for evaluating qualitative research. After the last formal question, I included a space for authors to share any additional comments.

The crux of the data presented here involves an analysis of the three aforementioned open-ended questions embedded in the survey. When appropriate, these analyses are bolstered by responses to the forced-choice survey items. Qualitative data were analyzed in two distinct ways. For some of the data, analysis consisted of creating numerical counts of the frequency of a certain type of response. That is, I read through the entire body of responses and came up with themes. I then counted the number of times a theme appeared. Similar items were grouped together. For example, when coding for *novelty*, I coded responses that mentioned the need for something new—be it a study with a new context, one that uses a new method, or one that advances new theory.

When analyzing other data, such as the perceived differences between qualitative and quantitative research, I analyzed data in an iterative fashion, traveling back and forth between the data and emerging themes (Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This analysis used three major steps. These steps are similar to those I have used elsewhere (Pratt, 2000a; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). First, I began by open coding the data to better understand how authors saw the world (Locke, 2001). Common statements were used to form provisional categories and first-order codes. Categories were then consolidated, becoming more theoretical and more abstract. This marked a move from open to axial coding (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once theoretical categories were generated, I looked for ways that these categories related to each other. For example, complaints about a lack of a standardized boilerplate for assessing qualitative research were associated with the imposition of inappropriate standards in assessing qualitative research. I kept these relationships in mind as I revisited the data to see whether and how they fit and misfit (Becker, 1970; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001).

Findings

The experiences of qualitative researchers regarding evaluation criteria in publishing coalesced around three major tensions: (a) the need to both break away from and be firmly embedded in extant theory; (b) the need to both provide enough data so that a reader can draw conclusions, while also providing enough interpretation of that data; and (c) the need to be both detailed and transparent with regard to one's methods, while also fitting one's research into the format of a top-tier North American journal. These themes appeared by approaching the issue of the evaluation criteria in qualitative research from different perspectives.

First, I assessed how authors perceive evaluation criteria as authors. To explore this perspective, I analyzed their responses to the following question, "For those who have had their qualitative articles accepted at top-tier journals, briefly describe the top three to five reasons for your acceptance." In addition, I assessed their perceptions as authors through forced-choice survey questions about their study design, framing and contribution, and one's stance as a researcher (see Appendix B). Second, I assessed another perspective via their responses to evaluation criteria as editors and reviewers by analyzing the responses to the following question: "If you have been an editor or reviewer of a qualitative article submitted to a top-tier North American journal, please list three to five criteria that you feel are the most important for evaluating qualitative research." The third perspective I assessed was more explicitly comparative with quantitative methodology. Here I asked, "In what ways, if any, do you feel that qualitative research is evaluated differently than quantitative research?"

Below, I briefly describe the findings derived from taking each of these three perspectives. In doing so, I lay the groundwork for each of the tensions noted above. Once identified, I discuss how these tensions are akin to fitting an oval peg into a round hole. I begin by examining how qualitative researchers viewed their experiences in publishing from the perspective of submitters of qualitative work (i.e., as authors).

Perspective 1: What Criteria Do Respondents View as Important as Authors?

To assess an author perspective, I triangulated data from both the open-ended and forced-choice sections of my survey. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the top six criteria for acceptance mentioned by authors when having their own work evaluated. Table 1 is derived from qualitative responses to the question about which three to five criteria authors felt were critical in their article's acceptance. This table is a summary of themes listed as a percentage of the number of people who mentioned a given criteria ($n = 87$). This table also lists those criteria mentioned by at least 10% of respondents.[2] After this cutoff, the next most frequent theme, which was "How appropriate was your methodology?" was only mentioned by 6% of those answering this question. Table 2, by contrast, is derived from survey data and lists the most often received comments from editors and reviewers. I present the top two responses in each of the categories relating to study design, framing and contribution, and researcher stance.

As noted in Table 1, making an important theoretical contribution was seen as a critical criterion for acceptance by more than half of the respondents. Making a novel contribution—either in terms of theory, context, or methodology—was also critical (41%). At the same time, approximately 14% noted the importance of staying sufficiently grounded in the existing

Table 1
Top Criteria Mentioned for Acceptance (Qualitative) by Respondents as Authors

Criteria	Frequency
Contribution to theory	52%
Novelty (theory, context, or methods)	41%
Transparent, exhaustive, well-articulated methods	31%
Good writing (interesting or compelling)	31%
Editor and reviewer qualities	17%
Links to existing theory	14%

literature. Contribution to theory was also seen in the survey as the most important issue in framing and making a contribution to a North American journal (see Table 2). Specifically, making a contribution involved both linking to existing theory and not being too linked with existing theory.

There was also some congruence on another well-mentioned top criterion: ensuring that one's methods were well-articulated and complete (31%). This criterion mirrors the top two concerns in the survey regarding study design: missing or inadequately described methods and analysis. Concerns about theoretical contribution and adequate methodology have been echoed both by Daft (1985) in his review of why empirical manuscripts get rejected and by Gephardt (2004) in his discussion of the publication of qualitative articles by the AMJ (see also Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1996).

The remaining top-ranked criteria had more limited degrees of overlap. For example, the importance of writing a compelling and interesting piece of research was seen as critical in the qualitative responses (31%). A holistic assessment of writing ability, however, was not raised in the survey directly. That said, three survey items that assessed the lack of clarity in certain areas of qualitative articles, such as having a missing or unclear purpose, method, or analysis, were identified as important by 45% to 65% of the respondents, thus suggesting the importance of writing. In previous research, the ability to communicate one's ideas effectively has been viewed as critical in publishing all manner of research—be it quantitative, qualitative, or theoretical (Daft, 1985; Davis, 1971; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997).

Still, other responses in Tables 1 and 2 appeared quite distinctive. For example, the qualitative responses raised the issue of reviewer and editor characteristics, such as having well-trained (qualitatively) reviewers and having an editor as a champion for an article in the face of negative reviews. By contrast, some of the most oft-cited themes in the survey data revolved around the tension between what Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997) refer to as showing versus telling: the importance of balance between providing raw data for your readers (showing) and explaining your data (telling). Although these themes do not triangulate here, both of them are raised in other perspectives on the evaluation criteria used for qualitative research in top-tier North American journals that are noted below.

Perspective 2: What Criteria Do Respondents Feel Are Important as Editors or Reviewers?

Table 3 shows both thematic counts and short, illustrative quotes by those in my sample regarding what criteria they use when they are reviewing or serving as an editor for a

**Table 2
Top Two Most Frequently Comments From Editors/Reviewers
for Various Categories (Quantitative)**

Question Asked	Most Frequently Noted Responses	Percentages	# of Respondents
Which of the following comments related to STUDY DESIGN have you received from editors or reviewers when submitting your qualitative work to top-tier North American journals?	1. Missing or inadequately described methods	65.4 **56.2**	51 **9**
	2. Missing or inadequately described analysis	61.5 **75**	48 **12**
Which of the following comments about the FRAMING and CONTRIBUTION of your paper have you received from editors or reviewers when submitting your qualitative work to top-tier North American journals?	1. Insufficient contribution to theory: Not enough links to existing theory	68 **68.8**	51 **11**
	2. Insufficient contribution to theory: Tied too closely to existing theory—nothing is 'new' here	49.3 **56.2**	37 **9**
Which of the following comments related to YOUR STANCE AS A RESEARCHER have you received from editors or reviewers when submitting your qualitative work to top-tier North American journals?	1. Too much interpretation of data as compared with showing your data	52.7 **53.8**	29 **7**
	2. Too much showing of your data (e.g., quotes) as compared with interpretation of your data	32.7 **30.8**	18 **4**

Note: The items in bold are from the RMNet sample. The items that are not bold are from the first sample of authors.

qualitative paper ($n = 83$). As above, I used a 10% cutoff as a threshold for whether or not to report a theme. Overall, there was a fairly strong consensus about the criteria used.

As was the case when their own articles were assessed, two of the top three criteria used by respondents as editors or reviewers include making a contribution to theory and having transparent, exhaustively detailed, and overall well-articulated methods. Several other criteria remain the same but are given different prominence. For example, the need to be novel in some way is only mentioned by 17% of those who are wearing an editor or reviewer "hat." Moreover, novelty primarily relates to theory, rather than having novel methods or context. Convincing the reader about the appropriateness of one's methodology becomes much more important (a move from 6% to 25%), as does making links to extant theory (from 14% to 20%). Finally, issues of "fit" between one's data, and one's interpretation of that data or the new theory one is proposing, relates to one of the issues surfaced in the survey data: that there must be a balance between showing and telling (see Table 2). However, there are two differences between how this issue is discussed here and how it was manifest in the survey.

First, and not surprisingly, the description of the showing-versus-telling issue is more nuanced in the qualitative data. For example, as one informant noted, this balance may be very dynamic:

Table 3
Criteria as Editor / Reviewers (Qualitative)

Criteria Used	Frequency	Representative Quotes
Contribution to theory	49%	"Contribution to theory"
Transparent, exhaustive, well-articulated methods	49%	"Clear explanation of data analysis and methods;" "transparency of analytical methods"
Good writing (interesting and compelling)	46%	"Quality of writing;" "paper is well-written and well-argued;" "compelling explanation"
Convincing/enough evidence	14%	"Evidence must be convincing;" "details are important; convincing and interesting 'story' being told"
Appropriateness of method	25%	"Answering WHY a qualitative approach is necessary for the research question at hand;" "could not be told as well with quantitative data"
Data-theory fit/ data-interpretation fit	24%	"Tight links between data and proposed theory;" "must strike a balance between data and interpretation"
Links to existing theory	20%	"Paper does not ignore existing literature and (does not) assumes [sic] it is the first considering these issues"
Novelty (theory)	17%	"Novel concepts;" "new or different theory;" "originality"

> [T]he manuscript must strike a balance between data and interpretation—with the balance being a moving target depending on the topic and the richness of the data. Data are typically preferred to interpretation, but careful guidance in processing data is always appreciated.

Second, this issue was closely related to discussions of good writing. For example, discussions of good writing included concerns about how much and in what way data is brought to bear to make a manuscript interesting or compelling. Statements such as "use of richness, convincing/clear presentation of data/results," and "is there a coherent story that the paper tells, that pulls together the different parts of the data and the paper?" speak of the importance of using data, and not simply strong rhetorical framing of theory, to make research interesting. One informant was very clear on the importance of showing, in the form of "pithy quotes from participants," to make manuscripts more compelling.

In summarizing findings from the first two perspectives, when taking the perspective as authors, there was some agreement about the criteria used when evaluating qualitative research. Specifically, three key evaluation criteria were raised in some form across the various perspectives: qualitative research should contribute to theory, be well-written, and have well-articulated methods. Although there were some differences when asked to take the perspective of an editor or reviewer (notably, regarding the criteria of novelty and appropriateness), these three key criteria remained central.

Perspective 3: How Is Qualitative Research Evaluated in Comparison to Quantitative Research?

Although some informants implicitly used quantitative research as a referent when discussing evaluation criteria from the perspective of a writer or evaluator of qualitative research, a slightly different picture emerged when asked to explicitly compare the two approaches. First, a different set of concerns came to light. Second, a key point of consensus was that there was a lack of consensus; that is, there was agreement that there are no standard ways to evaluate qualitative research. As a result, the standards applied to qualitative research were either too high or inappropriate. Moreover, this state, combined with a perceived lack of qualitatively knowledgeable reviewers, was believed to pose significant barriers for publishing qualitative research in top-tier North American journals. The main themes and their relationships are illustrated in Figure 1. The themes relating directly to evaluation standards are in the heavily bordered boxes.

As noted in Figure 1, central to the issues surrounding the evaluation of qualitative versus quantitative papers was the lack of standard operating procedures or a boilerplate for writing up and evaluating qualitative research (Miles, 1979). Specifically, the criteria for evaluating the methods are not as clear as with quantitative. As one informant noted, "Qualitative methods are not well understood, and there are not common practices that are well accepted amongst reviewers." This makes qualitative research difficult to assess. By contrast, "quantitative research is generally easier to evaluate" because of "clearer and more widely shared standards." These and similar arguments about criteria-related concerns are illustrated in Table 4.

Compounding the tensions about a lack of standard operating procedures for evaluating qualitative work (see Table 4) was disagreement about whether constructing a boilerplate is a good idea (see also Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997, pp. xx-xix). On the one hand, some felt it would be useful to have more standardized methods sections in qualitative papers. To illustrate, "I anticipate/hope that there will be some basic templates that we can use to display what we've done and to create some g.a.s.p.'s [generally accepted significance principles], and leave room for more discussion." By contrast, others noted the difficulty of establishing standards across very different types of qualitative research. As one scholar noted, "A person who is expert at interview studies can be a poor reviewer of archival methods; a discursive psychologist doesn't see eye-to-eye with a grounded theorist." Still, others cautioned against the cost of establishing such guidelines. To illustrate, one informant argued, "Qualitative researchers are moving closer to a recipe for what a paper looks like in these top-tier journals, but at risk to the originality, insight, and boundary-breaking of earlier qualitative research." And another noted, "Qualitative research may be headed to an overly formula-based approach. As a result, the inductive, contextually based and flexibility inherent in the method appear to be getting lost [*sic*]."

This lack of consensus around standards meant that reviewers often have different and possibly conflicting standards for evaluating qualitative research: "There is no boilerplate format, so reviewers have many (often contradictory) opinions about the format chosen (no one argues with the canonical way of setting up quantitative findings)." Specifically, two themes about the application of standards were prominent in the data. The first is that the bar is set much higher for the publication of qualitative versus quantitative research. The second is that quantitative standards are inappropriately applied to qualitative research.

Figure 1
Themes in Comparing Qualitative to Quantitative Studies
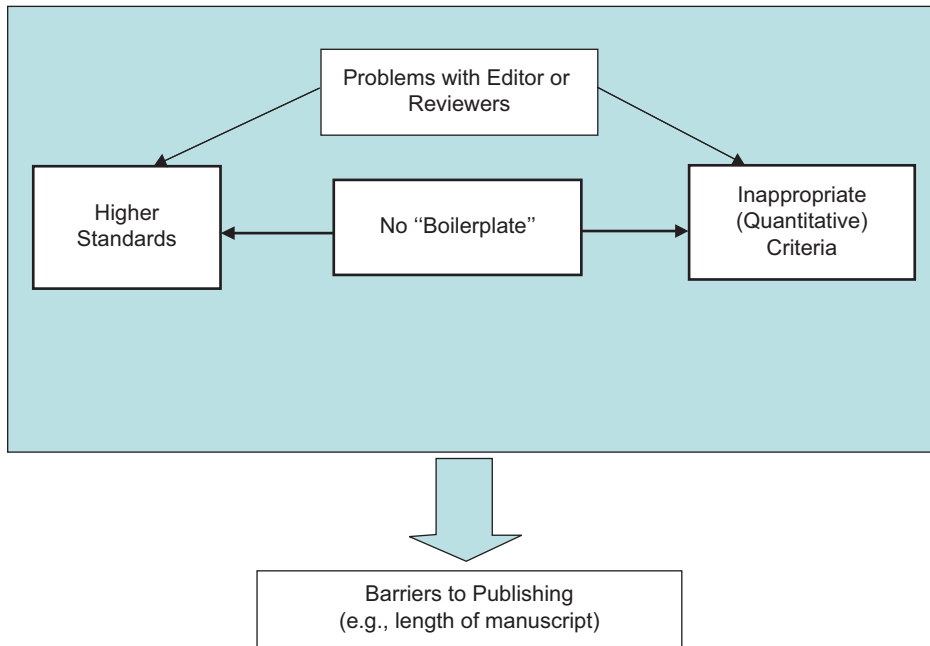
1. Overly high standards. One of the common complaints of qualitative researchers is that qualitative research has to be much better than its quantitative counterpart to be accepted. This sentiment is echoed by Gephardt (2004) who notes, ''Many scholars believe that good qualitative research is more difficult and time consuming to create than good quantitative research'' (pp. 460-461). Informants often attributed these higher standards to higher expectations of reviewers. As one informant notes, ''Some scholars impose higher standards on qualitative research than on quantitative research (in terms of data quality, for example, or logical rigor)'' (see also Table 4). Similarly, another complained:

> If I held ''quanto'' papers up to my standards, ASQ and AMJ would go out of business, since I do not believe that a study of process (and most are) that does not directly measure or observe that process is acceptable science. I do not hold these papers up to that standard, so they get published! Bottom line, quant work has luxury of lower standards in some ways.

It is interesting to note that this difference in perceived standards was even felt by researchers who conducted both qualitative and quantitative research:

> I have never had a quantitative study rejected by a journal because I am a fairly good researcher and writer (to A, A–, and B journals). On the other hand, of the six times I have submitted qualitative work to the same level journals, I have had only one acceptance (the one that put me on your contact list).

Table 4
Evaluation Tensions and Frustrations Stemming From
Comparisons of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Tension	Illustrative Quotes
No "boilerplate"	"Lack of clear standards that the reviewers understand." "Lack of clarity on determining/evaluating rigor and even agreement on what constitutes the correct ways of executing different qualitative methodologies." "More variability among reviewers because fewer standards to follow (e.g., nothing comparable to *p* value of a statistic)." "Inconsistent or ambiguous evaluation criteria." "Because there are many kinds of qualitative research and fewer shared standards, this often seems to make things even harder as each person has their own biases about how work should be done and tends to impose them." "More evaluators do not understand or accept methodology not institutionalized format for setting up study motivation." "With quantitative research, people follow the numbers and fairly well-accepted protocols for analysis. In qualitative research, I have to walk the reader through every step of data collection and analysis and justify why I made each choice."
Standards are too high	"The requirement for new, creative theoretical contribution seems higher the demand for rich, interesting data and narratives seems higher." "Qualitative papers are at a disadvantage from the beginning simply because they have to be so much better than the average quantitative paper. Because qualitative researchers suffer from an inferiority complex (being the poor and embarrassing cousin to the gentrified quantitative academics) they are reviewed with a much more critical and discerning eye." "Also, while a quantitative study can be interesting if it tests a known theory in a new context, a qualitative study seems to have to contribute something 100% new—this isn't always possible and it's unfair to expect it." "Requirements regarding theory development, modeling are much higher compared to quantitative papers."
Standards are inappropriate	"The editor kept asking for more and more quantitative analyses, although the qualitative analysis was good and based on well-known methodological sources." "Sometimes reviewers ask for rather stupid numerical 'tests' of 'validity', for example, number of times a phrase is used, rather than asking for writers to substantiate in other ways why one concept became prominent Also, I think that writers and reviewers struggle with the 'n' problem." "Reviewers are often looking for a hypothesis generation section, and for how the paper builds from existing research—not for what is different from the existing—then say there is nothing different in the paper." "It depends on the reviewer but many reviewers seem to evaluate qualitative (interpretive) research with positivistic criteria." "Positivist 'standards of proof' are held up to see if the findings are 'true' or 'right.'" "In general, the positivist perspective is applied by most reviewers in evaluating qualitative research—for example, complaints that research is not 'scientific' and interpretations are 'subjective.'" "Review comments often assume or adopt one way of how the research should look that usually corresponds with the deductive quantitative model of doing and presenting research." "Qualitative papers expected to fit validity concepts form quantitative methods." "Many reviewers seem to evaluate qualitative (interpretive) research with positivistic criteria." "Positivist researchers use criteria (e.g., sampling criteria) that is inappropriate for interpretive studies. Reviewers are not always knowledgeable about qualitative methods and don't appreciate distinctions."

This particular frustration over the height of standards may come, in part, from the criteria that qualitative research must be novel. This sentiment was expressed by one informant: ''While a quantitative study can be interesting, if it tests a known theory in a new context, a qualitative study seems to have to contribute something 100% new; this isn't always possible and it's unfair to expect it.'' However, high standards are more often related to the lack of common reviewing standards. As the same informant notes:

> Because there are many kinds of qualitative research and fewer shared standards, this often seems to make things even harder as each person has their own biases about how work should be done and tends to impose them. I think qualitative research is evaluated far too obsessively; no slack is allowed for normal imperfections that would be passed off as OK limitations in a quant study; reviewers seem suspicious and insecure.

Similarly, another informant notes:

> I think that qualitative research does not have the commonly understood methodological short-hand that quantitative research does, thus researchers have to explain and justify their methods much more (compared to writing something such as ''we conducted a multiple regression analysis''). Consequently, evaluations are more skeptical and looking for proof of adequate rigor.

2. Inappropriate (quantitative) standards. Another common complaint was that qualitative research often, and inappropriately, is judged based on criteria more appropriate for quantitative papers, or perhaps more accurately, positivistic, and deductive research (see Table 4). As one informant suggests, "In general, the positivist perspective is applied by most reviewers in evaluating qualitative research—for example, complaints that research is not 'scientific' and interpretations are 'subjective.'"
The same informant elaborates:

> In general, the positivist perspective is applied by most reviewers in evaluating qualitative research. For example, complaints that research is not ''scientific'' and interpretations are ''subjective,'' requirements to explain each and every trivial aspect of methods/design (even though it might make the methods section tens of pages long), insistence on writing down propositions/hypotheses, mindless insistence on providing numbers and counts for their own sake, complaints that authors are not doing enough to generalize and, once you take them up on it, complaints about whether qualitative research is generalizable at all.

As with the imposition of standards that are too high, the lack of consensus around standards often meant that deductive ones were used in their place. As one informant notes,

> In evaluating qualitative research, there is insufficient recognition of its variety in methodology and epistemology. So, review comments often assume or adopt one way of how the research should look that usually corresponds with the deductive quantitative model of doing and presenting research. More focus on generating possible alternative hypotheses for phenomenon observed and presented.

Although the lack of a boilerplate was viewed as a significant cause for having standards that were too high or inappropriate, the editors and reviewers also played a critical

role. However, rather than serving as a key means of accepting papers (see Table 1), they were primarily viewed as obstacles to their acceptance. Thus, although not an evaluation criteria per se, editor and reviewer characteristics were linked to the imposition of higher standards on qualitative research. Most often, the link was between ill-equipped reviewers and higher standards:

> The biggest issue is that qualitative papers are often reviewed by reviewers who are either not adequately trained in qualitative methods, or who may not regard qualitative research as being as valid as quantitative research. As such, qualitative research must meet a higher standard.

However, a few informants also noted that qualitative researchers often "raise the bar" in their evaluations. This, combined with a lack of agreed-upon standards, can make publishing qualitative research quite difficult. As one informant noted:

> Even boring quantitative research gets published; careful, yet uneventful qualitative work will get ditched. Qualitative researchers are usually very stringent when reviewing, which is fine, but makes the bar much higher; oddly enough, constructs in quantitative can be daft and unrelated to any sense of reality and it's okay as long as the regressions have stars, clearly not so in qualitative!

In a similar vein, another informant noted that his editor friend believed that "qualitative researchers are much harder on one another than those in other subareas such as population ecologists."

"Quantitative" editors and reviewers were also seen as the cause of the imposition of inappropriate standards:

> I believe most quantitative reviewers, which make most of the reviewers in top-tier American journals, do not know enough about qualitative epistemology and methodology to actually appreciate qualitative work in its own terms. Thus, they use evaluations that better fit a quantitative approach.

A key implication of these issues—missing boilerplate, inappropriate or unreasonable standards, and poorly trained editor and reviewers—was that there were significant perceived barriers to publishing qualitative research (see Figure 1). Some of these barriers were direct: For example, evaluating a paper using inappropriate criteria means that it is more likely to get rejected. However, there was a strong indirect effect as well. To satisfy inconsistent, inappropriate, or otherwise difficult evaluation criteria, qualitative researchers ultimately had to write longer and longer papers, thus making them difficult to fit into a journal format. For example, because of a lack of standardized protocols for methods, Method sections can get very long:

> The burden is higher to "prove" the results are valid. With quantitative research, people follow the numbers and fairly well-accepted protocols for analysis. In qualitative research, I have to walk the reader through every step of data collection and analysis and justify why I made each choice.

Some complained of having to write Method sections "tens of pages long." Sometimes, this added length is the direct result of editors and reviewers who are attempting to impose more deductive and positivistic standards, as well as a higher standard of "proof" for an author's assertions:

> The editor kept asking for more and more quantitative analyses, although the qualitative analysis was good and based on well-known methodological sources. Qualitative manuscript is longer because of the many quotes, but the editor did not accept a longer paper than the standard.

In sum, the perceived outcome of having either too high or inappropriate standards was that it was exceedingly difficult for qualitative researchers to have all the detail necessary to meet the evaluative standards, while at the same time meeting format standards (e.g., page lengths) required by the journals.

Building From the Different Perspectives: Tensions and Metaphor

The findings presented thus far suggest some inconsistencies in the evaluation of qualitative research in top-tier North American journals. On the one hand, the evidence in Tables 1 to 3 suggests that there is some consensus around the criteria that are currently being used to assess qualitative research in top-tier North American journals. Moreover, the most often cited criteria appear applicable to all empirical (quantitative and qualitative) research: having a strong contribution to theory, writing well, and having an appropriate method that is clearly described. On the other hand, it was also clear that qualitative research lacks common evaluative standards, or a boilerplate for communicating its methods (see Table 4). As a result, the criteria currently being used to evaluate qualitative research appears inadequate or inappropriate (see Table 4 and Figure 1). Taken together, these findings appear to mirror the conundrum used to open this article: that qualitative research should, and also should not, be evaluated by criteria similar to that used for quantitative research. How can these two perspectives be reconciled?

At one level, it may be that there is agreement on the criteria that are used, but disagreement over whether these specific criteria should be used to assess qualitative research. However, there was no mention by respondents wearing their "author" and "editor or reviewer" hats that qualitative research should be exempt from having strong theoretical contributions, clear and appropriate methods, and well-written manuscripts. A more likely interpretation is that there is agreement on the endpoints—what published research should generally strive to achieve—but disagreement on how qualitative research best meets these endpoints. In other words, the disagreements surfaced in the data suggest that the fulfillment of these broad criteria take a different shape for qualitative versus quantitative research. There are several reasons why qualitative research may differ in how it meets these evaluative criteria.

First, because much inductive research is theory-building, it is often not enough to build from existing theory; you must also build new theory (see Tables 2 and 3). In general, there appears to be strong pressures for novelty in theory (as well as in context and/or methods) in qualitative research (see also Table 1). This is captured in a tension of having to break from existing theory (to create new theory) while being firmly embedded in extant theory.

Second, good writing is critical to all research. However, in qualitative research, good writing is integrally tied to how evidence is brought to bear in convincing the audience (see Table 3). But for qualitative researchers, writing up evidence is oftentimes tricky, as one must balance the tension between showing too much data (showing) versus interpreting your data for your readers (telling; see Table 2).

Finally, having an appropriate and clearly described method is critical to all research in top-tier North American journals. However, for qualitative researchers, the lack of a boilerplate, and disagreements about whether such boilerplates were acceptable, meant additional challenges for publishing research. On the one hand, qualitative researchers must be detailed and expressive in their discussion of their methods and data. On the other hand, all this needs to be done within the format and page limits of a traditional research format of a top-tier North American journal (see Table 4 and Figure 1). Thus, qualitative researchers feel a third tension: to be expansive (i.e., detailed and transparent) while also adhering to the traditional format restrictions.

The unique challenges of meeting common evaluative criteria when publishing qualitative research in top-tier North American journals is less an issue of fitting a square peg into a round hole and more of fitting an oval peg into a round hole. There is enough overlap that it is easy to see why some researchers, such as the first one quoted in this article, see little difference in evaluating qualitative research. At an abstract level, both need to be well-written, contribute to theory, and have clear and appropriate methods. However, the fulfillment of these abstract goals is quite different and shows itself as unique tensions for qualitative research (e.g., showing vs. telling). Thus, the frustration of the second reviewer who notes that using the exact same criteria means that qualitative research does not quite fit.

Further compounding the frustration is that not all journals have "round" holes. Thus, not all qualitative research, especially in other disciplines, has the same emphasis on building theory—for example, see Thomas' (2002) critique of coupling theory and qualitative research in education; however, it is a critical component in top-tier North American organization and management journals. Similarly, the informants suggest that well-articulated Method sections may be more of a North American obsession. As some noted, in non-North-American journals, the "issue of methodology is not as important." Finally, although there is likely a quality-of-writing standard for most (or all) research, what constitutes good writing may vary. As many informants noted, conforming to more positivistic standards appears to be important for the journals I have targeted here but may not be important for other journals. For example, several authors noted that European journals are "NOT [emphasis in original] looking for a qual study that uses quant studies as a template." Thus, depending on one's disciplinary tradition or where one typically publishes, one might be expecting more "oval" holes, or perhaps bigger holes that accommodate more diversity.

Fitting Oval Pegs Into Round Holes: Some Suggestions From Published Work

So how does one manage the tensions of fitting an oval peg into a round hole? There appear to be two obvious responses. The first, and the one that has received a considerable amount of

attention in organizational studies, is to make qualitative research look "rounder"—that is, to make it more closely mimic quantitative research. A second approach would be to make the round holes "larger," or at least more "oval friendly." I will briefly touch on each of these tactics below. However, there is also a third approach: one that focuses on the fitting rather than what is being fit. This involves tackling directly some of the unique manifestations of publishing tensions faced by qualitative researchers (e.g., build new theory while embracing the old). Because this area has received the least attention, it comprises the bulk of my recommendations. These latter recommendations take the form of tactics for managing publishing tensions. For each tactic, I offer some existing research that illustrates its use.

1. Making "Oval" Pegs Seem "Round"(er)

One strategy for publishing qualitative research in top-tier North American journals is to make research more palatable to quantitative (or more specifically, positivist) reviewers. Given the perceived bias toward quantitative work, this strategy has been highly effective for some authors. Qualitative research can be made more palatable in two ways: mimicking quantitative research and including quantitative data. With regard to the former, two general types of mimicking have been proposed: mimicking structure and mimicking criteria.

One way to minimize the publishing tensions is to write a qualitative paper using the general formatting of a quantitative paper, moving from "literature review to methods, results, and concluding with a discussion" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997, p. 9). This general format is found in most, if not all, qualitative papers published in top-tier North American journals. I adopted this format in this article as an example of the type of headings and structure used in this approach. Sometimes, however, mimicking structure can be more extreme. For example, Sutton (1997) talks about how one can and should engage in "closet" qualitative research where qualitative data or findings are hidden to various degrees in other formats (e.g., creating a theory paper but not mentioning that it was based on a qualitative study).

Mimicking can also take the form of adopting parallel or closely approximate criteria for evaluation (Kirk & Miller, 1986; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lee, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, even though a fundamental drawback of most qualitative research is its lack of statistical generalizability, other forms of generalizability for qualitative research have been proposed. Yin (2003), for example, argues that case studies rely on analytical generalizability where data is generalized to a theory, not to a sample. Ecological validity argues that a theory must capture key contextual aspects of a theory for it to be relevant (Lee, 1999). And naturalistic generalization (Stake, 2000) argues that one can create a sense of external validity by recognizing how one case is similar to another. To illustrate, one can recognize an oak as a tree after seeing a maple tree. A student in my qualitative research methods class, John Burke, summed up this type of generalizability with a Chinese proverb: "A sparrow is small, but it has all the organs." Thus, one can argue that an in-depth study of any organization can lead to insights into other organizations because at some level "they all have the same organs."

A second major way to make qualitative research more palatable to quantitative reviewers is to include quantitative data in the paper. This tactic was explicitly mentioned by some of the informants in my study. One noted that a key reason for his or her paper's

acceptance was a "good mix of qualitative and quantitative data and interpretation of findings." Similarly, another attributed her or his acceptance to the fact that "qualitative findings were supplemented with convergent quantitative data." The popularity and legitimacy of this combination is evident in books on qualitative methods/design that explicitly discuss "mixed methods" approaches (Creswell, 2003; Lee, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994); and Sutton and Rafaeli's (1988) award-winning AMJ article on displayed emotions is an example of this type. A similar tactic is the quantitative analysis of qualitative data. I discuss that particular tactic later in this article.

2. Making Round Holes Larger (or More Oval Friendly)

A second tactic for improving the fit of qualitative research into top-tier North American journals would be to make the evaluation criteria for acceptance broader, or at least more qualitative friendly. Most of my informants suggest that this would entail having journal editors and reviewers who are trained in qualitative methods. In the short run, this would involve using more qualitative researchers as reviewers and editors; however, to enact more fundamental change would necessitate a rather significant shift in the methods training done in North America. As one informant pointed out:

> Ph.D. programs do not deal with qualitative methods in as much detail as they do with statistical analysis. I am now coming across Ph.D. candidates from good programs who don't seem to know much (if anything) about naturalistic inquiry or grounded theorizing.

The ability of any single author or group of authors to precipitate such a change, of course, is rather low. Hence, it is not surprising that many researchers attempt to fit their research into a more quantitative format rather than tackling broader institutional forces. But its difficulty does not countervail its necessity. Offering stand-alone qualitative methods courses, rather than one or two class sessions on qualitative methods in a general methods course, may be a good place to start.

3. Focusing on the Process of Fitting

My findings suggest that at least three broad sets of tensions exist for qualitative researchers: (a) the need to both be embedded in and break from extant theory, (b) the need to balance presenting data and interpreting it, and (c) the need to adequately describe one's analysis, but to also fit one's manuscript into the journal's format (e.g., page length). To manage these tensions, I offer several suggestions. These suggestions come from a variety of sources, including published treatments on writing up qualitative research; my own experiences as a qualitative author, reviewer, and editor; and lessons learned from examining exemplary published qualitative research. Although the suggestions roughly map onto these three tensions, each may be seen as addressing multiple tensions.

Creating open theoretical frames. As noted, qualitative research has to recognize and draw on existing theory while simultaneously distancing itself from it in an attempt to generate something new. This is especially difficult for problem-centered research that

attempts to build new theory. Problem-centered research stems from an occurring phenomenon or real-life issue rather than from the gaps in one or two theories. Because it does not stem from a particular theory, its framing may have to be expansive. For example, imagine you wanted to study why some leaders are inspirational and others are not. This issue would likely necessitate, at minimum, drawing on research in leadership, the psychology of being a follower, rhetoric, persuasion/social influence, and conformity. You might also draw on sense making or sense giving, theories of attraction, modeling and vicarious learning, impression management, social perception, and work in religious studies of inspiration. If you are interested in what organizational conditions are important in this process, you might extend this list even further. How then do you manage to review the relevant literature and position your contribution as something new? How would you differentiate inspirational from visionary or charismatic? One way to do so is via the creation of open theoretical frames.

In dozens of qualitative articles that I have reviewed, I have found that authors are often skilled at noting what the literature has said but not as effective at using the literature to argue or demonstrate what has not been said. Creating open theoretical frames involves both reviewing and critiquing the literature in such a way that the author(s) is(are) able to delineate the boundaries of what has been written, and at the same time, create a space representing where research has been largely silent. For example, in Barley's (1986) piece on how CT scanners influence the social order in a radiology department, he begins with a review of research on technology from an anthropological, sociological, historical, and economic perspective. He then adds what has been written by organizational theorists and finishes with a brief overview of structuration. However, he does not simply restate what these theories say. He also is clear about each theory's limitations. The end result is that each theory becomes a piece of a larger puzzle that is not yet complete: theories are juxtaposed to show their limitations and their "empty spaces"; these spaces are then filled with data.

Similarly, in a study of physicians, my colleagues and I examine the issue of professional identity development (Pratt et al., 2006). We suggest that this question has been addressed—to varying degrees—in the careers and roles, socialization, and identity work literatures. Similar to Barley, when reviewing each literature, we are careful to point out the boundaries of each set of theories—where they extend and where they do not. For example, we note that although socialization often implies identity change, "little is said about how members actively use identity-related information to construct their own identities" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 237). We then move to our methods and data and use the latter to illustrate not only how various theories fit together but also how our data fill in those pieces that extant theory does not yet address. In our concluding pages, we construct a model (see Figure 2 on p. 253) and discuss how the process we uncover in our data actually links disparate findings across multiple literatures. Thus, our contribution is not just to a specific theory but also to a greater understanding of how what we know in various literatures are actually parts of a larger, broader dynamic process (identity construction) that we illustrated.

Filling in these frames with data speaks to a related issue of how to present theory in relation to data. In general, most researchers compartmentalize theory and data by putting them in separate sections of an article. Although it is possible to interweave theory throughout the presentation of the data (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997), in many articles,

they are kept apart. I have previously discussed (Pratt, 2000b) this separation as two types of theory-data sandwiches: one where there is a good deal of theory before and after the data (a "data sandwich"; see Gephart, 1978, as an illustration) and one where the theory largely goes after the data (an "open-faced data sandwich"; see Pratt & Rosa, 2003, as an illustration). (As an aside, while both formats are present in the literature, I find that reviewers often like to have a fair amount of theory in the introduction before the presentation of data; hence they like data sandwiches.) Depending on what type of qualitative methodology is used, the juxtaposition of theory and data may take slightly different forms or use different labels. To illustrate, Van Maanen (1979) advocates a specific kind of theory-data separation in writing up ethnographies: between first-order concepts, which are from the informant's perspective, and second-order concepts, which are infused with theory. Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) article on strategic sense making and sense giving illustrates this type of separation.

Creating a hands-on exhibit: Showing and telling within page limits. Although some researchers pointed out in the survey that they were often given some latitude in page limits for their submissions, qualitative researchers need to be cognizant of the contribution-to-length ratio. This ratio is often an issue when deciding how much data to include in a paper. For qualitative researchers who want to minimize the violence they do to their experiences in the field—that is, to minimize the distortion that may be caused by translating their experiences with a group or organization into theory—this challenge is a serious one. As depicted in Figure 2, attempts to reduce the length of data description often come at the cost of doing violence to experience. For example, writing up thick description, as was done by Geertz (1973), focuses most on showing the story of those studied and thus does the least violence to experience. However, thick description is difficult to publish in top-tier North American organizational journals because (a) it often takes too much space to provide such a description and (b) in and of itself, thick description does not necessitate taking the further step to build or extend theory. At the other extreme, researchers can translate their experiences in the field directly into theory and write a theory paper. This saves considerable space (e.g., no Method section); however, it is probably the most removed from the experience of the informants. As a result, many qualitative researchers use one of the middle approaches—most often in combination.

Some of these middle approaches toward data reduction are illustrated here. For example, in the discussion of the criteria used when the authors' work was evaluated (Perspective 1: What Criteria Do Respondents View as Important as Authors?), I used only thematic counts to communicate my qualitative data. These counts were bolstered by some triangulation with survey data. The net benefits of such an approach are that it provides a relatively concise summary of the data and can be relatively easily compared with quantitative data. However, there are some hidden costs of this approach as well. First, thematic counts may fail to account for "taken-for-granted" meanings; thus, unless the point is to argue that consensus of opinions is important, which was partially the case here, this approach may be misleading. For example, few noted how important it was that their research fit the general theme of the journal (e.g., management); however, it is likely that this sentiment would have been expressed by most (if not all) of the authors if asked directly.

Figure 2
Translation "Trade Offs"
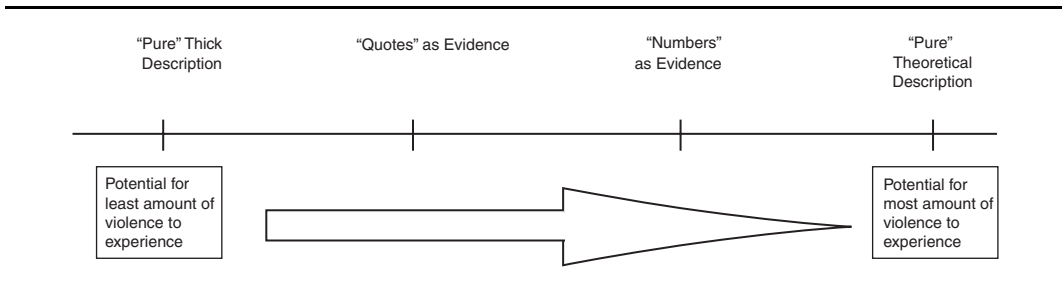
Second, it is unclear how to manage cutoffs. For example, how many people must report a theme for it to be significant? In Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) award-winning article about homelessness and the Port Authority, a critical theme for the ultimate resolution of their issue (the organization as a fixer of problems) was only reported by 25% of their sample. I chose 10% as a cutoff in this article (although I noted one theme that was only reported by 6%) because each of these themes was further supported in other data. In other words, I used a cutoff that allowed me to surface those themes that would have support in other sources (i.e., could be confirmed via triangulation). However, I could have easily made the argument for a higher percentage. Of course, even at high percentages, thematic counts can be deceptive. For example, 52% of respondents in Table 1 listed the importance of theory. Getting half of a sample of academics to agree on something would appear to be solid evidence. However, what if theoretical importance was noted by 100% of the men in my sample and only 4% of the women? (Note: This is a hypothetical example; I did not collect data on sex.) Would this still be significant? One could of course continue to cut one's data into finer and finer chunks, but this would appear to have some diminishing returns.

Third, in my own experience, I find that the use of theme counts often triggers more positivistic frames by reviewers. However, if one's goal is to look more like a round peg, then this tactic would be consistent with that aim. Finally, this approach literally hides the voice of the informant—a voice that many qualitative researchers want to capture. One needs to ask, "Does an article's thematic categories mirror the language used by its sample?" Without some data, it is impossible to tell.

As a result of these shortcomings, many researchers use quotations from informants (note: they are no longer respondents as they are in surveys as you are treating them as experts and using their own voice) or other data sources to illustrate their points. As noted in the section, Perspective 2: What Criteria Do Respondents Feel Are Important as Editors or Reviewers?, one approach is to combine thematic counts with a few illustrative quotes. This assuages concerns over voice somewhat, but other concerns remain. For example, should you pick the quotes that best represent the average response, or do you pick the most vivid or interesting one? Moreover, even using this approach, most of the critiques of thematic counts (e.g., the issue of taken-for-grantedness, establishing meaningful cutoffs, and triggering positivistic frames) remain. Although the use of quotes in this way is

sometimes used, incorporating many quotes in an article quickly fills one's allotted number of pages.

Some have attempted to circumvent this issue by putting most or all of their informants' quotes in tables at the end of the article. Although this saves space, it removes the informant's voice from the body of the article. This is analogous to how I wrote the ''Creating Open Theoretical Frames'' section. Here, I refer to articles and what they did, but you have to go to those articles to see what actually happened, just as you would have to go to the back of a article to see the quotes. Although my illustration clearly involves more effort (going to another article), based on my own experience, some reviewers never make it back to the tables; thus the richness of the data is entirely lost. Additionally, it is often helpful to have interpretations and data side by side to better help the reviewer judge the veracity of your interpretations. That said, the mere presence of a table (or in this case, cited work) can serve to add some legitimacy to one's findings.

As an author, reviewer, and editor, I find that a combination of ''within-the-body-of-the-text'' quotes and compartmentalized ''in-table'' quotes is common. I used this approach in the section, Perspective 3: How Is Qualitative Research Evaluated in Comparison to Quantitative Research? Although these sections can be long, there are some unique advantages of this approach. This combination illustrates that quotes often have two purposes: power and proof. Power quotes are those where the informant is so poetic, concise, or insightful, that the author could not do a better job of making the same point. These should appear in the body of your paper. Proof quotes are often used to show the prevalence of a point. These quotes may be a source of triangulation where you show how each data source supports a particular argument. Proof quotes may also be presented as a bundle of short quotes that are used to illustrate the prevalence of findings. These proof quotes, I would argue, should be compartmentalized from your text—ideally in a table—so that you have enough space to make the arguments that you need to make. (See Tables 3 and 4 for illustrations).

The general effect one wants to have is one akin to a ''hands-on'' museum. Think of your paper as a museum. You can spend most of your findings section telling about what you found but not giving the reader access to your data. This is similar to a museum where all of the exhibits are behind glass. In a hands-on museum, you are inviting the reader to interact with your data. Sufficient quotes both interspersed in the paper and set off in tables invite the reader to discover what you have learned. However, these exhibits are not simply ''lying around.'' They are in museums, and these museums have themes. Thus, your introduction is critical for identifying the type of museum (e.g., art, science) that you are creating for the exhibits—exhibits that will ultimately both showcase and reinforce the museum theme. A wonderful example of this approach can be found in Locke's (1996) description of how pediatric personnel manage the emotions of patients and their families through comedic performances. She carefully builds her theoretical edifice (museum) and then provides several tables full of quotes as ample evidence for her theoretical arguments (exhibits). But her data are not confined there. Rather, they are also sprinkled throughout her findings to both construct the narrative and strengthen the theoretical story. In doing so, she not only creates a convincing argument but also provides ample room for play and learning. There is enough data provided that the reader need not ''take her word for it'' but can come to his or her own conclusions as well.

Creating checklists. As noted above, one tension faced by qualitative researchers is that they do not have the templates that other empirical researchers, namely quantitative researchers, have. As a result, Method sections can get very long and convoluted. Although having agreed-upon templates may make it easier to fit a qualitative study into a journal-length format, it is not clear that one template will work for the various types of qualitative methods. Thus, I suggest managing this tension through the creation of checklists rather than through templates. Checklists point out what elements need to be a part of a Method section without prescribing the order of or the form for how these elements are to be addressed. But what should such a checklist include? Because this article is specifically aimed at publishing in top-tier North American journals, I examined qualitative articles that have been viewed as having great impact on the field as assessed by journal awards. *Academy of Management Journal* has granted a best paper award since 1986. *Administrative Science Quarterly* has awarded a scholarly contribution award since 1995; these awards are granted 5 years after an article has been published so that one can assess their impact on the field. From these winning articles, eight were identified as either partially or largely qualitative.[3] From these articles, some commonalities emerged for what elements a qualitative methods section should likely have. These elements can be viewed as a series of four nested questions. Although I present them as nested, this does not mean that these questions need to be answered in this order. Indeed, the award-winning articles each addressed these questions in a different order. These questions are summarized in Figure 3.

First, articles need to be clear about the following: Why this study? This question can be answered in two ways. To begin, it may involve an explanation for why qualitative methods are appropriate to use for a given research question. In addition, it may be answered by stating one's purpose: to build, elaborate, or test theory. Elsbach and Kramer's (2003) piece is a fine exemplar for writing about a study's purpose (pp. 285-286).

Second, researchers need to address the following question: Why study here? Given that qualitative work takes seriously the context in which a study is embedded, it is not surprising that each of these articles explained in some detail the nature of the context as well as their rationale for choosing it for a particular study. These logics often range from being an extreme case—where hard-to-study dynamics are easier to observe (Dutton and Dukerich's, 1991, Port Authority article)—to model cases where the context in question is prototypical of other cases, and thus the findings should be generalizable (Uzzi's, 1997, apparel industry study).

Third, researchers need to be clear about sampling issues, particularly the following: What am I studying, and why? Some researchers sample events (Isabella, 1990), others sample organizational cases (Zbaracki, 1998), and still others, people (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Qualitative researchers also need to be clear about the sampling strategy employed, be it purposeful, theoretical, or some other type (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Fourth, researchers need to be clear about issues of data analysis: How did I study these things? Whereas much positivistic empirical research is designed so that method and results can be replicable (even if this rarely happens; Collins, 1982), this outcome is typically not associated with qualitative research for numerous reasons (e.g., the person is the analytic tool, the unique constellation of relationships and interviews make some qualitative methods impossible to truly replicate). However, the standardization of methodology does create, rightly or wrongly, a sense of trust that the author knows what he or she is doing. Qualitative

Figure 3
Proposed Checklist of Questions to Be Addressed in Qualitative Methods Sections

1. Why this study?
  a. Why are qualitative methods appropriate?
  b. Am I building, elaborating, or testing theory?

2. Why study here?
  a. What is the nature of the context I am examining?
  b. What was my rationale for choosing this context?

3. What am I studying and why?
  a. Am I sampling events, cases, people, etc.?
  b. What is my sampling strategy?

4. How did I study these things?
  a. How did I analyze the data?
  b. How did I link data with theory?

researchers often attempt to garner such trust by showing that there was an intentional design and analysis strategy. This includes discussing steps for analyzing data (beyond a quick nod to Glaser & Strauss', 1967, work) and an explanation for how data is related to findings. In this way, focus shifts away from replicability to expertise of the researcher. Such expertise is often illustrated by taking the reader step by step through the major portions of the data analysis. Both Barker (1993) and Zbaracki (1998), for example, take a very conversational but detailed approach in walking the reader through the major parts of their methods, from sample selection to analysis. As with other recently published qualitative articles, they both cite several qualitative methods sources as well (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley 1979; Stake, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), adding even further legitimacy to the methods.

As a general strategy, most of these award-winning articles contain tables and figures that complement their methodological descriptions. Although not part of this award-winning sample (at least not yet), Corley and Gioia's (2004) recent work on a corporate spin-off provides a clear illustration of the use of tables and figures to illustrate various methodological points. Their Figure 2, for example, illustrates how they go from their data and first-order findings to the aggregate conceptual dimensions they use for building theory.

To close, although qualitative researchers may never agree on what a template should look like, we may be able to narrow down what questions should be addressed. If award-winning articles are any indication, researchers should, at minimum, address these four questions when submitting their research to top-tier North American journals. Such a checklist should

complement more detailed lists about what to put into qualitative articles. Lee's (1999) book, *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, for example, poses several questions for authors to answer prior to submitting a paper to a journal (pp. 174-176).[4]

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the ongoing debate about qualitative research evaluation criteria by framing the discussion in terms of the criteria enacted when publishing in top-tier North American organizational and management journals. Although the general debate over which criteria to use, as well as some of the specific publishing-related complaints lodged by qualitative researchers, are not new, I provide (a) a grounding of criteria-in-use used by a key segment of the community of inquiry (qualitative researchers), (b) an explanation for why there is both consensus and discensus around evaluation criteria, (c) an organizing metaphor for understanding these points of consensus and disagreement (fitting an oval peg into a round hole), and (d) a range of options for fitting oval pegs into the round holes offered by top-tier North American journals.

Of course, the article is not without its limitations. (Note: I am continuing to mimic the quantitative form of manuscript). To begin, I sampled researchers who have published or are engaged in qualitative research of some sort. However, the community of inquiry for evaluating qualitative research is broader than this and includes those who do "mixed" methods research (some of whom are represented here) and those who solely do quantitative research. Thus, although conversations about the evaluation criteria used for qualitative research are typically found in articles and books about qualitative research (see Daft, 1985, as a noticeable exception), the conversation may need to get broader.

In addition, I limited the target of publication to top-tier North American organization and management journals. I deliberately do not make claims that such criteria hold in other management or organizational journals—either in the United States or in other countries—or in other qualitative outlets (e.g., chapters and books). Thus, the lessons drawn from this article may not be generalizable. However, I also argue that this limitation is also its strength. Research has tended to take a broad brush approach when discussing the publication of qualitative research, without looking at whether or how local standards vary. Although there is some anecdotal evidence in my data that European journals are more open to qualitative research (and this certainly has been my own experience as well), this remains an empirical question. If there are differences, then research on publishing qualitative research should take these variations into account.

I have also framed my article in terms of qualitative methods in general; however, *qualitative methods* is a broad umbrella term that refers to several different types of methodologies (e.g., grounded theory, hermeneutics, narrative analysis, etc.; see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I did not attempt to distinguish among them here. Clearly, some tensions raised here may vary depending on the technique used (e.g., grounded theory, content analysis, or hermeneutics) and the perspective adopted (e.g., postpositivist, social constructionist, interpretivist, feminist, or postmodern). In addition, most of the recommendations made here are for papers that are attempting to either build or elaborate theory, rather than the use of qualitative methods to test theory. Thus, although I address general tensions in

publishing qualitative research, I have not touched on tensions or issues that may be unique to a particular perspective.

I conclude by pointing out the somewhat ironic parallels with the writing of this article and the tensions noted here. All articles written for this special issue started with a proposal. This proposal began in a similar way to other attempts to discuss the publication process, using my own experience with publishing as a starting point (Daft, 1985; Gephardt, 2004; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997). However, the editors suggested that I do a survey to bolster my own assertions. Thus, in my first draft, I reported all of the survey findings. The net result was that it triggered very quantitative assessments by some reviewers, with one expressing concerns about the psychometric properties of the survey items. Clearly, I had not taken my own advice and had inadvertently cued evaluation criteria that were inconsistent with those that I felt were appropriate! More generally, the reviews revolved primarily around the methods and analysis of my study, and even the feedback from the qualitative reviewers fell largely into the categories listed here (I needed more theory; I needed more on how it is different from what has come before; I needed more convincing use of data; I needed a better balance of showing versus telling, etc.). Although the feedback provided not only some ironic confirmation of the publication issues noted above, but it also pointed to a larger issue of methods and stories. To me, the article was about the story; the survey was meant to be ''ground'' not ''figure.'' I even put the word *study* in quotation marks to show that I did not see it as the central theme. Thus, I was disappointed that I got little feedback on some of the key issues I was trying to express. I felt a tension between the evaluation of the methods (or study) versus the evaluation of the lessons (or story) that I was trying to convey.

However, one can look at the three tensions raised as indicative of this larger tension between what a paper's story is (i.e., its theory and the quality of its articulation) and how well the methods are described. The tension between methods and stories was brought home to me by the one author who refused to answer my survey. When I prompted him or her, he or she wrote back, ''I think that reviewers accept lots of flaws in qualitative research (except for a few morons), and ask 'Is it is interesting story?' 'Did it help me see organizational life differently?' And 'Do I believe it?''' Although the authors that did respond to my survey appeared to disagree at some level (e.g., that reviewers are not forgiving of methodological flaws), this again appeared to be another case of oval pegs and round holes. As with the other tensions noted here, the one between story and study may not be an issue of "either or," but an issue of "both-and."

Appendix A

Sample Characteristics

Sample 1: Authors. When submitting to the four top-tier journals mentioned, authors in this sample most frequently reported submitting to *Organization Science* (OS; 65%), *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ; 64%) and *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ; 57%). Only 23% reported submitting to *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ). In addition, 32% reported publishing

in other top-tier North American outlets. Of the 100 authors who answered the question of frequency of submission, respondents reported submitting anywhere between 1 and 18 manuscripts during this 11-year period with the most frequent being three (21%) or one (20%) manuscripts. Eighty-three percent submitted five or fewer manuscripts. Most (46%) reported having only one paper accepted during that time, with 84% reporting three or fewer acceptances. Moreover, of the 82 who answered this question,[a] 40.2% sent at least one qualitative paper to more than one journal, and 31.7% reported sending it to only one journal. The most journals anyone reported sending an article to ($n = 1$) was five journals. Finally, of the 78 people responding, more than half (57.7%) reported no papers still under review from the 1995 to 2005 time frame, and 34.6% reported having one manuscript still under review from that period. The upper end of this range was four papers still under review ($n = 1$).

Sample 2: RMNet. Similar to the other sample of respondents, these authors reported submitting primarily to three of the four journals listed: AMJ (44.4%), ASQ (44.4%), and OS (38.9%). Fewer submitted to SMJ (5.6%). More (44.4%) reported submitting to other top-tier North American outlets. Most reported submitting a given paper to only one (41.7%) or two (33.3%) journals, with a large majority (75%) reporting that the papers they submitted from 1995 to 2005 were still under review. Finally, most authors in this sample reported submitting one to two manuscripts during this time period (67%), with 64% getting at least one acceptance.

a. My thanks to Barbara Gray who suggested adding a question about how many journals a manuscript had been submitted to and suggesting adding a question about papers that were still under review.

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire Items

1. Which of the following comments related to STUDY DESIGN have you received from editors or reviewers when submitting your qualitative work to top-tier North American journals?
   Unclear purpose: Not clear whether you are doing inductive (e.g., theory building) or deductive (e.g., theory testing) research
   Unclear or missing description of context or sampling logic
   Missing or inadequately described methods
   Missing or inadequately described analysis
   Inappropriate methods for research question
   Other

2. Of the comments listed in Question 1, which were the most important to the editor and/or reviewers? (Note: If you did not check an item in the previous question, you need not rank it).

3. Which of the following comments about the FRAMING and CONTRIBUTION of your paper have you received from editors or reviewers when submitting your qualitative work to top-tier North American journals?
   Unclear or ill-defined research question
   Lack of clear motivation for your study (i.e., why you engaged in the study)
   Insufficient contribution to theory: Not enough links to existing theory
   Insufficient contribution to theory: Tied too closely to existing theory—nothing is new here
   Topic or findings not likely to be interesting to an organizational audience

Insufficient contribution to practice
Study is not generalizable
Other
4. Of the comments listed in Question 3, which were the most important to the editor and/
or reviewers? (Note: If you did not check an item in the previous question, you need not
rank it).
5. Which of the following comments related to YOUR STANCE AS A RESEARCHER
have you received from editors or reviewers when submitting your qualitative work to
top-tier North American journals?
Manuscript did not adequately communicate that you were there in the field
Did not adequately represent or distorted the voice of your informants
Did not clearly elaborate your role in the research project (e.g., action research)
Too much interpretation of data as compared with showing your data
Too much showing of your data (e.g., quotes) as compared with interpretation of your
data
Study was too subjective (e.g., author had an agenda or was not objective enough in his
or her write up)
Other
6. Of the comments listed in Question 5, which were the most important to the editor and/
or reviewers? (Note: If you did not check an item in the previous question, you need not
rank it).

Notes

1. To illustrate, *Academy of Management Journal* recently reported in their 2006 business meeting that the acceptance rate for papers was 8%. However, they have noted improvement with regards to the proportion of qualitative to quantitative articles appearing in their journals during 2005 (up from 5.5% of the articles in 2004 to 15% in 2006). In addition to their recent practices aimed at making the journal more qualitative friendly, two qualitative research papers tied for ''Best Papers'' this year.

2. This 10% cutoff was chosen based on two considerations. First and most importantly, all of the themes reported above 10% (actually 14% and above) were raised in other data sources. Second, I decided that given the range of qualitative methodological techniques, as well as the range of experiences of the reviewers (see Appendix B), that a lower cutoff would be justified.

3. This population includes the following in the *Academy of Management Journal*: Sutton and Rafaeli (1988), Isabella (1990), Dutton and Dukerich (1991), and Elsbach and Kramer (2003). *Administrative Science Quarterly* articles include Henderson and Clark (1990), Barker (1993), Uzzi (1997), and Zbaracki (1998).

4. One journal, the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, has gone so far as to create a list of ''basic criteria for acceptability'' for various types of qualitative research methods, including case studies, grounded, theory, and phenomenology (see Webb, 2003).

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