Issues of international intercultural research

The narrative interview process

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Doing international research: problems and solutions

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It is impossible for a theory of behavior to be simultaneously general, precise and simple.
W. Thorngate, "In general" vs. "it depends": some comments on the Gergen-Schlenker debate. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 2, p. 404-410, quoted by
Karl E. Weick, The Social Psychology of Organizing, © 1969, 1979 by Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, (German translation by Suhrkamp Verlag 1985, p. 54-64)

Important literature in cross cultural studies is general and simple:
4 culture dimensions [power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity] developed by Geert Hofstede
(e.g. G. Hofstede, Culture's Consequences. Sage, Beverly Hills 1980)
7 culture dimensions [universalism/particularism, individualism/collectivism, affectivity/neutrality, specific/diffuse cultures, status achievement/ascription, synchronous/sequential time, relation to nature] developed by Fons Trompenaars
(e.g. F. Trompenaars, Riding the Waves of Culture. Understanding Diversity in Global Business, Chicago 1983)

Although highly influential because of generality and simplicity these theories are insufficient to understand issues in intercultural management.

Intercultural management, a definition:
Interaction between and among people from different cultures in the context of management and business

For this we need: Precise, detailed information about what is happening in the context of management and business = contrary to general and simple!

The technique of narrative interviews allows to collect information/data without having a theory readily at hand. It is a hermeneutic method employed before theory building.
Whenever we have inadequately detailed information insufficient for theory building we apply this technique.
Theories are based on some knowledge which is ordered and organized in a if → then framework, i.e. a theoretical concept.
With narrative interviews we collect short stories about critical incidents in intercultural interaction in management which will be ordered and organized in a second step, when we begin to understand what's happening in international intercultural management.

Why do we need short stories?
Short stories about real incidents permit us (the experts) to analyze the reported events and to convert collected experience of mangers into knowledge. Otherwise we would collect only information about the reflections and prejudices of the interviewed persons.

Understanding the interview process:

When are people willing and able to tell little stories about remarkably different behavior of their counterparts in international intercultural business and management?

They must
a) have experienced something
b) find it to be a worthwhile story
c) be willing to tell the interviewer
d) still remember the incident

You can be sure that our counterparts have experienced something. The issue is to mobilize them:

Give them a chance to remember!
Tell them in advance that you hope to be told little stories about remarkable incidents personally experienced by the interviewed person
(at the telephone when you make the appointment or in writing before you go to the interview).

A story is worthwhile to be told if the interviewed person can impress the interviewer:
Tell them that a) the experience of the interviewed person is unique and very important.
b) short stories about incidents are an important tool for training and teaching of students and young managers.

The interviewed person is willing to tell little stories, if she/he finds the interviewer sympathetic, if she can help the interviewer to solve a difficult task. Interviewed persons find interviewers who belong to their own culture more sympathetic and trustworthy. Interviewed persons do not want to look bad or to lose their face.

You can create sympathy be showing similar habits during the interview (e.g. taking the same drink as the interviewed person). Express your thankfulness and sympathy for the interviewed person. They devote a lot of precious time to you. Interviewed persons are more willing to tell little stories if they feel important. They are willing to help the poor student who is collecting information, but does not understand the world.

When you are told little stories stimulate your counterpart by telling that this is an amazing or interesting experience.

Come back to stories only half told and try to get the complete story.

Insert a few control questions after you were told a little story:
"Why did the person from the other culture behave like this? Do you have an explanation?"
"How do you cope with that? Isn't that difficult to cope with?
The responses to these questions are supportive in the interview process and help at a later stage to distinguish between interests, values and prejudices.

All narrative interviews must be taped. You should produce a transcript of all narrative interviews and analyze the written text.
You should identify in the transcript complete short stories with a clear beginning and an end, identify also stereotypes and culture related remarks.

After each interview reflect on your interview experience, what went well, what wrong – and why? Ask experienced interviewers for advice. Share your experience with other interviewers!

Make a first summary analysis of the first 4-5 interviews, after 12 interviews, 18 interviews and at the end of a series of interviews. Organize the incidents by similarity of event. Usually after 12 interviews you will have a record which covers all important types of incidents. After 25 interviews you will be able to identify the most important types of incidents (you may establish a rank order by how many respondents did mention a similar type of incident).

For <u>final assessment</u>
you need people from the counterpart culture to tell you whether the incidents you have been told so often are culturally determined. You ask these people: "Are these incidents which were experienced in a specific business/management context due to culturally determined different behavior?". Let them explain to you what is the "normal behavior" in the other culture and why?

How we organize our research:

Master theses
Doctor theses
Working groups of master and doctorate students
International intercultural conference series
Interviewers / research partners in other countries
National and international research contracts

So far in the German, Austrian and Central European context we have undertaken about 60 bilateral and trilateral country studies. (Lead managers Alexander Thomas, University of Regensburg, Gerhard Fink, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien).

In Vienna we have a collection of 700 taped narrative interviews with managers.

A brief survey on German and English literature on qualitative research

Compiled by Markus Nölling and Anne-Katrin Neyer, Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für gegenwartsbezogene Mitteleuropaforschung, Wien, August 2002

Qualitative Research: German and English literature

Hermeneutic, phenomenological and also psychoanalytic approaches, which originated within German language philosophy at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were important for the development of qualitative research. The outstanding role of scholars from Austria, Germany and Switzerland ended during the time of German fascist censorship. After 1945 the quantitative research paradigm has become predominant in the field of social science. (Mruck, Katja/ Mey, Günter (2000): Qualitative Sozialforschung in Deutschland, Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Online Journal), Nr. 1/2000. See also: http://qualitative-research.net) Since the 60s and 70s qualitative research has had a revival in the academic discussion among German speaking scholars and in the USA. In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland a common

positive position emerged. The application of qualitative research methods in empirical projects is accepted. The Anglo-American research discussion during the 80s and 90s did not lead to full acceptance of qualitative research methods, the discussion is not yet over. (Flick, Uwe (2001): Qualitative Sozialforschung- Stand der Dinge, in Soziologie: Forum der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, Nr. 2/2001, Opladen 2001, p. 54.)

1. Method of data collection: Narrative Interviews

1.1 German literature
Depending on research interest - from very structured to highly open strategies - in German qualitative research a variety of interview methods is applied. A rather useful form is the Narrative Interview developed by Fritz Schütze, and his approach to give the freedom to an interviewee to explain his or her own view of his or her life biography or a part of it. This approach to give a full view of life data through narration is one of the most common methods of the Narration Analysis in the German language area. (Flick, Uwe (2001): Qualitative Sozialforschung- Stand der Dinge, in Soziologie: Forum der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, Nr. 2/2001, Opladen 2001, p. 57.) Since the 1970s the Narrative Interview was further developed and has gained in importance (Bernart, Y./Krapp S. (1998): Das narrative Interview. Ein Leitfaden zur rekonstruktiven Auswertung. (Forschung, Statistik & Methoden, Bd. 2),Landau 1998, p. 28.). Today it is considered to be the most developed Interview technique in qualitative social research. (Maindok, Herlinde (1996): Professionelle Interviewführung in der Sozialforschung:Interviewtraining: Bedarf, Stand und Perspektiven, Pfaffenweiler 1996, p. 94)
Schütze, Fritz (1976): Zur soziologischen und linguistischen Analyse von Erzählungen. In: Internationales Jahrbuch für Wissens- und Religionssoziologie, Köln 1976, pp. 7-41.

Schütze, Fritz (1977): Die Technik des narrativen Interviews in Interaktionsfeldstudien-dargestellt an einem Projekt zur Erforschung von kommunalen Machtstrukturen, Bielefeld 1977

Schütze, Fritz (1983): Biographieforschung und narrative Interview, Neue Praxis: Zeitschrift für
Sozialarbeit, Sozialpädagogik und Sozialpolitik, Neuwied 1983

1.2 English literature

1.2.1 Narrative Psychology:
Theorist: Jerome S. Brunner

Brunner expresses that "psychologists studying narrative are challenged by the notion that human activity and experience are filled with meaning and that stories, rather than logical arguments or lawful formulations, are the vehicle by which that meaning is communicated."
(Hevern, V.W.(2002, July): Narrative psychology: Internet and resource guide (Online). Syracuse, NY. Available: Http://maple.lemoyne.edu/~hevern/nrmaster.html)

Brunner, J. S. (1986): Actual minds, possible words. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brunner, J. S. (1990): Acts of Meaning Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brunner, J. S. (1991): The narrative construction of reality. Critical Inquiry, 18, 1-21.

Brunner, J. S. (1994): The "remembered" self. In Neisser, U. / Fivush, R. (Eds.): The remembering self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative, pp. 41-54. New York: Cambridge University Press

1.2.2 Narrative Analysis:

In 1967 Labov and Waletzky developed a useful framework for narratives (everyday conversations that their interviews simulated) in general. Since that time Labov has only published a few studies in this research field. Lobav argues as follows: "This is not because I have lost interest in the subject, for I have written and delivered a great many unpublished papers in this area. I may not have pursued theses papers into the domain of publication because the analysis of narrative was competing with quantitative studies..." (Labov, W. (1997): Some further steps in Narrative Analysis, in: Special Issue of The Journal of Narrative and Life History 1997 , Amsterdam 1997 p. 1.)

Labov, W. / Waletzky, J.(1967): Narrative Analysis. In Helm, J. (ed.): Essays on the verbal and virtual arts. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Pp. 12-44

Labov, W. (1981): Speech actions and reactions in personal narrative. In D. Tannen (ed.): Analysuing Discourse: Text and Talk. Georgetown University Round Table. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press

In 1997 William Labov was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania.
In 1967 Joshua Waletzky was a professor at Harvard University and William Labov was a professor at Columbia University.

2. Method of data interpretation

2.1 Grounded Theory

2.1.1 German language
German Grounded Theory literature is based on American theorist Strauss and Corbien.

2.1.2 English language
Theorist: Strauss, A. / Corbien, J.
Publisher Description:
The second edition of this best-selling text continues to offer immensely practical advice and technical expertise to aid researchers in making sense of their collected data. Basics of Qualitative Research, Second Edition presents methods that enable researchers to analyze and interpret their data, and ultimately build theory from it. Highly accessible in their approach, authors Anselm Strauss (late of the University of San Francisco and co-creator of grounded theory) and Juliet Corbin provide a step-by-step guide to the research act-- from the formation of the research question through several approaches to coding and analysis, to reporting on the research. Full of definitions and illustrative examples, this highly accessible book concludes with chapters that present criteria for evaluating a study, as well as responses to common questions posed by students of qualitative research. Significantly revised, Basics of Qualitative Research remains a landmark volume in the study of qualitative methods.

Strauss, A./ Corbien, J. (1998): Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

German language area
A popular method to analyze qualitative data is Mayring's qualitative content analysis. This method of text interpretation offers a guideline for the inter-subjective analysis of the material. Therefore the material is analyzed by dint of content analytical rules, without neglecting the qualitative aspects of research. (Mruck, Katja/ Mey, Günter (2000): Qualitative Sozialforschung in Deutschland, Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Online Journal), Nr. 1/2000. English text: http://qualitative-research.net and Bortz, J./Döring, N. (2001): Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation für Human- und Sozialwissenschaftler, 3. Über. Aufl., Berlin 2001, p. 382)

Mayring argues as follows:

"We developed a number of procedures of the qualitative content analysis amongst which two approaches are central: inductive category development and deductive category application." (Mayring, Philipp (2000): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Online Journal),p. Nr.2/ 2000. English text: http://qualitative-research.net, p. 3)

"Within the framework of qualitative approaches it would be of central interest to develop the aspects of interpretation, the categories, as near as possible to the material and to formulate them in terms of the material. For that scope qualitative content analysis has developed procedures of inductive category development." (Mayring, Philipp (2000): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Online Journal) Nr.2/ 2000. English text: http://qualitative-research.net,p. 3)

"Deductive category implication works with prior formulated, theoretically derived aspects of analysis, bringing them in connection with the text." (Mayring, Philipp (2000): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research (Online Journal),p. Nr.2/ 2000. English text: http://qualitative-research.net, p.4)

Mayring, Philipp (2000): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken, 7. Aufl. , Weinheim 2000

Mayring, Philipp (1999): Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Anleitung zu qualitativem Denken. 4 Aufl. Weinheim 1999

Selected Further Readings on Qualitative Research

☞ **Ratner, C. (1997): Cultural Psychology and Qualitative Methods. New York: Plenum**
This book is part of a project to understand the cultural aspects of human psychology. The academic discipline devoted to this subject is called cultural psychology. The field of cultural psychology draws together research from cross-cultural psychology, psychological anthropology, history, sociology and economics.

It became obvious that qualitative methods need to be systematized in order to be useful to cultural psychology. If these qualitative methods could be developed and reoriented toward elucidating cultural aspects of psychology, the result would be a very useful qualitative cultural psychological methodology. Developing qualitative cultural psychological methodology is the task of this book. It involves reviewing existing qualitative methods, systematizing them around core epistemological and ontological principles, informing them with a theory of cultural psychology which will guide them to elucidate cultural aspects of psychology, and enhancing their scientific status – i.e, their comprehensiveness, objectivity, validity, abiltiy to detect general tendencies and causal relationships.

☞ **Gummesson, E. (2000): Qualitative methods in management research. London: Sage**
This revised **edition** and the **10th** printing refines the book's basic ideas with conceptual developments, updated literature references and current examples from research and practice. Its basic challenge remains: Is research in management disciplines – leadership, corporate strategy, accounting, marketing, organization theory, quality management, and others-taking advantage of the best scientific methods available? The author's answer its: No! Qualitative Methods in Management Research offers an approach to case study research. It unfolds the similarities between scholarly research and management consultancy. Its emphasis on access: How do we get close enough to reality to prompt it to tell us its story on its own terms? It discusses the critical role of preunderstanding. It juxtaposes the postivistics paradigm-which

is quantitative, reductionistic and theory testing – and the hermeneutic paradigm – which is qualitative, holistic and theory generating. It links quality assessment of case study research to current total quality management thinking. The book is written in a personal style and rich in examples from academic research, practice and management consultancy.

☞ **Creswell, J. (1998): Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage**
Five traditions of biography, phenomenological study, grounded theory study, ethnography, case study (Data collection, data analysis and representation, writing the narrative report). Chapters: Designing a Qualitative Study, Five different qualitative studies, Five qualitative traditions of inquiry, Philosophical and theoretical frameworks.

☞ **Cassell, C./ Gillian, S. (Hrsg.) (1995): Qualitative methods in organizational research- A practical guide. Sage Publications, London.**
An introduction considers the role and distinctive features of qualitative research methods in organizations, and discusses key debates about their use. The remainder of the book outlines a number of different approaches. The purpose, rationale and context of each approach is described, with guidelines on when and how it might be used (e.g. Qualitative Research in Work Contexts, the qualitative research interview, the twenty statements test...). A feature of the volume is its attention to range and diversity. Thus well-known methods such as interviewing, participant observation and case studies are included alongside newer approaches such as stakeholder analysis and tracer studies. The context described span a wide spectrum of issues, from individual decision-making to personality assessment to working practices and employee relations, within organizations ranging from health-care services to multinational cooperations.

☞ **Reason, P. (Hrsg.) (2001): Handbook of action research. Sage Publications, London.**
The handbook is divided into four parts, and there are important themes of thinking and practice running throughout. The first section reviews the range of paradigms and metatheories, the perspectives, values and epistemologies that inform the different practices of action research. Part 2 represents the diverse approaches to action research and the range of methodologies which constitute the family of action research approaches. Part 3 shows how different researchers have applied the various different groundings and practices in their own work. Finally, the last section addresses some of the competencies that may be required for the initiation and conduct of research.

☞ **Crabtree, B. (Hrsg.) (1994): Doing qualitative research. Sage Publications, London.**
Designed to stimulate interest in qualitative research methods related to primary clinical care and to prepare practitioners to engage in it. Expands existing approaches, ways of knowing, and types of research relationships at levels from the global through community, family, individual, organ, and cell to genome; also recognises recursive interaction between and among the levels. Distinguishes four dimensions of investigation: what the numbers are, what the words mean, who benefits, and what the consequences are. Annotation c. Book News, Inc., Portland, OR (booknews.com)

☞ **Coffey, A./ Atkinson, P. (1996): Making Sense of Qualitative Data. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.**
Table of Content: Varieties of Data and Varieties of Analysis, Concepts and Coding, Narratives and Stories, Meanings and Metaphors, Writing and Representation, Beyond the Data, Complementary Strategies of Computer-Aided Analysis.

☞ **Bickman, L./ Rag, D.J. (1998): Handbook of applied social research methods, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.**

The handbook is divided into three parts. Part 1 represents a review of planning applied research. Part 2 offers an overview of the applied research framework. Finally, the last section shows a practical data collection and analysis methods.

☞ **Rosnow, R.L./ Rosenthal, R. (1993): Beginning behavioural research – A conceptual primer. New York.**

This book is intended for undergraduate students who , as part of a beginning course in research methods, are required to plan an empirical study, analyse the data, and report the results. It is also designed to encourage students to be analytical and critical in interpreting research findings.