7-2018

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Citation

OSPINA, Sonia M., ESTEVE, Marc, & LEE, Seulki.(2018). Assessing qualitative studies in public administration research. *Public Administration Review, 78(4)*, 593-605.
Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soss_research/3519

Assessing Qualitative Studies in Public Administration Research

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Published in Public Administration Review, 2018, 78 (4), 593-605. DOI: 10.1111/puar.12837

Abstract:

Systematic reviews of research methods in the public administration field have assessed the progress of research practice and offered relevant recommendations to further develop research quality. But most recent reviews examine quantitative studies, and the few assessments of qualitative scholarship tend to focus on specific dimensions. This article calls attention to the overall practice of qualitative research in the field of public administration. The authors analyzed 129 qualitative studies published during a five-year period (2010–14) in the six top public administration journals, combining bibliometric and qualitative analyses. Three findings are drawn from the analysis. First, qualitative work represents a very small percentage of the journal articles published in the field. Second, qualitative research practice uses a small range of methodologies, mainly case studies. Finally, there is inconsistency in reporting methodological decisions. The article discusses the implications of these findings and offers recommendations to ensure methodological rigor while considering the integrity of the logic of inquiry and reporting standards of qualitative research practice.

Evidence for Practice

• Qualitative research, based on thick descriptions of real-life settings and understandings of participants ' worldviews, can help close the gap between practitioners and researchers.

• Scholars should care about methodological reporting standards, as this can enhance research credibility for policy makers.

• Public administration research should increase the use of certain qualitative traditions (e.g., ethnography and participatory action research) to enrich the interaction between researchers and practitioners.

The exponential growth of quantitative research (Pitts and Fernandez 2009) has been accompanied by a parallel, continued development of qualitative research (Dryzek 1990; Fischer 2003; Miller 2012; Stone 2002; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014). These trends reflect a rich and robust tradition of empirical research in public administration (PA). In this context, qualitative research can be viewed as a well-established methodology capable of answering "big questions" in PA and helpful to strengthen the field's links to practice (Stout 2013). Over time, conversations have shifted from questions about legitimacy to more productive exchanges around frameworks and approaches (Riccucci 2010; Stout 2013), criteria to improve rigor (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000; Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005; Lowery and Evans 2004; Miller 2012; Stout 2013), and sound research design (Cappellaro 2017; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012).

This is consistent with "the explosion of reflections on qualitative research and methodology in recent years" in the social and administrative sciences (Blatter, Haverland, and Van Hulst 2016, xix). Of importance for PA are efforts in political science (e.g., Blatter, Haverland, and Van Hulst 2016) and management (e.g., Boisot and McKelvey 2010) to bolster appreciation of good qualitative research practices and their potential contributions to knowledge generation. The primacy of quantitative methodologies in most disciplines demands that we continue to ensure that both types of research have equal standing regarding the legitimacy of knowledge claims generated by empirical research (Blatter, Haverland, and Van Hulst 2016; Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012).

Periodic assessments of research practice can contribute to this goal. However, the most recent comprehensive assessment of PA qualitative studies dates from 2000 (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000), with a smaller effort reported in 2004 (Lowery and Evans 2004). As of today, there is no systematic answer to how the overall practice of qualitative research has evolved since these reviews were published. Indeed, we do not even know whether

recommendations made then have produced changes to enhance qualitative practice. Our article aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive overview of the state of the art of PA qualitative research.

This article focuses on qualitative *approaches to research,* that is, qualitative methodologies (Haverland and Yanow 2012), rather than qualitative *methods*. This is because the choice of methods stems from assumptions that are aligned with specific theoretical perspectives and methodologies, which are linked, in turn, to philosophical understandings of the world. The absence of explicit conversations about the philosophical presuppositions of what constitutes scientific research results in miscommunication and hampers knowledge development in the field (Haverland and Yanow 2012). Hence, attention in assessments must move up the analytical ladder of abstraction (Carney 1990), away from the choice of concrete tools and techniques to the choice of methodology. The PA field is ready to explore these linkages more systematically, fostering fruitful cross-fertilization of knowledge and methodological pluralism.

Our study enriches this conversation by exploring the current meaning and impact of qualitative research. Drawing on a large database of articles (2010–14) from six PA journals, we combine bibliometric analysis (quantifying several dimensions of qualitative practice) and qualitative analysis (using an interpretive logic to explore the consistency in the studies' design, implementation, and reporting). Based on the findings, we offer recommendations to enhance the rigor of qualitative studies in ways that respect the integrity of their logic of inquiry, purposes, and reporting styles (Lub 2015).

Qualitative Studies in the PA Field: Understandings and Misunderstandings

The qualitative researcher's approach to empirical research demands intense and prolonged contact with social actors in naturalistic local settings. Features characterizing this methodological approach, independent of qualitative tradition (Creswell 2012), include (1) incorporating a holistic view of the study context; (2) replacing standardized instrumentation with the researcher as the main *instrument,* to capture the participants' worldviews; (3) focusing on words and other forms of representation different from numbers, to illuminate meaning through analysis of themes, gaps, and patterns; and (4) producing, among possible interpretations, a compelling understanding of the phenomenon in relation to the theoretical assumptions used and against established standards of quality (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). Qualitative studies thus illuminate the processes and meanings associated with a phenomenon in a real-life setting (Pratt 2009; Rynes and Gephart 2004) and offer insights that are often difficult to attain with numeric data.

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are needed in PA (Groeneveld et al. 2015). But their logics of inquiry are quite distinct and influence design, data collection, analysis, and reporting in ways often taken for granted.

The Underlying Assumptions of Methodological Choices

The decisions that a researcher makes during a study, whether he or she is aware of it or not, reflect answers to three philosophical questions: what is the nature of the world and of human beings? (ontology); how do we know what we know and develop knowledge? (epistemology); and how can we "capture" the object of research? (methodology). The answers reflect understandings tacitly assumed beforehand—presuppositions—that influence the choices made along the research path, from design to reporting (Haverland and Yanow 2012; Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012).

Presuppositions associated with the first two questions lead in practice to two contrasting orientations to scientific practice. Philosophers of science refer to these different *modes of knowing* by the terms *postpositivism* (the contemporary version of *logical positivism,* following Crotty 1998)[1] and *interpretivism,* respectively. These modes render different understandings of what constitutes legitimate knowledge (Boisot and McKelvey 2010). The differences often produce disagreements over the true value of knowledge claims in contemporary social and administrative sciences (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012).

At the methodological level, applying each orientation results in the systematic use of two contrasting strategies of inquiry, *from the outside* or *from the inside* (Evered and Louis 1981). Postpositivist researchers take a detached, value-free stance toward the object of study, often distancing themselves from the actors in the research setting (doing inquiry from the outside). They position themselves as external observers using instrumentation to isolate the phenomenon and manage complexity. In contrast, interpretivist researchers immerse themselves in the stream of events and activities of the phenomenon studied, interacting with its social actors (doing inquiry from the inside). They become the participating instrument in situ, aiming for a holistic picture of historically unique situations and embracing complexity.

Scholars committed to either mode of knowledge (with the consequent strategy of inquiry) develop distinct "research cultures" with language, practices, and standards of their own. Postpositivist researchers tend to favor quantitative methods and a deductive approach, drawing from experimental and quasi-experimental designs, econometric models, survey methods, quantitative and mixed case studies, and traditional ethnographies. Interpretivists tend to favor qualitative research and inductive or abductive approaches, choosing methods that focus on language and representation, such as narrative inquiry, qualitative case studies, ethnographic, phenomenological, hermeneutical or historical analysis, and participatory research (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014).

Hence, the specific choice of methods and tools to collect data—written questionnaires, oral interviews, observations, and so on—will also reflect the knowledge presuppositions that shape the strategy of inquiry, or what is called in the social sciences *indication of method* (Ospina and Dodge 2005). While both types of researchers may use qualitative tools to help them discover causal relations or causal mechanisms (Lin 1998), respectively, the logics behind the data collection, analysis, and interpretation are quite distinct in each case. For example, a postpositivist researcher may do oral interviews to complement his or her quantitative study or to refine a given theory (Battler et al., 2016), but the data treatment will follow a post-postpositivist logic. Likewise, an interpretivist researcher may use numbers sporadically, but the primary way to

approximate social reality will always be from the inside, and thus, relying on full immersion (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014).

With diversity comes fragmentation, preventing appreciation and mutual learning across cultures (Nesbit et al. 2011). To illustrate potential miscommunications across the cultural divide, consider the fascinating debate that has ensued around the methodological underpinnings of the narrative policy framework. As Jones and Radaelli (2015) propose to combine narrative theoretical perspectives with quantitative methodologies, they have met strong objections from interpretivist scholars. They highlight *indication of method* problems stemming from the unorthodox combination of a theory that is grounded in interpretivism on one side with methodological choices grounded in postpositivism on the other. The passionate—and often divisive—arguments going back and forth reflect a cultural divide that is not fully resolved among policy scholars in political science (see the journal *Critical Policy Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 [2015]), for this exchange). As we argue here, neither is it resolved in PA.

PA's Contemporary Version of the "Paradigm Wars"

Discussions of a simplistic qualitative versus quantitative methods divide have now been replaced by attention to the research implications of different logics of inquiry for research and knowledge development (Haverland and Yanow 2012). But tensions continue to be evident at the methodological level, similar to those in political science and management.

At the core of these tensions is PA's early aspiration to define its scientific enterprise through a single dominant philosophy of knowledge, thus mistaking "logical positivism" for science (Riccucci 2010). This fallacy produced a degree of unintentional intolerance toward research that did not follow the canon of postpositivism in its implementation and reporting, under the misconception that this was the path to make the field "more scientific" (McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Perry and Kraemer 1986; Stallings and Ferris 1998). Methodologies grounded in the interpretivist inquiry logic did not fit this mode (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014).

Today's generalized ascendance of postpositivism and its methodologies—as the dominant paradigm in the social, administrative, and behavioral sciences—compounds the historical tension. Equating rigor with the complex numerical operations associated with postpositivism (Nesbit et al. 2011) narrows the definition of what is legitimate empirical research in a field. "Research methods" requirements in PA doctoral programs teach postpositivist methodologies; interpretivist methodologies tend to be relegated to electives (Stout 2013). The consequences for the field are real. PA journal reviewers trained this way may reject good qualitative studies or at best request changes that are inconsistent with the logic of this methodology (e.g., reduce the article's length, trim down quotes presented as evidence, delete contextual details, etc.).

Two divergent postures—pluralistic and paradigmatic—illustrate the tensions. Pluralist arguments invite an enhanced "epistemological scope" (Riccucci 2010, 3), that is, they welcome diverse logics of inquiry and acknowledge the relevance of both postpositivism and interpretivism for the field. Pluralists lament the dominance of one over another paradigm and advocate giving interpretive methodologies their due in the field (e.g., Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000; Haverland and Yanow 2012; Luton 2010; Stout 2013). After all, these labels represent the extremes of a continuum of research practices, all legitimate if they use standards consistent with the appropriate logic of inquiry (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012).

Paradigmatic arguments, in contrast, highlight the divide between a pure postpositivist and a pure interpretivist approach or ignore the latter altogether. Postpositivists seldom make explicit statements against interpretivism or qualitative research, but—misunderstanding its logic—some express impatience with the study's "lack of rigor." Others equate "quantitative" with the golden standard of "empirical research," categorizing qualitative research as "nonempirical" and thus less scientific (e.g., Gulrajani and Moloney 2012). Some interpretivists respond by hardening their paradigmatic posture, presenting qualitative research not only as relevant but even as better able to illuminate the intricate processes in PA.[2] Others may criticize the naiveté of the truth claims of postpositivists and lament the field's move toward embracing the dominance of postpositivism (e.g., Rhodes 2011).

The pluralist posture may be gaining currency, but the paradigmatic posture continues to influence the field's collective mind-set. In fact, the philosophical conversation is only slowly making strands in the context of U.S.-dominated scholarship, while it has been more accepted in European circles. Rigorous assessments of the practice of qualitative research—both postpositivist and interpretivist—may help reduce the discrepancy.

Prior Assessments of PA Qualitative Research Practices

Brower, Abolafia, and Carr (2000) analyzed 72 qualitative research articles in *Public Administration Review, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* and *Administration & Society* between 1991 and 1995. This was followed by a review of nonquantitative studies in *PAR* (Lowery and Evans 2004) between 1996 and 2000. While excellent, more recent reflective pieces aiming to integrate knowledge are not empirical studies (e.g., Nesbitt et al. 2011; Stout 2013). The evidence to assess progress and present practices is scant.

Brower, Abolafia, and Carr (2000) offer four actionable recommendations based on the identified shortcomings of qualitative practice: (1) be less timid and push the arguments from description to explanation, (2) ensure adequate and sufficient presentation of data, (3) develop theoretical sensitivity to theorize from the data, and (4) develop sensitivity for the backstage context by being more critical of the actors' accounts.

Lowery and Evans (2004) found that case studies dominated but did not reflect a sophisticated understanding of the method. Furthermore, there was little use of social science conventions to describe the methods. They also reported the absence of explicit connections between paradigm, theory, methods, and techniques and a misunderstanding of the difference between positivism and interpretivism. The researchers concluded, confirming Perry and Kraemer's (1986) study of PA research, that scholars were unprepared to conduct qualitative research. An analysis of 10

qualitative articles from *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1998–99) further revealed that PA's qualitative practices lagged compared with the management field.

More recent reviews of qualitative research practice are narrower in scope, focusing on specific methods and interpretive dimensions (Cappellaro 2017; Gains 2011; Jeong 2009; Tummers and Karsten 2012). Altogether, the greatest agreement among reviewers—past and recent—has been about the insufficient disclosure in reporting research details. For example, Stewart (2012) reviewed 53 self-reported qualitative multiple case studies published in top PA journals (2004–09). Despite the use of multiple data sources, studies reported scant details about the interviews, sampling, analysis, and conceptualization of the evidence. Stewart called for more explicit connections between research design, data collection, and the studies' cross-case analysis to enhance their reliability.

To conclude, our review of the early assessments of PA qualitative studies identified field concerns that can be categorized into three broad questions: (1) Is qualitative research relevant, that is, helpful to build theory and to inform practice? (2) How can the field better incorporate qualitative research approaches? (3) How is qualitative research implemented and reported in top PA journals? The received literature's answer are (1) yes, qualitative research is relevant to inform theory and practice; (2) the field needs widespread understanding of qualitative research and its complexity and better training of future researchers; and (3) it is hard to assess how well qualitative research is implemented, given inconsistent reporting and absent established conventions. The received knowledge helped frame this article's inquiry to explore the meaning and impact of qualitative research today.

Study Methodology: Our Approach to Assessing Qualitative Studies

We identified as "qualitative" all articles reporting empirical research that drew primarily from "data in the form of words, that is, language in the form of extended text" (Miles and Huberman 1994, 9).[3] Building on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) description, qualitative data, at their best, are words that emerge from observations (field notes), interviews (transcripts), or documents (researcher memos and institutional documents); are collected (or accessed) in a naturalistic way (a researcher acting as instrument applies a holistic lens on the local context); and are processed through several iterations of systematic analysis (from raw to clean to categorized to interpreted data and findings).

A systematic literature review helped frame the assessment. Our analysis combined bibliometric and qualitative methods. Bibliometric analyses are broadly defined as the measure of text and information (Norton 2001) to provide a systematic evaluation of a particular research field (Wright 2011). An important limitation is that analysts cannot fully capture the specificities of each analyzed article (Raadschelders and Lee 2011). To overcome this, and to bring new light to the inquiry, we qualitatively assessed each article.

This study included six top academic journals in the field: *Governance* (*GOV*), *International Public Management Journal* (*IPMJ*), *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (*JPART*), *Public Administration* (*PA*), *Public Administration Review* (*PAR*), and *Public Management Review* (*PMR*). We chose these based on their impact factors (see 2014 Social Science Citation Index) and their use in prior studies analyzing research in the field (see, e.g., Andrews and Esteve 2015; Groeneveld et al. 2015). Even though journals represent the primary research outlet in academia, this selection decision limits the analytical scope because it ignores research published in books, book chapters, and agency reports (Walker, Brewer, and Choi 2014). Nevertheless, our study captures contemporary trends that reflect understandings of an influential group of gatekeepers in the field.

The sample included qualitative empirical articles published between January 2010 and December 2014, identified through keywords in the abstract using the ProQuest database. Capturing notions associated with social science qualitative research practice, these keywords were *qualitative, case study, grounded theory, triangulation, archival data, interview, observation, coding, theoretical sampling, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, inductive, interpretive,* and *abduction*. We read abstracts (and full articles when needed) to identify those studies using only a qualitative approach to gather empirical evidence.

Additional selection considerations led us to include (1) studies developing an argument around one or several prior qualitative studies of the same author and (2) studies exploring the nature of qualitative research using robust empirical examples. Likewise, we excluded (1) rationalist (i.e., reason-based) studies (Riccucci 2010) as well as mixed methods studies, which incorporate different standards demanding a separate analysis, and (2) studies not clearly encoded as empirical (e.g., describing research but not offering empirical data). This yielded 129 articles reporting qualitative studies (see the Supporting Information online for the full list) with sufficient descriptive information for analysis.

For the qualitative assessment, team members read carefully assigned articles to categorize their mode of inquiry as postpositivist or interpretivist and, within the latter, to identify the qualitative tradition, such as ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, and so on (Creswell 2012). We then assessed whether their implementation and reporting were faithful to the standards of the chosen mode of inquiry and, within interpretivism, to the specific qualitative research tradition.

Table 1 presents the final coding structure used for the qualitative analysis. We refined the original codes after a first round of reviews to more fully ground them in the data. The coding scheme included citation information, general characteristics, and methodological characteristics. The latter category aimed at capturing research choices ranging from epistemological to methodological, using the logic of the analytical ladder of abstraction (Carney 1990). Moving upward, codes represent more abstract, philosophical considerations. Moving downward, codes focus on more concrete, practical research choices. Specific codes in the methodological characteristics category were clustered within six relevant families: (1) epistemology; (2) theoretical lens; (3) methodological choices associated with the qualitative tradition used; (4) research design considerations; (5) data collection and analysis methods; and (6) writing and reporting strategies, including standards of goodness.

Table 1 Description of the Codes Used in the Systematic Interpretative Assessment

Citation Information			
Title; abstract; authors, issue; journal; year; volume; starting page; ending page			Rationale: The publication trends in time and journals
General Characteristics			
Number of authors; university of authors; gender of authors; main topic; policy context			Rationale: Topic, context, instance and logic offer evidence helpful to understand choices below
Methodological Characteristics			
Toward Philosophy	Epistemology	Epistemic community	Rationale: Where does the article fit within broader epistemic and qualitative traditions? Is there a link from epistemology and theory to methodological decisions?
	Theoretical lens	Main topic	
		Policy context	
		Research question	
	Methodology	Research tradition	
		Comparative nature of design and reason of design	
		Fit between chosen tradition and methodological decisions	
		Other relevant methodological decisions	
	Research design (cases and sampling)	What is the "case"?	Rationale: Are the criteria of case and sample selection reported? Is there a link from theory and methodology to design choices?
		Type of case	
		Number of cases	
		Logic behind case selection	
		Criteria of sample selection (units of analysis)	
		Number of interviews	
		Describe criteria for number of interviews	
Toward Practice	Methods (from collection to analysis)	Methods of data collection reported	Rationale: Are important methods decisions reported? Is there a link between methodology and data collection/analysis decisions?
		Single or multiple method	
		Time frame (of case or of data collection) reported	
		Discussion of the analysis	
		Report coding of interviews	
	Writing and reporting strategies	Consistency between research tradition and reporting	Rationale: Is the report authentic (transports reader vicariously to the site), plausible (having face validity), and critical (challenge readers to think deeply)? Is there a good sense of the context, actors, and their situated activity? Does the argument unfold with the use of evidence, connecting context and meaning? Is there evidence of intention to check data quality and conclusions using specified standards of goodness?
		Described as exploratory	
		Explanatory vs descriptive	
		Inclusion of thick description	
		Display of empirical evidence that links evidence to conclusions	
		Report content of the interviews	
		Theoretical sensitivity	
		Discussion of the terms (validity, reliability, generalizability, trustworthiness, replicability; credibility)	
		Stated limitations of the methodology/study	

Finally, the analysis connected the various levels of the analytical ladder of abstraction, for example, how epistemological and methodological presuppositions informed the research design and methods decisions. The last column of table 1 indicates the rationale for each broad family of codes.

For coding and analysis, we randomly distributed about one-third of the sampled articles to each team member, devoting several meetings to clarifying the review criteria. In-depth discussions of the rationale for each section of the coding structure guided the individual coding. An iterative process included cycles in which everyone coded a few articles and compared their coding to refine common criteria. For items requiring careful judgments (e.g., inclusion of thick description), we drew on state-of-the-art qualitative research methods literature (Creswell 2012; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). When in doubt, all authors reviewed the questioned article, comparing assessments for reliability purposes. An example of coding for an article is presented in the appendix.

Results: The Practice of Qualitative Research

Table 2 presents the number of qualitative studies published in the reviewed journals for the 2010–14 period and the percentage considering all the studies published in these journals during the same period.[4] The table shows that less than the 7.57 percent of 1,703 total published articles in the studied journals relied solely on qualitative methodology to gather and analyze empirical evidence (we excluded reviews, comments, letters, and editorials from the total). This represents a very small percentage of articles published during the study time.

Table 2 Composition of the Data Set Used in the Study

Journal	Total Published Articles	Number of Reviewed Articles	Percentage of Reviewed Articles
JPART	258	10	3.87%
PAR	462	16	3.46%
PMR	321	34	10.59%
GOV	168	14	8.33%
IPMJ	115	6	5.21%
PA	379	49	12.92%
Total	1,703	129	7.57%

Examining the articles over their publication year and journal, we observe that some journals did not publish a single qualitative study that we could include in our sample during some years. This suggests that the likelihood of qualitative journal studies impacting broad field conversations is quite low. Descriptive information from the analysis is reported in table 3, structured around the logic of the analytical ladder of abstraction (Carney 1990).

Table 3 Selected Descriptive Information

	JPART	PAR	PMR	GOV	IPMJ	PA	Total
			Epistemic Community				
Positivism	5(50)	13(81.2)	15(44.1)	7(50)	3(50)	32(65.3)	75(58.1)
Interpretivism	1(10)	0(0)	14(41.2)	3(21.4)	2(33.3)	10(20.4)	31(24)
Other	4(40)	3(18.7)	5(14.7)	4(28.5)	1(16.6)	7(14.2)	24(18.6)
			Methodology: Research Tradition				
Case study	6(60)	14(87.5)	26(76.5)	12(85.7)	6(100)	44(89.8)	108(83.7)
Field study	2(20)	1(6.2)	1(2.9)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	4(3.1)
Grounded theory	1(10)	1(6.2)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	2(1.5)
Hermeneutics	1(10)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1(.7)
Other (e.g., ethnography, action research)	0(0)	0(0)	7(20.6)	2(14.2)	0(0)	5(10.2)	15(11.6)
			Research Design				
Single case study	3(30)	9(56.2)	14(41.2)	9(64.2)	1(16.6)	28(57.1)	64(49.6)
Multiple case study	3(30)	5(31.2)	12(35.3)	3(21.4)	5(83.3)	16(32.6)	44(34.1)
Criteria of sample selection	8(80)	6(37.5)	14(41.1)	0(0)	1(16.6)	7(14.2)	36(27.9)
Criteria for number of interviews*	6(66.6)	5(45.4)	5(16.6)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	16(15.2)
			Method				
Single data collection	2(20)	6(37.5)	8(23.5)	5(35.7)	2(33.3)	16(32.6)	39(30.2)
Multiple data collection	8(80)	8(50)	25(73.5)	7(50)	4(66.6)	26(53)	78(60.4)
Report time frame	5(50)	13(81.2)	24(70.5)	6(42.8)	3(50)	18(36.7)	69(53.4)
Discusses the analysis	4(40)	9(56.2)	20(58.8)	1(7.1)	3(50)	18(36.7)	55(42.6)
			Writing and Reporting				
Consistent with research tradition	8(80)	10(62.5)	29(85.2)	9(64.2)	6(100)	33(67.3)	95(73.6)
Described as exploratory	2(20)	6(37.5)	13(38.2)	1(7.1)	0(0)	13(26.5)	35(27.1)
Explanatory writing	8(80)	7(43.7)	18(52.9)	9(64.2)	4(66.6)	31(63.2)	77(59.6)
Descriptive writing	1(10)	9(56.2)	15(44.1)	3(21.4)	2(33.3)	12(24.4)	42(32.5)
Includes thick description	7(70)	14(87.5)	26(76.4)	8(57.1)	3(50)	28(57.1)	86(66.6)
Report interview's content*	2(22.2)	4(36.3)	9(30)	1(8.3)	2(33.3)	5(13.5)	23(21.9)
Display of empirical evidence	8(80)	11(68.5)	23(67.5)	6(42.8)	3(50)	25(51)	76(58.9)
Stated methodological limitations	8(80)	6(37.5)	13(38.2)	0(0)	1(16.6)	8(16.3)	36(27.9)

Note: Percentages of the total analyzed sample for each journal are displayed in parentheses.
*Percentages refer to the total number of studies that used interviews as one method of data collection.

Epistemology, Choice of Qualitative Tradition, and Interconnections

With respect to epistemic communities, most of the cases reflect either a postpositivist or an empiricist approach to qualitative research (Riccucci 2010), while interpretivist traditions are underrepresented. Most studies did not articulate their epistemological and theoretical assumptions, but a few did. In those instances, the authors presented their perspective, explained why they chose it, and enunciated assumptions, thus offering further understanding of their approach vis-à-vis other paradigms. An example is Lejano and Leong's (2012) rigorous study of the nature of public disputes and resolution of controversial public issues in California.

The scarcity of studies with an explicit interpretive approach speaks to an imbalanced research practice in the field and suggests that the differences in qualitative research practice between the two epistemic communities are real. Given how small the interpretive group is, and the absence of explanation of epistemological assumptions in most studies, Lowery and Evans's (2004) diagnosis of a lack of understanding of paradigmatic differences may still remain, despite contemporary evidence of its conceptual discussion (Haverland and Yanow 2012; Riccucci 2010).

There was little variation regarding qualitative research traditions, with a vast majority of the reviewed articles using case studies (83.7 percent). A few relied on other methods: ethnographies (3), hermeneutics (1), field studies (4), and grounded theory studies (2). Other important traditions, such as narrative inquiry or phenomenology, were absent. Most authors did not explain why they chose the qualitative tradition (mostly case study) over other alternatives. The possibility that studies using less familiar interpretive methods are rejected for publication is worth exploring in future studies.

Research Design, Data Collection, and Analysis Methods

Independent of epistemic community and qualitative tradition, most studies (119; 92.2 percent) articulated an explicit research question. They connected it well to a theory, both in terms of study motivation and implications, independent of whether they were descriptive (32 percent) or explanatory (60 percent). With some exceptions, most descriptive studies contributed to a received conversation, adding to knowledge by illuminating a poorly known phenomenon and connecting it to existing theoretical conversations. Micheli and Neely (2010) offer a good example of this with a detailed and rich description of the systems and processes to measure performance at different levels of implementation of Public Service Agreements in England.

Explanatory studies included instances in which the goal was to understand the stages of a process that led to a particular outcome, such as Purdy's (2012) study of power in a collaborative governance process to redesign the rules for hydroelectric licensing in the United States. In some instances, the goal was to identify mechanisms that could explain a surprising situation or outcome.

As an example, Etienne's (2015) study of the regulation of industrial risks in France shows that, contrary to the literature's assumption of information maximization, concern with reputational risk was a key factor to understand apparently unexpected and irrational regulator preferences and tools of detection.

Most studies did not discuss criteria that justified the choice and delimited the boundary of the "case" studied (i.e., the case study or the bounded cases for field studies and ethnographies, which Ragin [1992] calls the overall "casing" process underlying any study). Among the few articles carefully reporting the rationale behind the overall "case" selection was Mele and Ongaro (2014), who justify their two reform case studies after providing a comprehensive framework of the Italian government reforms between 1992 and 2007. In contrast, most authors did not explain the selection criteria and took for granted, for example, that a local government in the United Kingdom, or, for that matter, in the United States or India, would represent a legitimate bounded case. Hence, there was no justification in reference to either the theory used or contextual implications of history, geographic location, or jurisdictional level (the same applied to countries as bounded cases).

Likewise, a large number of articles missed explaining sampling criteria (what Ragin calls "cases" or the units of observation, e.g., actors to interview or documents to analyze). About nine in every 10 reviewed studies failed to discuss why they selected their interviewees or to report and justify the numbers and did not offer interviewees' profiles. Likewise, most case studies failed to describe sampling criteria or criteria to construct a corpus for systematic analysis of documents. An exemplar for reporting selection criteria for their units of observation is Vijay and Kulkarni's (2012) examination of the emergence of collective action frames in an Indian movement, in which the authors carefully explain how they selected their interviewees and documents.

Data collection reflected state-of-the-art practice, if judged, for example, by the fact that 60 percent of the articles used multiple sources of data. Moreover, there was consistency within the studies' tradition, question and approaches (even if this fit was not often explicitly reported). Many studies reported triangulating data sources, confirming the belief that this practice enhances qualitative research credibility and the overall research design (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005). For example, Schotanus et al.'s (2011) comparative research of three case studies of purchasing groups in the Dutch context thoughtfully describes each form of triangulation used (data, methods, and investigator triangulation).

Only in a few instances did the data collected seem inadequate. In one case, it did not match the study question; another case focused on a constructed story, with no reference to how, when, or why the data used to build it had been gathered. In a few cases, there was no clarity about what data were collected. That less than half of the studies (43 percent) discussed in their methods section the strategy or type of data analysis used is more problematic. This lack of transparency of the path from data collection to interpretation and theorizing is still an area of concern consistent with earlier assessments (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000; Lowery and Evans 2004).

Writing, Reporting, and Quality Discussions

The methodological reporting was very unequal, ranging from having no methodological section in the article (only one case) to detailed descriptions that still left some questions unanswered about data sources. For instance, 105 articles used interviews to collect empirical evidence as the primary or secondary source. However, only 23 (21.9 percent of those using this data collection method) reported something about the content of the questions used during the interviews. In contrast, robust studies either mentioned briefly the main concepts guiding the interviews (e.g., Van Oortmerssen, Van Woerkum, and Aarts 2014) or even fully disclosed this information by including specific questions in an appendix (e.g., Mischen 2015).

The range of variation around the "golden rule" of qualitative writing—to "show" rather than just "tell" the reader what the analyst found—was wide. Solid empirical evidence—in the form of quotes, detailed descriptions of places and events, vignettes, and other forms of representation—was present in almost 60 percent of the studies. These also clarified the path from evidence to interpretation and conclusions. Instances of abstract, generic claims without specific evidence (reflecting an immature use of evidence and an inability to weave data and theoretical considerations) represented a minority within the broader sample, yet it was surprising to see them published. In general, responding to Brower, Abolafia, and Carr's (2000) call for sensitivity for the backstage vis-à-vis actors' accounts of events, most studies demonstrated awareness on the importance of context to understand the meaning and interpret the accessed qualitative data.

A puzzling finding was the absence of discussions of the limitations of the study, with only 36 studies (27.9 percent) doing so. Most studies highlighted the benefits and richness of their approach; however, two-thirds omitted mentioning limitations that—in principle—any study may have. Furthermore, when discussed, the exclusive focus was on the difficulty of generalizing because of the small number of cases. This reflects two potential problems: first, it omits other criteria such as validity and reliability (postpositivist criteria) or trustworthiness, replicability, and credibility (interpretivist criteria); second, it may reflect a confusion between the interpretivist notion of analytical generalization and the postpositivist notion of generalizing to a population (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012).

Roughly three-quarters of the articles (73 percent) presented a report that was clearly consistent with the research design tradition used (mostly case studies). With respect to the reporting style of the findings, save a few exceptional cases, the writing of the studies tended to follow the traditional tone, language style, format, and structure of postpositivist quantitative studies (literature review, methods, and results). Indeed, a comparison with qualitative reports in other disciplines such as sociology, political science, and management does not fare well. While well written, qualitative studies in PA seemed much less literary, creative, and innovative. Only very few reflected an intention to tell a compelling story characterized both by human interest and theoretical relevance. This suggests a reluctance to risk innovative writing.

Significant variations from study to study suggest that, altogether, there is no widespread agreement about which methodological decisions to report. Even some exemplary articles offering grounded claims and theoretical sophistication lacked at least one important detail. For example, in Romzek et al.'s multiple-case study (2014), the reader was left wanting information about the coding scheme and its evolution given the use of grounded theory; in another multiple-case study heavily reliant on interviews (Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2010), information about their content was missing. While these are small details within highly accomplished pieces, they illustrate lack of agreement. This will be further discussed later.

Discussion: Closing the Gap between Past and Present

Overall, our findings suggest that despite a handful of weak cases, there is robust and rigorous qualitative research in the field. But there is room for improvement. Qualitative researchers have responded to some recommendations from prior assessment studies. For example, a good number of studies today go beyond description and many reflect excellent theoretical sensitivity (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000; Lowery and Evans 2004). However, earlier calls to comply with social science reporting conventions are still applicable.

The general agreement, past and present, is that there is much variation and inconsistency in reporting research decisions, sometimes in their amount and often in their depth (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000; Lowery and Evans 2004; Stewart 2012). Our study found uneven disclosure of details in research reporting across the continuum from stronger to weaker studies. It is thus hard to fully assess the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research practices in the field, despite excellent exemplars. Here we offer basic recommendations to improve reporting standards that cut across epistemic communities. These, in turn, may contribute to enhancing the methodological rigor of qualitative research, independent of orientation. We argue, like earlier reviewers, that these can further motivate enhanced PA qualitative research practice.[5]

Clarify epistemological and theoretical assumptions. Most reviewed studies did not explicitly articulate their commitment to an epistemic community, independent of their approach. Since postpositivist and empiricist qualitative research still overrides the interpretive approach, at least as reflected in our sample, this is not surprising. It also perpetuates Lowery and Evans's (2004) diagnosis of virtual misunderstandings across paradigms. The absence of discussions blocks interplay between the two research cultures (Haverland and Yanow 2012).

Cunliffe (2016) argues that qualitative researchers must do a type of activity that she calls "philosophical underlabouring"—the effort to understand and make evident the assumptions under which knowledge is produced. This intentional work reflects and identifies the presuppositions, expectations, and rules that influence, often implicitly, research decisions and practices. Underlaboring is particularly helpful to understand contested conceptualizations of the phenomena of interest, and thus of the research decisions taken to study them. Our findings suggest that this is not happening in qualitative PA research as much as it should.

Articulate the logic behind choosing a qualitative research tradition. Because it was absent in most studies of our sample, we reemphasize the importance of articulating the rationale for using a particular qualitative research tradition, considering research question, and driving theory. Further, the lack of diversity in qualitative methodologies—with case studies predominating over all other traditions—reiterates earlier imbalances in the use of PA qualitative traditions (Lowery and Evans 2004; Perry 2012; Pollitt 2006). Instances of other traditions in our sample, such as hermeneutics, ethnography, or grounded theory studies, suggest some progress, but not enough. PA continues to underutilize powerful qualitative methodologies to better understand the complexities of PA phenomena (Gains 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen, Tummers, and Pandey 2017; Rhodes 2011; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014).

Explain the criteria for case selection and clarify the sampling strategy. Justifying how particular cases are chosen as empirical instances of a broader phenomenon (be it one or several cases) clarifies the proper unit of analysis from which to draw inferences about the phenomenon of interest. Consistent with Stewart's (2012) review of multiple-case studies, many studies in our sample lacked sufficient information about "casing" decisions and about sampling characteristics for units of observation. This "casing process" is key to connect empirics to theory in a qualitative study (Ragin 1992). One level down the analytical ladder, transparency about the sampling strategy for interviewees, observations, documents, and other sources offers similar evidence of methodological rigor.

Be transparent about how the qualitative data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. There is progress in reference to earlier reports of inadequate or insufficient data collection details (Brower, Abolafia, and Carr 2000). There is, for example, increased evidence of good practices such as triangulation. But reporting inconsistencies across studies is still a concern. Each researcher decides what to report and what to omit—from big decisions such as sampling and coding schemes to smaller details such as data sources, time frames, data collection settings, and content of interviews or observation protocols. Hence, readers have an incomplete picture of the study and, most importantly, are unable to compare quality across studies.

Clear reporting of data analysis strategies continues to be absent, as identified in earlier assessments. Less than half of the studies explained successfully how the researchers moved from raw to ordered data to interpretations to research findings. Interpretivist studies tend to model this better than positivist qualitative studies. Interpretivism demands attending to rigor in method and interpretation, with the expected convention of a systematic defense of the reasoning behind the process of interpretation. This contrasts with positivist validation of knowledge, which happens exclusively by methodological procedure and rational logic (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005; Lincoln and Guba 1985). This difference helps explain the poor reporting in a sample that is largely postpositivist and empiricist, where rigor is defined around method.

Ensure a writing style consistent with your chosen qualitative research tradition and explore creative writing possibilities. Researchers must connect epistemological and theoretical assumptions to the chosen methodology and qualitative research tradition. Likewise, the writing of the report is connected to the

tradition that frames it. This tradition influences the study's organizing architecture (narrative structure) and its embedded structure (narrative devices and techniques used) (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). Good qualitative reporting demands the use of "encoding" strategies. This means offering signals to the audience about the epistemic community in which it is embedded, to manage expectations around language, logic, and writing styles (Creswell 2012).

Our study suggests that there is room for improvement in the qualitative research writing practices of PA scholars. Despite the wide variety of narrative devices associated with qualitative research traditions, there is considerable uniformity in writing styles and reporting structures. A communication style typical of postpositivism dominates, and thus creative representations of the social worlds studied are scarce. If more agreement is needed around what methodological details to report, PA also needs more creativity and variety in the writing of qualitative reports. But, of course, this requires first encouraging scholars to use a variety of qualitative traditions beyond the case study and appreciating the promise of interpretivist writing approaches, communication strategies, and rhetorical devices.

Consider the broad range of standards of quality in qualitative research and report on the limitations of the study. The discussion of quality standards in qualitative research has evolved over time, from proposing very rigid standards that replicate positivist criteria (such as internal and external validity and reliability) to considering others more consistent with its underlying epistemological and methodological assumptions (such as credibility, trustworthiness, and comfirmability) (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy 2005; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). Given the alternatives, the researcher must determine early on which evaluation criteria will guide decisions of design, implementation, and reporting. Two interrelated but analytically distinct conceptual operations are at play: (1) specifying the standards to evaluate the study and (2) clarifying the tactics to monitor quality during different research stages, thus helping minimize the risks of going astray from the specified standards (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). Consistent with earlier reviews, our findings reiterate a continuing absence of discussions of standards. Moreover, when present, few methodological limitations tend to be reported, overemphasizing generalizability concerns. Altogether, qualitative research in PA begs for more explicit discussions of standards, either postpositivist or interpretivist. Postpositivism's emphasis on explicating study limitations offers a model for qualitative reporting, assuming appropriate translations to the logic of interpretive studies.

To sum up, we have offered recommendations that bridge past and present assessments of qualitative research in the hopes of fostering progress to close the gap. We have also recommended the need to articulate consistent methodological decisions at each level of the analytical ladder of abstraction and warned that these should not contradict each other. While following these recommendations does not automatically translate into better scholarship, it may help create sufficient agreements to stimulate more methodological rigor in the qualitative research practice. Of course, given the nature and variety of qualitative research methodologies, one cannot expect complete uniformity in reporting or in the standards to ensure high study quality. What matters instead is that the study reports on the standards chosen, showing their legitimacy within a given qualitative research tradition and making consistent decisions along the research process.

Ultimately, a qualitative research study must offer evidence of underlaboring work (Cunliffe 2016), enacting the researcher's awareness of the upward and downward linkages between (1) epistemological and theoretical assumptions and their methodological consequences, on the one hand, and (2) decisions about research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, on the other. Evidence of this awareness will ensure readers' full understanding of the research approach and enhance the study's credibility and trustworthiness. More transparency in research methodology will indirectly lead to improving the methodological rigor of qualitative research and make legitimate its distinct standards vis-à-vis quantitative research. This requires an important shift in mind-set for PA qualitative researchers as well as for editors and reviewers of PA journals: they must become aware of the implications of these rigorous demands and adjust expectations and editorial practices to accommodate them.

Conclusion

We now return to the three questions drawn from the literature review that helped characterize the qualitative research conversation in PA, linking our findings to actionable ideas associated with its meaning and impact. The first question is whether qualitative research is relevant to build theory and to inform practice. Our study suggests that methodologically robust qualitative studies help explain phenomena of importance to PA, and their framing connects their questions to broader theoretical conversations in the field. Nevertheless, despite the presence of robust and rigorous qualitative research, PA scholarship would benefit from three correctives: agreeing on and expecting consistent reporting of key methodological decisions; seeing more diverse qualitative traditions beyond case studies and more writing styles beyond the typical postpositive style; and fostering a more explicit discussion of the standards of quality and limitations of the studies.

But the small number of published qualitative studies in PA journals is surprising, at least when compared with the number of quantitative studies published in the same outlets that published our sample. The generalized narrative in PA that the field has relied too heavily on qualitative research is overrated. At least between 2010 and 2014, less than one article out of 10 in the journals studied used primarily qualitative methodologies to answer a question of interest to the field. This is in line with some PA scholars' warnings about the dominance of quantitative approaches in PA research (e.g., Perry 2012). The low proportion of purely qualitative studies does not fare well for the methodological pluralism typical of a mature field—articulated as an aspiration in PA. Actionable ideas to address this are associated with the other questions.

The second question is about how can the field better incorporate qualitative research approaches. A deeper understanding across the epistemological divide will build methodological pluralism and enhance readers' ability to evaluate the work of colleagues. A possible strategy is to foster conversational spaces—in conferences

or as independent events—in which participants engage in multiparadigmatic interplay (Ospina and Uhl-Bien 2012) and develop a field-level understanding of the logics of various paradigms. The findings also validate prior calls for required doctoral training in qualitative research (Haverland and Yanow 2012; Nesbit et al. 2011; Stout 2013). This requirement is not just for those inclined to use this methodology but also for quantitatively inclined students who, given topical expertise, may review qualitative studies. The point is for reviewers to avoid rejecting good studies because of mere methodological illiteracy. Furthermore, another strategy in the same direction is a field effort to attract and accept more interpretive studies in top journals once standards of excellence are understood.

A key contribution of this study stems from insights about the third question in the PA methodological conversation: by which standards is qualitative research implemented and reported? Our findings point to an unresolved problem: the absence of consistent reporting of methodological decisions. While there is progress since prior comprehensive reviews, appropriate reporting is still an aspiration. Expecting a single format for all researchers would counter the ethos of qualitative research. But the field must attend to the absence of basic agreements on *what minimal methodological decisions ought to be included* (independent of where or how they are reported). We hope the recommendations offered in the discussion help address this gap.

Finally, this study has several limitations, primarily associated with its narrow scope, on various accounts. First, our sampling frame resulted in the exclusion of some studies. In doing so, we ensured consistent and realistic boundaries for our study but reduced the universe to effectively assess the impact of qualitative research in the field.

Second, journals capture only a small fraction of the outlets public administration scholars use to disseminate their research. Some scholars may prefer outlets other than journals or publishing outside PA. The plethora of good qualitative research outside PA journals thus precludes full understanding of the practice as a whole. Nonetheless, the reviewed journals do represent aspirational venues for scholars and, therefore, provide valuable information. Further research could incorporate other publication outlets, such as books, edited chapters, and PA articles in sibling fields such as management and political science.

A third limitation pertains the coding categories used to review and interpret the articles. Narrowing our assessment to specific categories enhances reliability (or dependability in interpretivist terms) but may have blinded us to important nuances and insights about other qualitative dimensions of the studies. Finally, while at least one of the authors read each article in depth, our findings and interpretations may be influenced by the idiosyncratic culture of our research team. Attempts of transparency in coding and other decisions offer the reader a chance to assess the trustworthiness of our own research decisions. While the credibility and generalizability of our findings may be subject to challenges, the arguments presented should be of interest to public administration scholars, whether they are authors, reviewers, editors, or readers of qualitative studies.

To conclude, there is progress with respect to prior assessments, but it is not enough to present an optimistic scenario of qualitative research in PA. Increasingly, studies seem to demonstrate a good level of competence (the glass is half full), but some fail to offer sufficient information to ensure that we can trust the results (the glass is half empty). We suggest a field effort to explore agreements around minimum standards and their logic. It is worthwhile considering their dissemination in editorial policies of public administration journals. Notable examples include *Public Administration Review*'s transparency and openness guidelines (Perry 2017) and an editorial letter in the *International Public Management Journal* regarding common-method bias (Kelman 2015). Developing such statements would require convening structured conversations that include thought leaders as well as postpositivist and interpretivist researchers doing qualitative research in the field to deliberate on basic agreements that satisfy scholars across the divide.

A field conversation about the convergence/divergence of standards must incorporate on equal standing the logic of inquiry of the interpretive paradigm. With our recommendations, we join other PA scholars mentioned earlier in this article who also see the value of a pluralist methodological agenda for the field. The aim is to ensure that the quality, contributions, and impact of qualitative research in PA scholarship are understood and appreciated alongside those of quantitative research.

Advancing this agenda is also consistent with trends in sibling disciplines and fields. For example, editors of top management journals (e.g., Bansal and Corley 2012; Pratt 2009; Rynes and Gephart 2004) and in domains such as organizational studies (e.g., Daft and Lewin 1990) have long made systematic efforts to promote this shift in mind-set. Almost three decades ago, the first editors of *Organization Science* challenged a premature move toward "convergent thinking" and a positivist "methodological box" (Daft and Lewin 1990, 2). They encouraged "heretical" research methods and novel theoretical explanations with a new grammar and new logics beyond the then-dominant logical positivist tradition in their domain. Today, considerable progress has been made around methodological pluralism in journals that recognize and publish excellent qualitative research, whether interpretivist or positivist. This is an effort worth emulating in the PA field.

Notes

1. Postpositivism, a "critical realist" philosophy of science (Laudan 1990), is sometimes called neopositivism. Creating unnecessary confusion, some use postpositivism to refer to interpretivist traditions, defining them as moving past positivism (e.g., Prasad 2005).
2. Some PA scholars go further in their critique, grounded in a broader historical debate about the social role of research—fostered by, among others, Jürgen Habermas and his colleagues from the Frankfurt School: positivist methodologies may undermine democracy, given their excessive reliance on instrumental rationality and their rejection of human emancipation as a potential research goal.
3. Still or moving images and other forms of representation such as performance and art are also qualitative data. Given the nature of the conversation in PA, we prioritize text-based approaches.
4. While the rest of the published articles include quantitative, mixed methods, and conceptual research, the proportion of qualitative studies in PA is still low compared with other fields. In the management field, for example, 22 percent of empirical articles published in four top management journals (1986–2008) were qualitative (Plowman and Smith 2011).

5. Some academics have made similar recommendations for quantitative studies, particularly around adequate reporting of data collection procedures and measurement practices (e.g., Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012; Wright, Manigault, and Black 2004).

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Supporting Information

A supplementary appendix may be found in the online version of this article at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/puar.12837/full.

Appendix Example of Coding: Methodological Characteristics of Vijay and Kulkarni (2012)

Epistemology	Epistemic Community	Interpretivism
Theoretical lens	Main topic	Social movement
	Policy context	Health care
	Research question	Yes (presented): Which frames were employed over the evolution of the palliative care movement? How did these frames emerge? (p. 749)
Methodology	Research tradition	Case study
	Comparative nature of design and reason of design	Yes
	Fit between chosen tradition and methodological decisions	Yes
	Other relevant methodological decisions	
Research design (cases and sampling)	What is the "case"?	Palliative movement in Kerala, India
	Type of case	A social movement in a country region
	Number of cases	1
	Logic behind case selection	Yes (extreme case, pp. 752, 753)
	Criteria of sample selection (units of analysis)	Yes (for interviews: snowballing/internal and external. For document analysis entire universe including past material and present websites)
	Number of interviews	40 (p. 753)
	Describe criteria for number of interviews	No
Methods (from collection to analysis)	Methods of data collection reported	Yes (p. 753)
	Single or multiple method	Multiple (document and interviews)
	Time frame (of case or of data collection)	Yes (Of case, 1993–2010)
	Discussion of the analysis	Yes (frame analysis, pp. 754–56)
	Report coding of interviews	Yes
Writing and reporting strategies	Consistency between research tradition and reporting	Yes
	Described as exploratory	No
	Explanatory vs. descriptive	Explanatory
	Inclusion of thick description	Yes
	Display of empirical evidence that links evidence to conclusions	Yes
	Report content of the interviews	Yes (see p. 754 and quotes on pp. 761, 763, 764, 766)
	Theoretical sensitivity	Yes
	Discussion of the terms (validity, reliability, generalizability, trustworthiness, replicability; credibility)	No
	Stated limitations of the methodology/study	Yes (p. 767)