Studying Organizations by a pragmatic Research Design

the case of qualitative case study designs

Antoft, Rasmus; Houlberg Salomonsen, Heidi

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European Group for Organizational Studies

Beyond Waltz - Dances of Individuals and Organization
5–7 July 2007
at
Vienna   University   of   Economics   and   Business   Administration
Vienna, Austria

Studying Organizations by a Pragmatic Research Design: the case of qualitative case study designs

Sub theme: Waltzing with the pragmatists

Rasmus Antoft, Assistant Professor, Ph.D.
Aalborg University, Department of Sociology, Social Work and Organization.
Kroghstraede 7, 9920. Aalborg, Denmark. E- mail: ras@socsci.aau.dk

Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen, Assistant Professor, Ph.D.
Aalborg University, Department of Economics, Politics and Public Administration
Fibigerstraede 1, 9220 Aalborg, Denmark, E-mail: heidi@socsci.aau.dk

1.0 Introduction

In recent years new pragmatism has been an inspiration for organizations studies (see for example Van de Ven 1989, Clegg and Hardy 1996, Czarniawska 1997, 2003, Czarniawska and Sevón 1996, Wicks and Freeman 1998, Tsoukas & Knudsen 2003; Westwood and Clegg 2003). On an ontological and epistemological level pragmatism has offered a 'third way' to a discussion of whether organizational studies should be grounded in either a realist or a post-modern ontology. This debate has long been a central issue in Organizational Studies leading both to positions on paradigm incommensurability and arguments on the need to combine the paradigms, (Hassard 1990, Parker 1993, Reed 1993, Czarniawska 1998). It has also lead to positions arguing for a third way, such as critical realism (Reed 2005) or pragmatism (Wicks and Freemann 1998, Czarniawska 2003). The pragmatic response to paradigm incommensurability is to view the development of theoretical knowledge not as a war game (see for example Martin & Frost 1996), to be lost by the one 'who bleeds first' and won by the one who 'stays longer on his (yes)? feet' (Czarniwska 2003a:257), but as a conversation (Van Maanen 1995:140, Weick 1999, Czarniawska 2003, 2003a:257, Eisenberg 2000).

The discussion of paradigms however remains largely at the level of ontology, epistemology and ethics, leaving questions on how to design and how to choose methodologies which accommodate a pragmatic ontological and epistemological perspective untouched. In this paper we would like to begin to address these questions by conceptualising various case study designs in organization studies from a pragmatic perspective. Pragmatism is thus not a stance from where the prime ambition is to discuss questions of ontology or ethics but as an epistemological stance from where we discuss implications for research design, methodology and the validity of scientific knowledge from a pragmatic perspective. This is not to advocate that epistemology exhausts ontology (Reed 2005) but to try to take the discussions further to a more operational level for social science research. Agreeing with Alfred Schütz that *"It is impossible to understand human conduct by ignoring its intensions, and it is impossible to understand human intensions by ignoring the settings in which they make sense"* (Schütz, 1973 from Czarniawska 1998a:4), case study designs are chosen as they allow for recognition of the contextual factors and settings in which organizational behaviour unfolds (Yin 1994). In this paper we will focus on qualitative case study designs.

The central question we address is the implications a pragmatic perspective has for the way we generate and develop our theoretical as well as empirical understanding of organizations and organizational phenomena using case study designs. Our main

argument is that a pragmatic perspective is applicable to the following types of case study designs: a non-theoretical, a theory generative and a theory interpretive case study design, as well as a design aiming at developing existing theories. Our second argument is that the implications a pragmatic perspective has for how we conduct scientific inquiry in the various designs may not be that different from more conventional perspectives on case study designs. In what follows we firstly present the pragmatic perspective applied in the paper, secondly we discuss the implications a pragmatic perspective has for the four types of case study designs, listed above and thirdly we discuss some of the implications a pragmatic perspective has for validating the knowledge generated in the various case study designs.

2.0 The New Pragmatism and some Ontological and Epistemological Reflections

"We pragmatists take the same dim view of Absolute Truth and of Reality as It Is in Itself as the Enlightenment took of Divine Wrath and Divine Judgement." (Rorty 1998:76)

Before turning to the question of how to design case studies from a pragmatic perspective we briefly address some ontological and epistemological issues, as they influence the question of how to generate valid knowledge and hence also influence the question of how to design research studies. As Richard Rorty has been one of the major sources of new pragmatic inspiration within organization studies (see for example Tsoukas & Knudsen 2003a, Chia 2003; Czarniwska 1997, 2003, 2003a Keleman & Hassard 2003, Weick 2006) the following discussion of how to represent reality and the role of theory takes its starting point in Rorty's reflections on these issues.

As indicated in the introductory quote, new pragmatism as formulated by Rorty abandons the idea that the purpose of scientific knowledge is to strive for correspondence with the world as it truly is (Gimmler 2005:78). In fact the very idea of truth is absurd: *"It is absurd, either as the notion of truth about reality which is not about reality-under-a-certain-description, or as the notion of truth about reality under some privileged description which makes all other descriptions unnecessary because it is commensurable with each of them."* (Rorty 1979:378). This leads however not to a stance of post modern relativism, where the idea of the reality is replaced by an idea of *"…discursive constructions and cultural forms that have no ontological status or epistemological significance beyond their textually created and mediated existence…"* (Reed 2005:1622). In other words, in a post-modernist sense, is taking the pragmatic perspective that the world is not out there, but merely reproduced in the language-games in which we engage (Rorty 1989), or is it to make the distinction "…between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there" (Rorty 1989:4-5).

This absurd view of representations of reality as it truly is, is also implied in the acceptance of the contingent character of knowledge of, in our case, organizations: *"To accept the contingency of starting-points is to accept our inheritance from, and our conversations with, our fellow humans as our only source of guidance."* (Rorty 1982:166). As Czarniawska quoting Rorty describes it: *"In Rorty's view, there are no a priori or universal criteria; all there is is a temporary and localized agreement in a "scholar community" about what is "good", "functional", or "beautiful" (Rorty 1987, 1992b)"* (Czarniawska 1997:56). Thus Rorty argues for a philosophy

which takes a step away from thinking towards practice and actions by asking not whether a scientific description of a given, in this case phenomena, in organizations is true, but whether it works and proves to be of a certain use within the context in which it is formulated and ascribed a meaning (Pedersen & Tjalve 2000:45-46).

In such a perspective the aim of generating scientific and theoretical descriptions and explanations is not correspondence or the discovery of empirical phenomena's essence, but to engage in conversations on the good or functional aspects of a given theoretical statement (Rorty 1979:378). In this sense the social realty, including the social scientific reality, is essentially a social accomplishment.

Representing the scientific community and the development of scientific and thus theoretical knowledge as a conversation however requires not only 'talking' but also 'listening,' in spite of the fact that these conversations often take place in multi-paradigmatic sites. As Weick argues, reflecting on the development (Weick 1996) and the paradigmatic differences (Weick 1999) within organization studies, organizational theorists should drop their 'heavy tools': *If theorists drop their heavy tools of paradigms and monologues, they still have their intuitions, feelings, stories, experiences, awe, vocabulary and empathy. Most of all, they still have their capacity for attentive listening"* (Weick 1999:804).

A central medium for scientific conversations is theories; however, as we have abandoned the criteria of correspondence, the question to be discussed in conversations of theories is not one of whether they are true or false. As stated by Mintzberg: *"It is important to realize, at the outset, that all theories are false. They are after all, just words and symbols on pieces of paper, about the reality they purport to describe; they are not that reality. So they simplify it."* (Mintzberg 2005:356). This means that theories are not discoveries of causal relations in the reality as it is, but creations (Mintzberg 2005:357), representations (Weick 1989:529), or enactments (Weick 2005:405). As pragmatism neither regards theoretical accounts and interpretations of organizational structures, processes and behaviour as merely reflections of an objective reality (Wicks and Freeman 1998), nor argues that there is no stance from where we as either researchers or practitioners can privilege some accounts, they (we) need a criteria of a good theory which is not 'merely' empirical testing and the identification of causal relations (Donaldson 2003).

As a 'third way', recognizing that there are multiple ways to describe, engage in conversations of and interpret in this case organizational phenomena, pragmatist's point to a criteria of usefulness (Weick 1989, Mintzberg 2005:356). This criteria

"…remind people that they can and should see different interpretations as having more or less value (i.e., better or worse), depending on their ability to serve given purpose and enable people to accomplish relevant goals." (Wicks & Freeman 1998:134). The criteria of usefulness is both seen as a epistemological criteria which raises questions of the credibility and reliability of knowledge as well as a normative criteria which raises questions of the usefulness of knowledge in terms of its ability to accomplish goals, develop theory etc. (Wicks & Freeman 1998:130). The normative criteria further imply that scientific knowledge does not and should not have a privileged position. Science is thus merely one way of representing parts of the reality in which we engage (Wicks & Freeman 1998:126-127). The criterion of usefulness within a scientific community implies however, not that anything goes, but in stead that the criterion of usefulness becomes a question of whether our theoretical arguments, models etc. are considered plausible (Weick 1989) or legitimate by the interpretative community (Czarniawska 1997:201) or the networks of critical debates, conversations and narrative traditions, which constitutes the field of organization studies (Reed 1996:51, Czarniawska 1997:200-201, Wicks & Freeman 1998:132).

Thus, privileged or not, scientific knowledge is a distinct way of generating knowledge of, in this case, organizations, and why the questions of usefulness and plausibility within the scientific conversations are linked to questions of the quality of our research designs. In what follows, we turn to discussing the practical implications the various case study designs have for generating scientific knowledge from a pragmatic perspective.

3.0 What is as case?

We now turn to our argument that a pragmatic perspective is applicable to the following four types of case designs: The non-theoretical, the theory generative, the theory interpretive case study design as well as the design aiming at developing existing theories. Before giving an introductory description of the differences between the various case designs we briefly reflect on the question: what is a case?

Looking at the case study literature you will find numerous answers to the question of what a case is and the discussion seems complex. The problem with these many different answers is that they all have implications for research practices and results when working with case studies as a research strategy (Ragin 1992:8); however, it is a commonly held conception that case studies are preoccupied with the unique.

The use of the term 'case' raises yet another question: "When researchers speak of generality…A case implies a family; it alleges that the particular is a case of something else. Implicit in the idea of a case is a claim…if (researchers) say that they have presented 'only a case' the term itself reveals greater ambitions. Cases are always hypotheses" (Walton 1992:121-122).

No matter what a case is a case of, the case's selection represents a hypothesis stating that a case represents a more general or a special, extreme or unique phenomenon. In practice the researcher does not, a priori, consider what a phenomenon is a case of, but it can become a goal in it self to disclose a generalised connection of what a phenomenon is a case of.

To the question of what a phenomenon is a case of, there is no unambiguous answer (Antoft 2005). A case can be seen as an example of many different empirical and theoretical universes depending on what part of the organizational life we place our research focus on (Andersen 1997). As a consequence we see cases as examples of analytical and social constructions and cases should not be considered as anything else. This also counts for case studies designed to capture the unique, and controlled by an idea of understanding and explaining the 'special case', confronted in the research process. From this standpoint case studies are placed in a social world where the case or cases under study cannot be seen as separate from the surrounding world. Studying an organizational phenomenon as a case is only meaningful when the phenomenon is considered a part of a larger social reality and can be studied in this context. In short, the case study is conducted from either an empirical or a theoretical basis in a context where some sort of social organizing takes place, and at the same time the researcher will have some notion of a more general universe in

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which the case in spite of its unique character represents more general social phenomenon.

Since cases are not something that exists out there or can be discovered but should be viewed as constructions there will always be multiple possibilities and opportunities for defining a case no matter what agenda is guiding the research (Andersen 1997). A consequence of this perception of case studies is that cases can develop and change in character during the research process (Platt 1992:41), as well as in the presentation of and conversations regarding the results and conclusions drawn. In the end the audience can influence and change the case through their interpretations of oral and written presentations of the research results (Ragin 1992:8).

4.0 Case study designs and pragmatism

What is the argument for conducting case studies in the first place? Of course there are a number of different answers to the question but for the sake of the overall argument in this paper we will focus on three reasons based on our pragmatic standpoint.

The first argument relates to the issue of designing scientific inquiry. The choice of research strategy is often attached to the question of what problem is being studied. In this line of argumentation the empirical or theoretical problem solving is guiding the choice of research design, methods and data. With reference to Robert K. Yin we argue that the case study is a relevant research strategy when the boundaries between the phenomenon under study and its context do not appear clear and evident (Yin 1994:13). However Barbara Czarniawska argues that Yin's argument for using case studies do not contribute to a more precise answer since the boundary between a phenomenon and its context is never clearly evident (Czarniawska 1997:64). Taking this into account we must design our case studies from a slightly different rationale; case studies enable attention to the meaning of contextual conditions and highlight the boundary between a phenomenon and its context as a social construction often created by the researcher.

In such a pragmatic perspective the second argument is closely related to the question of how we as researchers can construct such boundaries. The creation of boundaries is a process in which the researcher in conversation with the empirical material, existing theories, other researchers, practitioners and other actors (individuals, groups, organizations etc.) negotiate and construct these boundaries between the phenomenon and its context: "Here a case study is the study of development of a certain phenomenon. The process or focus is chosen by the researcher, and the time frame is beyond the decision of the researcher (a study can be terminated before the case is over; which does not terminate the case for other observers.) The span of the development of the case is negotiated between the researcher and the organizational actors (alive or documented)" (Czarniawska 1997:65).

To further grasp the (practical) process of defining a case-study, Czarniawska (1997) proposes the concept of window-studies. Window studies utilise both the negotiated character of the process of negotiating what the case-study is observing, and the often, methodologically set boundaries,. As well as the set boundaries, case-studies always take their point of departure by 'breaking into' a chain of organizational

events, actions, decisions etc, which resembles the processes of the socially constructed, reproduction of the organizational aspects we wish to study.

A window study is defined as the point in which: "A researcher opens an arbitrary time window and describes all that can be seen through it. Here it is the processes that are negotiated with the actors: what is central, important, new, routine, and so on. A window study can turn into a case study (when the researcher decides to leave the window and follow the train of events), or into a series of mini-cases." (Czarniwska 1997:65).

This processional identification of boundaries between phenomena and context is a premise no matter what strategy is applied. However the boundaries are not just negotiated with other actors, but also through the researcher's conversations with theories and empirical material. In the strategies presented in this article the researcher engages in a conversation with the empirical material in a qualitative manner; metaphorically speaking this dialog takes place as a 'negotiation' process. Most qualitative oriented researchers have been confronted with informant's unexpected, yet enlightening answers. The informant dismisses the question as being irrelevant for the phenomenon under study, he or she points at several other contextual conditions being overlooked as the case is described by the interviewer or mentions that the context in which we study a certain phenomenon is too narrow, the historical perspective too short etc. The qualitative case study enables the negotiation or the conversation. In this conversation the researcher's contribution can be described as a '*novel reading'*, which means an interpretation by a person (researcher) who is not socialized into a certain social organization/ context, and as a consequence is able to describe and perhaps explain an organizational phenomenon in a new, creative, but still recognizable manner (Czarniawska 2000:18).

Finally, it is possible to use a moral argumentation for choosing qualitative case studies as a research strategy. From a pragmatic perspective, qualitative case studies always claim the need for a conversation between the researcher and the field of investigation – between researchers and practitioners- the researcher is thus morally obliged whilst constructing the boundary between phenomenon and context and also when drawing their conclusions about a certain phenomenon and its relation to the context in which it unfolds. Rorty (1982) writes that it would be a misinterpretation to view peoples' reasoning as epistemologically privileged – in relation to the researcher's status - as they try to justify their actions and cultures. However, it would not be a delusion to consider them more morally privileged. The point being, that we as researchers have an obligation to listen to peoples' reasoning about their actions and include these in our scientific reflections. This is not because people

them selves hold the key to their motives of action, but because they are humans just like 'us' (Czarniawska 1997:4).[1] Although it is rare to see research strategies based solely on a moral argument, it does not mean that moral reflections and arguments can be dismissed. This kind of argumentation could and should be part of our considerations on when and where it is both interesting and relevant to adopt a research strategy based on qualitative case studies.

Regardless of what a case is a case of, and what argument we use for practicing case studies, one can choose among various case study designs. A conventional and introductory way to differentiate between the various case study designs is to differentiate according to whether their prime ambition is to generate new empirical or theoretical knowledge. The different case study designs such a differentiation gives are illustrated in figure 1:

Figure 1: Different types of case study designs

	Scientific inquiry starting from empirical knowledge	Scientific inquiry starting from theoretical knowledge
Purpose: to generate new empirical knowledge	Non-theoretical case study designs	Theory-interpretive case study designs
Purpose: to generate new theoretical knowledge	Theory-generating case study designs	Theory-developing case study designs

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[1] This claim should not just be seen as an argument specific for qualitative case studies alone but as a more general argument for taking the others perspective into account in research.

An implication of the different initial ambitions in terms of the character of knowledge case studies produce is that the conversations the designs are contextualised as part of varies. That is, as we will return to when discussing validity, not to say that the results from the designs primarily aiming at developing theoretical knowledge are not to be used and evaluated in non-scientific conversations, but it is to say that there are different 'rules of conversation' to be considered in the various designs as well as different initial questions to be answered.

4.1 The non-theoretical case study design

The overall purpose of non-theoretical case studies is to generate new empirical knowledge. Putting it on the spot, non-theoretical case studies are concerned with an interest for special issues, occurrences, social groupings or communities, and seek elements from real life for representing and explaining the unique cases being study (Antoft 2005). Arend Lijphardt agues that non-theoretical case studies are descriptive and they exist in a theoretical vacuum. They are not guided by established or hypothetical generalizations nor are they motivated by a wish to create general hypothesises (Lijphardt 1971). In other words there are usually no theoretical ambitions setting the scene for designing and conducting these kinds of case studies.

Looking at the case study literature there are two main arguments for working with non-theoretical case designs. In the first argument the main purpose, not just for organization case studies but also for sociological research in general, is uncovering the uniqueness of social systems and social processes through field work and with an emphasis on the actors' subjective experiences (Becker 1970). The focus is on thick descriptions (see Geertz 1973) of social reality and social phenomena rather than on developing general concepts and theories; the researcher acts more or less as a media, and reflects a deeper understanding of the social reality being observed. The idea is to become one with the part of the reality, those events, actors, social groupings or communities under study, whilst at the same time letting the observed present themselves, and their interests in and views on, their social world (Andersen 1997). A second group of non-theoretical case studies are motivated by their relevance for a broader organizational, political, social and cultural frame of reference. This kind of case study is driven by an inherent societal engagement, where the phenomena under scrutiny is viewed as having a major impact on social life, and generates valuable and interesting knowledge (Andersen 1997). The Enron scandal, the genocide in Rwanda and the terror attacks on the World Trade Centre are good examples.

Whatever the argument for conducting non-theoretical case studies, they are all typically guided by societal engagement and they share a common purpose i.e. generating interesting empirical knowledge. In short this involves uncovering interesting and unique social phenomena or problems through empirical studies presented through 'thick descriptions'.

The purpose of generating empirical knowledge could also be seen as the basis for creating a platform for accomplishing goals or developing theory etc. Since the analysis of these unique cases makes it possible to generate empirical knowledge about organizational phenomena that would otherwise be unknown to us, they have the potential for being useful, not just for practitioners but also for scientific communities' ambitions in terms of developing existing or constructing new theoretical knowledge. In other words it is implied that knowledge generated from non-theoretical case studies contributes to both stimulating action for practitioners and theory construction in scientific communities.

Even though these types of case studies do not develop models or theories but 'only' have ambitions to uncover interesting and valuable empirical knowledge, in a pragmatic view the description is still an important part of any research process and the ambition of disclosing social conditions and constructing theories and models which can prove to be useful in future conversations about organizational phenomena on both a theoretical and a practical level.

4.2 The theory interpretive case study design

The theoretical interpretive case study design can be regarded as a 'truly' pragmatic case study design in the sense that the theories involved may be essentially chosen using as its starting point the question of the purpose at hand (Czarniawska 1997:201). As illustrated in figure 1, the theoretical interpretive case study design's initial purpose is to generate empirical knowledge, i.e. how can theoretical knowledge enhance our empirical understanding of a given case. The theory interpretive case study design has at the out set an inductive character. Often these designs are chosen on the grounds of an empirical puzzle and an interest in understanding and explaining an empirical incident or problem etc. In these designs various theories enable the researcher to contextualise the empirical incident in various ways which may not only give different descriptions and explanations of the empirical data, but also give different answers to the question of what this is a case study of. Although initially inductive, rather quickly, theories become a central element in the theory interpretive case study design as 'the novel reading' takes as its

point of departure existing theories, which help in defining the case, enables the collection and ordering of the empirical data (Selznick 1949:250), and identifying potential relations within the data gathered; in addition, existing theories are the grounds on which to discuss the uniqueness or general character of the empirical findings of the case.

One of the most prominent case studies using a theory interpretive case study design is Graham Allison's (1971) study of the Cuban missile crisis published in *Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis.* Allison begins his case study by pointing out that the conclusions of case studies are not only dependent on the empirical data available and gathered, but are also dependent on the theories used to interpret the empirical data: "When answering questions such as "Why did the Soviet Union place missiles in Cuba?" what we see and judge to be important and accept as adequate depends not only on the evidence available but also on the "conceptual lenses" through which we look at the evidence." (Allison & Zelikow 2004:16). Hence a prime purpose of the case-study is thus to illustrate how different theoretical interpretations results in different explanations of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

A theory interpretive case study design may, however, include not only a novel reading, but novel reading*s,* as competing or supplementing theories often informs the case-study. Allison and Zelikow (2004) argue in this respect for competition as a criterion when choosing theories, as theories not only reflect, but also represent and thus simplify the empirical phenomena to be interpreted. In this process competing theories "…open minds a little wider and keep them open a little longer. Alternative conceptual frameworks are important not only for further insights into neglected dimensions of the underlying phenomenon. They are essential as a reminder of the distortions and limitations of whatever conceptual framework one employs." (Allison & Zelikow 2004:21). From a pragmatic perspective, this may be the case if the purpose at hand is for example to show how a certain empirical event is caused, informed and /or explained by a multiplicity of logics, rationales etc. In addition to the criterion of competition, one finds a list of other selection criteria in the literature, for example the criterion of the simplest theory, or the most comprehensive theory which is able to describe or explain the largest part of the case (Andersen 1997:70). From a pragmatic perspective these criteria may or may not be of relevance, depending on the purpose at hand.

4.3 The theory generating and theory developing case study design

The main ambition of both the theory generating and theory developing case study design is the generation of theoretical knowledge. Although the former relies on an

inductive logic starting from the particular and the latter relies on an deductive logic starting from the general (Mintzberg 2005:357), the central question in the context of a pragmatic perspective for these designs is how can we generate and develop our theories for engaging in and contributing to future scientific conversations on organizational phenomena? From a pragmatic perspective that implies that the usefulness is not only a question of its practical implications for practitioners, but also for the research community with which we engage. When talking to other theorists the pragmatic criterion of usefulness becomes a question of the plausibility of a given theoretical statement (Weick 1989).

In addressing these questions we turn to Karl Weick, who has had and still has a major 'voice' in not only conversations within the organizational field as such (see for example Organization Studies 2006), but also within the part of the field arguing from a pragmatic perspective (Van Maanen 1995, Wicks & Freeman 1998, Eisenberg 2007). Weick himself was one of the first within organization theory to advocate the criteria of usefulness in his contribution to the special issue of Academy of Management Review in 1989 on the questions of what constitutes a good theory and how is the process of theorising to be improved (Van de Ven 1989). As stated in the introduction: "Theorist often write trivial theories because their process of theory construction is hemmed by methodological structures that favour validation rather than usefulness…" (Weick 1989:516).

Before we elaborate this argument, we will shortly present the two types of case designs relevant for this discussion. Hereafter we describe the more general implications a pragmatic perspective has for theory generating and developing, and finally we turn to some more practical implications in terms of research design.

The main purpose of the theory generating case design is to establish new theoretical knowledge based on empirical knowledge and data. This strategy enables the researcher to establish theoretical patterns through empirical observations, which cannot be intercepted through existing theories (Antoft & Salomonsen 2007). Put in a different way: the relevance of theory generating designs should be found in its ability to develop new concepts and theories through case studies, especially in research fields without existing theories at hand.

In the grounded theory approach as developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) it is how we construct valid theoretical endings from empirical data that is the pivotal point. The main focus in this line of theory construction lies in the process of generating theory from a general method for comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The starting point for constructing new concepts is not based on the

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assumption that theory development only happens through deduction. However this does not mean that generating new concepts through empirical material is a pure inductive process. As Strauss writes: *"Many people mistakenly refer to grounded theory as 'inductive theory'* (Strauss 1990:12). More precisely it is the interplay between induction and deduction which makes possible the process of generating new theory. If you want to generate new concepts using a case study design the first step in the research process is to identify the key dimensions in the empirical material. The second step is to define concepts as configurations of the key dimensions identified earlier. Generating new concepts implicates some sort of a theoretical universe and the third step in the process is to test potential generalizations to other examples existing in this universe. As a result, the process of generating grounded theory is comparative in its form (Glaser & Strauss 1967). For Glaser and Strauss it is important to stress, that generating theory should follow certain methodological rules creating a systematic and transparent research process leading to new theories.

Grounded theory produces new theoretical knowledge on two different levels: substantive and formal theory. Substantive theory is developed for an empirical field of investigation. It is theory with a direct reference to the described phenomena, such as patient care, relations between professions, crime, and negotiations etc. Formal theory, however, is theory developed for a conceptual field of investigation. Rather than using words from people that are being studied, this level of theory is attached to scientific terms such as stigma, formal organization, socialization, authority and power etc. Both substantial and formal theories have 'middle-range' character. As a consequence these theories, when fully developed, can be placed in between what Robert K. Merton describes as minor working hypothesises about peoples everyday life and all-embracing 'grand theories' (Glaser & Strauss 1967:32-33).

As mentioned above this approach is basically comparative in its form. Constructing new theory demands verification and falsification of the concepts generated from the observations of the organizational phenomenon. A single case can be sufficient for creating a notion of a concept, but the concept cannot be verified and its representative validity evaluated until it has been compared to other cases.

Theory generation case studies' contribution to generalizations through developing concepts is recognized. This is also the case when discussing studies not based on the logic of grounded theory. A number of classical studies are also based on detailed empirical investigations and these studies lead to what can be considered strong formal conceptualizations (Andersen 1997). Michel Croziers (1964) study *the Bureaucratic Phenomenon* is a classic example from organizational studies. In his

research Crozier analysed of the machine operators in the tobacco industry in France, which were viewed as bureaucratic organizations. Early in the research process Crozier discovered an interesting trait of these employees, they seemed to be complaining a lot, and in a way which made it impossible to explain within a bureaucratic theoretical framework focussing on the subordinates in placement in the formal organizational hierarchy.

The machine workers insisted on keeping their special skills out of formal working procedures and written manuals. By performing what Maw Weber describes as social closure and restricting access to knowledge about how they practice their work, the workers could use the organization's weaknesses to block production and as a consequence challenge their superior's authority. This process was the starting point for a trade union tactic attempting to increase the worker's salaries and status in the organization. In this case study, Crozier demonstrated how French culture interplayed within a bureaucratic system, but more interesting at the same time he disclosed how control within strategic points in a bureaucracy play a key role in realising political agendas.

Developing new concepts presumes an ability to develop typologies and to reformulate insights in a theoretical vocabulary (Andersen 1997). The starting point for Crozier was the exercise of power by excluding others from skills vital for the organization. This led to a more general argument demonstrating the relationship between organizational status and control over central sources of uncertainty. Today, this conceptual model is still relevant for studies on differences in power and status in organizational life (Andersen 1997).

These examples of conceptualizations are all generalizations capturing in a dense matter crucial organizational phenomena. Through many years of challenging, these conceptions have gone through a process of further development and coupling with other conceptions, and have proved to be everlasting and still play a key role in organizational studies. How then can we explain the durability of these conceptions? One possible explanation is the grounding in empirical data. It is tempting to assume that it is the conceptualizations and the theory construction's foundation in the empirical reality that seems to have made them more useful as tools for even contemporary organizational analysis. What we should not forget is that this development has happened not just through empirical testing but also through continuous conversations in research communities about their usefulness as general conceptions and theories. In this sense there is a certain pragmatic element in the process of generating new theory from empirical knowledge.

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Looking at theory developing case designs, Weick (1995) suggests that theory and theory development is not adequately conceptualised as a product, but as a process of theorising. In other word, our struggles with not only generating, but also testing and developing theories will never end – and should never end (Weick 2005:395). The need for conceptualising the development of theory as a process and not a product is grounded in, as Rorty writes, a perspective on the world as unknowable due to its contingent and ever changing character. This is also reflected in organizations as

"…organizing is the act of trying to hold things together by such means as text and conversation, justification, faith, mutual effort (heedful interrelation), transactive memory, resilience, vocabulary, and by seeing what we say in order to assign it to familiar categories. Efforts to hold it together are made necessary by interruptions such as regression, thoroughness, inconsistency, cosmology episodes, forgetting, the unexpected, threats, and disasters." (Weick 2006:1732).

The subject of our inquiries is thus constantly changing as it reproduces itself -why are our theories reflections on 'yesterday's organizations?' (Weick 2005:410). Important questions in this respect are thus not how organizing constitutes a system of causally dependent elements but how organizations are able to hold themselves together, what that means, what the holding together depends on as well as in a more explanatory mode, "…when what it depends on happens…" (Weick 2006:1732). In order to theoretically reflect the complexities involved in organizing and move from theorising of yesterday's organizations to theorising of the processes which reproduce the organization, researchers must stop making theories which only look and understand backwards, when the organizational life, according to Weick, quoting Kierkegaard, is lived and experienced forwards. "Living forward that is unsettled, emergent, and contingent contrasts sharply with our backward oriented theoretical propositions that depict that living as settled, causally connected, and coherent after-the-fact." (Weick 2006:1732).

Understanding theory construction as a process of theorising is further reflected in Weicks view on the theoretical vocabulary we choose to describe the contingent character of organizational life as well as in his conceptualization of the epistemological challenges such a perspective poses. Regarding the former, Weick referring to Rorty argues, that "…vocabularies are tools for coping rather than tools for representation…" (Weick 2006:1725). That means that the central question for theory constructions and development becomes: "…what kinds of vocabularies foster faith, coping and better guessing? The answer, in science as in everyday life is that, if the goal is to compose useful vocabularies, then tests of usefulness lies in the outcomes of actions that take place in the presence of these vocabularies. The words

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I struggle with seem to contribute to resilience. But if they don't, if interruptions lead instead to further collapse rather than resilience, then we need to find a different set of words, a different way of saying so we see and think differently, and a different way to imagine more energetically". (Weick 2006:1734).

Turning to the latter, Weick introduces the evolutionary epistemology (Weick 2004:659-660, 2005:395). The evolutionary epistemology is argued by comparing theorizing with sense making (Weick 2005). As sense making, theorising means that we conceptualise, understand and explain as we go along, that is that the way we are able to know the world is not fixed but constantly changing as we try to make models, hypotheses and concepts from the data we collect. An evolutionary epistemology is consistent with the pragmatic position, that 'people do not hold on to their ontologies' (Czarniawska 2003:133), which is why it is necessary to be epistemologically open-minded. But it is also consistent with the pragmatic position that theories of the reality are more a process of creation, achievement and enactment: "The 'known facts' and 'empirical findings' theories 'explain' can precede theory construction or follow it. The fact that theory construction is a form of retrospective sense making does not decouple it from facts. Rather, it means that facticity is often an achievement. Having first said something, theorists discover what they have been thinking about when they examine more closely what they said. A closer look at what they have said often suggests that it is about examples, experiences, and stories that had previously been understood though not articulated. What is said enacts facts because it makes understanding visible, explicit, and available for reflective thinking, but what has been said does not create the understanding; instead, it articulates the understanding by converting 'know how' into 'know that'. (Weick 2005:405).

Having described the more general implications a pragmatic perspective has for theory generating and developing, we now turn to some more practical implications in terms of research design.

Firstly a pragmatic perspective entails that research designs allow researchers to get close to the subject of inquiry (Mintzberg 2005:365). As argued by Weick, "Any theorizing is dependent on the quality and extent of the details that ground it." (Weick 2005:397). This means that the pragmatists argue for keeping the thick descriptions: "Authors of qualitative studies are often asked to drop much of the description of characters and events, so as to make room for greater theoretical development. The resulting description may end up as little more than a small sequence of vignettes or a summary table of quotations, illustrating those concepts or hypotheses formulated in a paper. Such paring can deplete a manuscript of much of

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its value. Lost may be the rich description that Van Maanen (1989) said is necessary for researchers to build strong theory over time. Lost also may be the comprehensible events. Weick (1992:177) noted that much of his own work constitutes "knowledge growth by extension" which "occurs when a relatively full explanation of a small region is carried over to an explanation of an adjoining region." (Sutton & Staw 1995:383).

Equally important is however the ability to 'step back' and reflect on empirical findings (Mintzberg 2005:365). The process of stepping back is however also affected by the perspective chosen at the out-set of one's case study design. That is to say, stepping back from empirical findings in a realist perspective is, as will be demonstrated in the second implication, a quite different process from stepping back in a pragmatic perspective.

A second practical implication of theory development as pragmatic theorising, confronts the perspective on theory development as a linear process of problem solving, which entails a sequential thinking as well as an implicit striving for solving the problem (Weick 1989). In- stead theorising emphasises the simultaneous parallel process which is often the main characteristic of generating and developing theory. This process is conceptualised as a disciplined imagination (Weick 1989) which, in accord with an evolutionary epistemology, prescribe "…an active role for researchers who construe theoretical representations, rather than seeing such theoretical representations as deductively or naturally following from problem statements… 'disciplined imagination' is rooted in the view that 'logic' of scientific discovery, is psychological, that is, a matter of heuristics – and not just logical, that is, composed of deduction and predictions." (Cornelissen 2006:1581).

Disciplined imagining involves the following three components: problem statements, thoughts trials and selections criteria. Components which all lead to more plausible theories in the sense of being "…interesting rather than obvious, irrelevant or absurd, obvious in novel ways, a source of unexpected connections, high in narrative rationality, aesthetically pleasing, or correspondent with presumed realities." (Weick 1989:517). Disciplined imagining involves a set of practical reflections and rules of how to construct and develop theories for future conversations within the tradition of organizational studies.

The first practical advice is to state problems with are likely to be solved by middle range theories or by models, hypothesizes etc. which are more steps towards theories than actual theoretical statements (Weick 1989:521). This advice is argued referring to the contingent and complex character of organizations which result in the premise

for social scientists that their problem statements often involves "…so many assumptions and such a mixtures of accuracy and inaccuracy that virtually all conjectures and all selection criteria remain plausible and nothing gets rejected or highlighted." (Weick 1989:521).

Secondly, researchers must increase the heterogeneity of the supposed outcomes – or the thought trials – involved in the research design and be careful when classifying how the different and, especially, the difference among the thought trials is empirically identifiable (Weick 1989:522). This process may be qualified using metaphorical imagination (Weick 1989, Cornellisen 2006). This process may involve deductive as well as inductive logic in which one turns to one's own past experience and past theoretical conversations of the subject of one's inquiry as well as to one's own 'tool of intuition' (Cornelissen 2006:1582). Enhancing heterogeneity means increasing the potential outcomes and thus increasing richness but also the complexity in one's theoretical metaphor, model, explanation etc. In other words the increase of heterogeneity involves a constant balance between remaining sensitive for the complexities potentially involved in one's theoretical model, description, explanation etc. and being able to cope conceptually with these complexities.

The third piece of advice regards when to stop and select the metaphor, model or explanation which one finds most plausible (Weick 1989). In this part of the process Weick (1989) introduces a number of selection criteria. This is interesting in the sense of triggering a re-evaluation of past theorising of the empirical subject, and thus potentially triggering a revision of that past theorising (Weick 1989:525). That this is obvious may at first sight be a disappointing reaction in the sense that no new meaning has been added, but this may lead to a question of obvious for whom?

Thirdly arguing for theorising and not theory has some implications for the way we evaluate the theoretical contributions resulting from our case-research. Arguing for a strong theory is arguing for a strong or fixed reality, which from a pragmatic point of view is, as mentioned, absurd. Thus what we can do from a pragmatic perspective is to try and approximate our theories to the socially constructed and ever changing reality. However, our theories themselves often represent approximations of actual theories: "The process of theorizing consists of activities like abstracting, generalizing, relating, selecting, explaining, synthesizing, and idealizing. These ongoing activities intermittently spin out reference lists, data, lists of variables, diagrams, and lists of hypotheses. Those emergent products summarize progress, give direction, and serve as place markers. They have vestiges of theory but are not themselves theories. Then again, few things are fully fledged theories." (Weick 1995:389).

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This view may be judged as being negative, but arguing from a pragmatic stance, that theory construction and development is more adequately described as theorising results, in a more positive judgement where researchers need not be apologetic, but merely honest. To argue for a process based conception of theory is however also in line with conventional descriptions of theory development to argue for ways to increase the robustness of the theory work: "If prior and subsequent steps in theorizing are merely more of the same – diagrams precede this paper, and diagrams will be the focus of the next paper – then theorizing is less robust and promising than if people are moving from one of the five through a second of the five, on to a third of the five." (Weick 1995:389).

Fourthly, and as already indicated, development of theories according to criteria of usefulness and plausibility involves also more 'mundane' or conventional designs, which aim at identifying the ability of theories to generalize, "…we need to find out, if not that not any particular theory is false (since all are), at least how, why, when and where it works best, compared to other theories." (Mintzberg 2005:357).

In accordance with a pragmatic perspective on science as conversation, DiMaggio points out that although being engaged in scientific work may often be a lonesome process, the conversational character of the scientific community implies that the theory construction is not an individualistic, but a collective or at least highly social constructive process. The process of developing and constructing theories does not end when the research is published. A *"…theory's fate will be determined in part by factors outside one's control. If the production of good theory requires the utmost care, theory's reception is ordinarily helter-skelter: a process of appropriation driven more by resonance than by reason, in which complex arguments are reduced to slogans and related to one another along binary dimensions more redolent of Levi-Strauss's tribal cultures than of gradated theory classes."* (DiMaggio 1995:394). A central premise of theory development in a pragmatic perspective is therefore, that "…one must trust in the free association…" (Weick 2004:657), and accept that theorists may control the input in the contemporary and future scientific conversations, but they can not control the outcome (Weick 2005:409).

A well know case-study which illustrates several of the points described above is Phillip Selznicks (1949) *TVA and the Grassroots*. Firstly reading the case-study one is presented with an abductive reasoning, which of course may not represent the development of the theoretical concepts involved. Secondly, at the time of the case study, one of the main theoretical accomplishments was its conceptualization of how organizations may respond to their environments by incorporating them as part of the

organization, what Selznick defines as *cooptering*. However as part of the case-study, Selznick pointed to the way formal organizational structures in time become infused with values (Selznick 1949); a point that was later taken up by the sociological new institutionalists as a major inspiration for their development of how organizations become institutionalised (see for example DiMaiggio & Powell 1991).

5.0 Pragmatic case study designs and the question of validity

In this section we discuss the implication a pragmatic perspective has for how we can validate our empirical findings and theories, our research findings and discuss the questions of how do we validate our knowledge. We have already touched upon the question of how to validate our knowledge within the scientific community, arguing that the criterion of validity becomes a question of whether it is useful for the purpose at hand. Although the purpose at hand varies in general the purpose of the various case study designs can be described as how to generate useful empirical thick descriptions in the non-theoretical case study design, novel readings in the theory-interpretive case study design and plausible models and theories in the theory generating and developing case study designs.

The validity of our scientific accounts is however not only judged within scientific communities, but also by the organizational actors, which are the subject of our inquiries, as well as other actors outside the scientific community. In this part we discuss whether and how these judgments can be used as a criterion of validity per se and as a criterion of validity within the scientific field.

Given the pragmatic position that theoretical knowledge should be valued according to its practical relevance, respondent validation becomes central. This is caused by the pragmatic perspective on the status of science as neither morally privileged, nor closer to the idea of some sort of truth compared to other descriptions. In other words, researchers have an obligation to include the accounts and judgements given by the subjects of our scientific investigation. The accounts given from actors within and actors from without the scientific conversations are however not given and justified by the same standards or logics: "If we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood. Our focus shifts from the relation between human beings and the objects of their inquiry to the relation between alternative standards of justification..." (Rorty 1979:389-390).

In other words do the standards from which actors make judgments of whether a scientific account is interesting, obvious, connected, believable, beautiful, or real, differ. This calls for awareness of the premises or standards laid by actors outside the scientific communities when judging the validity or the usefulness of the scientific accounts. What may be useful from a practice perspective is not necessary the same as from a scientific perspective. For example what is interesting from a practitioner's point of view indicates that we have been able to do a novel reading in the sense of

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adding a new perspective on their actions and their reasons etc. which is produced in the organizations we study. When theories are involved, often this novelty lies in the researcher's ability to see the general and or the unique elements of the specific context or the relationship between various aspects of the organizational context and or its environment. This may however cause an opposite reaction within the scientific community: the reading may not be that novel in the sense of not adding new theoretical insight. The judgements may also be affected by organizational politics. As argued by Weick: "Theorists can imagine as well as select realities that merely serve the interests of powerful organizational actors and not be aware that this is happening. It is a thin line from that is interesting to that is in my best interest, from that is obvious to that is what managers want to hear, and from that is real to that is the power system." (Weick 1989:528).

Thus a central challenge facing theorists is thus to make explicit which and who's interests may be in play. These premises are out of the researcher's control, and are thus literally premises which one can only take into account when including respondent validation. This is, however, not the case when it comes to reflections on which research designs and methodologies respondent validation makes most sense when argued as a strategy of validation. It is obvious that case study designs primarily aiming at description and producing empirical knowledge may be more readily validated by laypersons than those primarily aiming at explaining and generating or developing theories. However, given the pragmatic perspective, all four types of case study designs may produce knowledge which to some extent can be validated outside the scientific community. Thinking more practically, one way of practicing respondent validation is to construct thick descriptions from the often detailed empirical material as a form of narrative which laypersons (and the scientific community) can respond to and comment on whether this representation of organizational life is meaningful and or useful to them. To facilitate this process we as researchers must create descriptions, which is thick enough in conveying 'The devil in the detail' (kilde) so to speak, and at the same time make the descriptions specific enough to point at central dimensions in the representations without loosing central elements in the overall narrative.

Thus whether a description is 'thick enough' or whether a theoretical interpretation represents a novel and useful reading of a given empirical case is to a large extent negotiable with the actors who are the subject of our inquiries. Regarding the former, descriptions are never specific enough, but they may become thick enough. Regarding the latter, when we ask respondents to judge what is a useful interpretation or a novel reading we ask – is this knowledge of any use for you and your organization, but we additionally ask whether they are able to recognize our

representation as well as whether our representations add a novel perspective on their conception of their (organizational) reality.

When it comes to questions of whether our models, theories etc. represent plausible representations of the reality, is however, not only for laymen to decide. This is firstly caused by the fact that theories are representations which simplify and model the reality as experience by the organizational actors as well as by the researcher – they do not reflect the reality as it is. This is as mentioned an ontological premise within the pragmatic perspective. But it is also a practical circumstance, which has implications for the usefulness of laymen's perceptions in the process of validating ones models or theories. The problem is whether the organizational actors are able to fully comprehend our theoretical representations of their experienced reality, since these representations does not necessarily present empirical thick descriptions relying heavily on the experiences and perceptions of the actors. As a consequence we must also turn to our scientific communities to validate our more simplified and perhaps abstract representations of organizational life.

Conclusion

In the introduction we stated, that the main arguments posed in the article as follows: a pragmatic perspective is applicable to the four types of case-designs and the implications a pragmatic perspective has for how we conduct scientific inquiry in the various designs may not be that different from more conventional perspectives on case-designs.

Having elaborated the former in the discussions above we now turn to the latter. To begin we do not wish to argue that there are any differences between conventional case-designs arguing for example from a realist perspective. However the difficulties involved in conducting case-designs may not be that different. The strength of the pragmatic perspective is, we argue, that it not only puts focus on, but also makes substantial methodological contributions, by pointing out the epistemological implications the practical difficulties and challenges involved in conducting scientific inquiries.

In case studies a pragmatic perspective puts focus on theory generating, development and interpretation as a practical process, which involves as much contingency, ambiguity and retrospective reasoning and justification as sense making processes in ordinary life do. However, it also points to ways in which we can perhaps not solve, but cope with the complexities these practical problems represent inherent in the process of generating, developing and interpreting theories and empirical findings.

Conducting case studies from a pragmatic perspective, the purpose of our scientific inquiries is put up front. The questions of what is the purpose of our inquiries and for which (political) reasons do we conduct this line of research should be explicated in our representation in a way which make it possible for others to see how these questions are answered and reflected in our case designs. This kind of pragmatic reflections puts focus not just on the handicraft but also on the political and moral implications of our scientific endeavours.

If we look at some of the differences between conventional and pragmatic designs it is not a question of how to conduct a case study as it is a question of what to make of our case study and how to validate it. But the main difference is to be found in the process of validating ones case studies. To define the conventional way of validation qualitative case studies is however quite difficult. Reading the literature on qualitative research you will find an unambiguous field of understandings pointing at different ways of validating qualitative inquiry and this is no different when focussing qualitative case study research. There is no doubt that the more

conventional ways of validating down plays the role of respondent validation in favour of for instance a classical data triangulation (Riis 2006). However we see respondent validation as a key to create scientific knowledge using case designs not just because the respondent should have a morally privileged status but because they as organizational actors can evaluate the relevance of the research being done. Validating in terms of relevance is not just done through conversations with the organizational actors but also with the scientific communities. Testing ones analysis through conversations with colleagues does not in it self stand out from the more conventional ways of validating qualitative case studies, but it is still an important process of validating our simplified representations of the new theoretical and/or empirical knowledge.

Finally we argue that the choice for methodologies for our case-designs are not a priori legitimized in the idea that *"different methods appropriate to the natures of different objects..."* (Czarniawska 2003:129), but are legitimized in considerations on *"...which vocabulary suits the purpose of my inquiry best?"* (Czarniawska 2003:129). Thus we find a methodology based on a pragmativ logic as best suiting our purpose – designing qualitative case studies.

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