

COMMENTARY

# Framing the Issue of Research Quality in a Context of Research Diversity

Christopher S. Chapman

## INTRODUCTION

The current editorial policy of *The Accounting Review* states “The scope of acceptable articles should embrace any research methodology and any accounting-related subject, as long as the articles meet the standards established for publication in the journal.” The policy concludes with the statement “The journal is also open to all rigorous research methods.” Private journals are rightly entitled to set as selective an editorial policy as they think proper. An association journal, however, should rightly be expected to maintain an open policy that does not *ex ante* privilege one form of research over another. In that respect, the clearly stated policy of *The Accounting Review* of seeking “any” and “all” is admirable. However, the continuing need to make the case for research diversity is disappointing given the longstanding recognition of the dangers of narrowness:

Reinforcing the above [stagnation and decline of accounting research] is a tendency for senior accounting academics to judge and reward the performance of juniors on the basis of a narrow definition of what constitutes academic accounting. (Demski et al. 1991, 4–5)

With regard to *The Accounting Review*, recent years have seen considerable efforts to enhance the diversity of research appearing in its pages. These efforts have undoubtedly resulted in a higher level of research diversity than that seen for most of the period since the current editorial policy was published in 1989. In conference panels and other arenas of debate, the case has been put that a journal can only publish as diverse sets of papers as are submitted to it. Detailed reports of submissions and acceptance rates are now prepared and published, demonstrating success in this regard. The issue that continues to divide is that of the requisite diversity of an editorial board to encourage the submission of kinds of work that currently remain unsubmitted. Underlying the continuing debates over this aspect of diversity is disagreement over the implications of the caveat in the editorial policy, “as long as the articles meet the standards established for publication in the journal.”

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Debates around this topic all too easily reduce to a false dichotomy between diversity and quality, with diversity perceived as a threat to quality. Increased diversity promises to increase the quality of the body of accounting research, however. Accounting is a complex social phenomenon, and so our understanding of it should be enhanced through the adoption of a diverse set of research perspectives and approaches. Grasping accounting in all its complexity is important from an intellectual perspective, but also from the perspective of the ability of our research discipline to contribute back to society (e.g., Flyvbjerg 2001). Diversity of research approaches requires diversity in the proper estimation of quality and validity of research, however (Ahrens and Chapman 2006).

To help structure my arguments around this central issue of the relationship between research diversity and quality, I offer two frameworks in the sections that follow. In doing so, I hope to help us to move toward a situation in which research diversity in *The Accounting Review* (and other journals) may become taken-for-granted practice, as well as policy.

### DIVERSITY FRAMED IN U.S.-DOMINANT CATEGORIES

The process of becoming a published researcher is arduous and complex. Along the way, we pick up a variety of tools and techniques. The expression “All-But-Dissertation” reminds us that while tools and techniques are necessary for successful research, they are not sufficient. Expertise and judgment are built up over years of reading, observing the efforts of others, and trying ourselves. Hopefully, as we go on, we become better able to make the fine judgments required to distinguish between creative and fruitful leeway in the application of established approaches, and their misapplication. We become experts in assessing the validity of the kinds of research with which we are familiar. Our hard-won understanding naturally offers the starting point for our engagement with different forms of research.

To illustrate this point, let us look at an attempt to understand research diversity drawn from outside the discipline of accounting. Figure 1 is a reproduction from the introduction from the editor to a special issue of the *Journal of Financial Economics* entitled “Complementary Research Methods.” This journal addresses a discipline that also has a particularly strong tradition of a particular kind of research; namely, economics-based capital markets research. The figure offers an organizing framework for considering different research methods in relation to this core audience. It

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**FIGURE 1**  
Positioning “Complementary Research Methods”—Reproduced From the Introduction of a Special Issue of the *Journal of Financial Economics* in 2001

*P. Tufano / Journal of Financial Economics 60 (2001) 179–185*

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	Small sample size	Large sample size
Intensive private data collection	Traditional field-based or case study research	Survey methodologies and “unique” databases
Public data collection	Small-scale empirical research (e.g., industry level studies)	Traditional empirical research (e.g., CRSP/Compustat studies)

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distinguishes various kinds of research methods in two dimensions: first, through their use of privately or publicly available data, and second, through the large or small size of their data sets.

Approaches to research potentially vary in a vast number of ways. The point of the figure is to distill these down to a manageable number. Simplification is not *per se* a problem. Danger arises when the dimensions chosen privilege the interests of one particular group of researchers over those of another, however. Let us consider the designation of a case study as having a small sample size, for example. This framing has been seen also in accounting, with several journals in the past including “small sample” sections that published such work. However, as clearly put by [Anderson and Widener \(2007\)](#), this is to assume that the unit of analysis must always be company-level observations, and this need not be the case.

This figure offers a way for large sample, public data researchers to think about how other forms of research might complement (contribute to) their own activities. As such, this represents only a partial engagement in research diversity. The framing of Figure 1 adopts the interests of one subgroup. In a U.S. context, it is commonly understood that in-depth field studies might act as a precursor to subsequent testing through other methods (e.g., [Merchant 2008](#)). While field studies sometimes might play exactly this role, such work also has its own purposes that are debated and developed within broad (frequently interdisciplinary) communities of scholars. From the perspective of “complementarity,” as seen in Figure 1, these other purposes might be considered irrelevant (e.g., [Merchant 2008](#)). From the perspective of research diversity, and the building of a comprehensive understanding on the nature and effects of accounting, these intentions need no scholarly justification in relation to other forms of research.

In the next section, I will offer a second framework for considering research diversity from a perspective that is less overtly grounded in the assumptions of any particular subgroup of researchers.

## DIVERSITY FRAMED IN TERMS OF DIFFERENT RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The framework presented in Figure 2 sets out a different way to differentiate research based on its choices in two dimensions. The language of the figure is couched in terms of the philosophy of science and sociology; however, it is not new to the accounting literature (see, for example, [Chua 1986](#)). In its two dimensions, Figure 2 offers summary labels for sets of fundamental research choices, offering names for each possible combination of these sets of choices.

This second framework operates at a far higher level of abstraction than that seen in Figure 1. As previously noted, recent years have seen increases in the diversity of research published in *The Accounting Review*. That diversity notwithstanding, the entire contents of *The Accounting Review* since the publication of its current editorial statement (and the scope of research diversity implicit in the categories of Figure 1) fall within the bottom right-hand cell in this second framework—Functionalist research.

Functionalist, therefore, is a designation that allows for considerable diversity within itself. In approaching that diversity, the framework helps to identify commonalities in terms of two dimensions. On the vertical axis, such work shares an interest in aspects of accounting informed by the Sociology of Regulation. On the horizontal axis, such work shares the principle of Objectivity in its methodological choices. In the sections that follow, I shall explain these two dimensions in more detail. In considering how we might use such a high-level framework in relation to this discussion of research diversity, however, it is important to acknowledge the limitations set out by [Burrell and Morgan \(1979, xii\)](#) in their introduction:

In this analysis we polarise a number of issues and make much use of rough dichotomisations as a means of presenting our case. We do so not merely for purposes of

FIGURE 2  
Four Paradigms for the Analysis of Social Theory

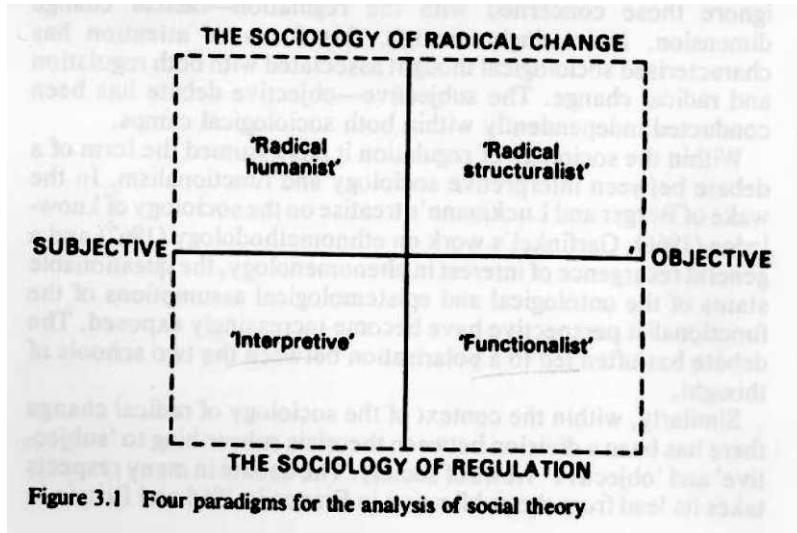


Figure 3.1 Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory

Reproduction of Figure 3.1 from [Burrell and Morgan \(1979, 22\)](#).

classification, but to forge a working tool. We advocate our scheme as a heuristic device rather than as a set of rigid definitions.

I shall, therefore, not try to offer exemplars of the other the kinds of research identified in the framework. Seeking to reduce the diversity of *The Accounting Review* to a single exemplar article of Functionalist research would be misleading, at best. Just as there are disagreements and debates in the domain of Functionalist research (e.g., is deception an allowable aspect of experimental research?), so it is elsewhere (see [Ahrens et al. \[2008\]](#) for a very compact rendition of such debate). Given such extended and disparate communities of scholarly debate, there exists a vast literature published across many decades in journals such as *Accounting, Organizations and Society* that makes non-Functionalist research choices. The intention here is to try to lay the foundations for a more open reading of such work by Functionalist researchers by highlighting the fact that there are very different choices to be made in the proper conduct of research.

A sensible starting point for Functionalist researchers to begin to explore such diverse work is to build from a shared interest in particular aspects of accounting rather than unfamiliar choices concerning methodology.<sup>1</sup> A timely reminder of the value of reading such diverse forms of research can be seen in the award of the 2011 American Accounting Association (AAA) Notable Contribution to the Accounting Literature to [Young \(2006\)](#). In introducing the award in Denver, the chair of the awarding committee offered a compelling explanation of the paper's scope and importance. Rather than trying to offer my own here, I simply reproduce that address to the meeting verbatim:

<sup>1</sup> Those whose appetite for more methodological discussion is not satisfied by what follows may find [Bettner et al. \(1993\)](#) to be a valuable article to follow up on. This article also declines to offer specific exemplar articles of the four kinds of research in Figure 2. It does offer brief portraits of how the four kinds of research might define and approach research questions in the discipline of Finance.

I want to thank Kevin Stocks for appointing me and the members of the Selection Committee for working quickly and professionally to reach our decision.

We selected “Making Up Users” by Dr. Joni Young, which appeared in AOS in 2006. Dr. Young looks at concepts that we rely on constantly but usually take for granted, in this instance—the users of financial statements.

Early 20th century textbooks and monographs discussed accounting in terms of what was being done by accountants, and assumed that accounting information was used by many people for many unspecified purposes. After World War II, several factors, including the rise of decision science, resulted in changes to theories about the nature and purpose of financial statements. Financial reporting was seen as serving a narrow group of users—investors and creditors—as they made certain economics-based decisions about future cash flows.

However, because actual flesh and blood users tend to ignore economic models, to be unpredictable, to have diverse needs, goals and investment time horizons, accounting theorists and standard setters focused their attention instead on idealized users who fit their idealized models.

These idealized users and their presumed information needs became the justification in arguments for or against proposed accounting alternatives. Even the AICPA noted that debates about proposed standards were “based on alignment with existing concepts rather than on more direct verification with users.”

This paper is significant because it helps us understand how we have constructed or defined the user of financial statements and how that social construction influences current accounting practice. The article implicitly demonstrates that we could make accounting research and practice more relevant if we looked seriously at a variety of real users—and what they hope to see in, and get from, accounting reports. Congratulations Dr. Young. ([Ravenscroft 2011](#))

[Young \(2006\)](#) falls into the category of Radical Humanist, the diametric opposite of Functionalist in the framework. In terms of the framework presented in Figure 2, it is not a paper seeking to elaborate stable causal laws explaining relationships between variables on the basis of testing *ex ante* hypotheses (i.e., Objective research). Rather, it seeks to understand how the idea of the user of accounting information has been constructed, how the meanings attached to this idea have evolved over time, and how this has affected society through its suppression of alternative possible meanings and goals for financial reporting (i.e., the Sociology of Radical Change). To help explain these choices further, the next two sections will address the concepts underlying the two dimensions of the framework.

### **Vertical Dimension—Making a Choice as to What Aspects of Accounting We Should Study**

Accounting is not a natural phenomenon; rather, it is human-made. The law of gravity is neither made by humans, nor subject to our dismissal. Like gravity, accounting is also a pervasive and powerful force in human societies. Unlike gravity, its form is neither natural nor stable over time. Rather, accounting represents the outcome of an ongoing stream of negotiations between (and excluding) many groups. The outcome of these negotiations has significant effects on wealth, health, and subjective wellbeing. Against this backdrop, the vertical dimension of the framework highlights for us that in a social science context, there are important choices to be made regarding the impacts and effects of accounting that we might seek to study and understand.

The Sociology of Regulation informs questions concerning those effects we might take to be more positive (e.g., accounting as an effective means to structure and control people, organizations, and society). The Sociology of Radical Change addresses those effects that are the inevitable counterparty to the more positive aspects (e.g., accounting as a means to dominate and coerce).

To try to bring the oppositions set out in this figure more clearly into an accounting context, let us consider the role of Financial Reporting in society. Research work that aims to understand and enhance Earnings Persistence, or to reduce Earnings Management, addresses itself to matters of the *status quo*, the existing social order, and what is actually happening in contemporary financial markets. For example, it works with the assumptions that shareholders are rightly entitled to expect predictive and unbiased financial information, and takes the study of this as its central concern.

This is a valuable and well-established agenda for research, and represents a set of assumptions about accounting falling under the scope of the Sociology of Regulation. It cannot be understood to offer a comprehensive understanding of financial reporting as a phenomenon, however, since inherent in any structure of social order (e.g., the setting of the interests of shareholders as the predominant stakeholder) is the possibility of structural conflict (e.g., conflict between shareholders and the interests of society, employees, special interest groups, etc.). The Sociology of Regulation emphasizes what is actually going on. The Sociology of Radical Change reminds us that a comprehensive understanding of accounting might also be expected to include some study of alternative potentials that might have been or, indeed, still could be.

The accounting literature includes much work (and even dedicated journals, such as *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*) that seeks to study and understand accounting informed by the Sociology of Radical Change. Research that is seen as overtly political often falls foul of the criticism that it represents opinion rather than research. The headings of the vertical dimension relating to Regulation versus Radical Change might seem to present a distinction between research choices that are very different in terms of their inherent level of “politics.” This would be a misunderstanding, however. Research aimed at supporting the *status quo* is every bit as political as research that seeks to challenge it.<sup>2</sup> As such, overt politics cannot be understood to be a threat to the quality of research without recourse to further consideration of questions of research method. This matter is addressed in the horizontal dimension of the framework.

### Horizontal Dimension—Making a Choice over How We Should Study Accounting

A further aspect of research that is often used to condemn it to the wrong side of a dichotomy between research and opinion is the failure to adopt what might be loosely understood as the basic principles of scientific method. The horizontal dimension shows these represent a choice, not inevitability, when considering research method.

Bundled up in [Burrell and Morgan’s \(1979\)](#) discussion of the various principles making up an Objective approach to research, we start with the assumption that social structures (such as accounting) are both tangible and relatively stable. If we start with such a realist position, then positivism represents the project of seeking to uncover stable causal laws between such real objects of study. This kind of project takes it as a working assumption sense that people are subject to their context and its rules and have relatively little possibility to change the rules that govern their lives. All of these suggest the value of an approach to research methodology that seeks to generalize from specific data through the arms-length testing of hypotheses as to stable causal laws.

While the label given to research building on this set of assumptions in the framework is “Objective,” it is important not to get carried away with the potentially appealing sense of neutrality

<sup>2</sup> See [Tinker et al. \(1982\)](#) for a detailed discussion of this issue.

that this label seems to imply. Such “Objective” research is inevitably heavy with subjective judgments:

Validity is subjective rather than objective: The plausibility of the conclusion is what counts. And plausibility, to twist a cliché, lies in the ear of the beholder. (Cronbach 1982, 108)

This provocative statement was made by Cronbach (1982) to stretch the point in an extended debate with Donald Campbell over the relative virtues of internal and external validity. Cronbach (1982) puts it bluntly; however, the quotation serves to highlight the point that, valuable though rules are, they do not offer an escape from the need for subjective quality judgments. If the test of Functionalist research quality were simply that of presenting a statistically significant result, then our journals would be very much more voluminous than they are. Frameworks such as the predictive validity framework (Libby et al. 2002) offer valuable ways to think through various threats to the validity of “Objective” research. As forcefully put by Cronbach (1982), however, all of these threats are subject to judgment of their severity. Shadish et al. (2002, Chapter 1) draw on the work of sociologists of science (e.g., Latour 1987) to highlight the inherent impossibility of an absolute ideal of neutrality in any human undertaking (including science). They do so not to undermine the attempt; rather, to warn against too easy assumptions of neutrality.

These caveats notwithstanding, the label of Subjective as an approach to research may still appear to those trained in Objective research like an admission of failure right from the start. Moving away from a stance of research Objectivity is not willful disregard for a world of real data that are waiting to be analyzed. Rather, it is the recognition that important aspects of accounting require a different approach for their effective study.

As opposed to building upon an assumption of realism, a nominalist position emphasizes the way in which names, concepts, and labels are used to structure reality. From such a starting assumption, the quest for stable causal laws is less compelling; rather, the anti-positivist approach emphasizes the study of particular (not universal) frames of reference with which more autonomous individuals construct their realities. As a result, research might seek to engage first-hand and in depth with the subject of investigation to allow individual experiences to unfold their nature and characteristics.

To take a simple example of the very different ways in which Objective and Subjective Research might consider the same basic topic, let us very briefly consider the issue of gender. From an Objective perspective, we might imagine an archival study into the impact of gender balance on the effectiveness of corporate governance. The hypothesis might be that there are stable structures of governance that function according to predictable laws, and that the systematic collection of data and its subsequent statistical analysis might help to elaborate the nature of these laws. Gender might be realized as a dichotomous variable acting as a marker for a presumed different approach to governance decision.

A Subjective approach to research might choose instead to undertake a series of interviews with members of an organization seeking to draw out the ways in which they might individually and collectively construct the idea of gender. This might entail the way in which individuals felt compelled to behave, to express themselves, to consider their prospects and identities in relation to the organization. The intent would not be to fit gender into *ex ante* categories; rather, to find ways to express how the concept might have meaning and motive power in the particular setting of the study. An issue to be given attention would be ways in which existing patterns of behavior suppressed other potentials for the formation of identity and action in practice.

This simple example, hopefully, makes the point that these two approaches to the study of gender are complements and not substitutes. They highlight different aspects of gender in different ways. Both are partial, neither is complete. For those trained in Objective research, however, this

brief portrait of Subjective research likely raises questions of what rigor and method would look like in such research.

### The Judgment of Quality and Validity in Subjective Research

The judgment of what contributes to quality and rigor in any form of research must build on the specific research assumptions underpinning the research. Articles such as [Cooper and Morgan \(2008\)](#) serve as useful starting points in the development of an answer to the question of “How can I judge the quality of a case study?” However, just as it takes years of study to become adept in judging the quality of Objective research, so it is with Subjective research.

To give a taste of the way in which matters of method can be approached in Subjective research, I will briefly discuss Grounded Theory ([Glaser and Straus 1967](#)). The intention is to show how Subjective research is a disciplined and rigorous undertaking that has clearly defined criteria of quality informed by its Subjective research assumptions. It is just an example, however, since, as with Objective research, different communities of scholars have particular (and subjectively determined) preferences.<sup>3</sup>

A sufficient number of researchers write papers claiming to adopt Grounded Theory that editors of a leading journal were moved to commission a corrective note regarding its proper application (e.g., [Suddaby 2006](#)). While it goes against the ordering of [Suddaby \(2006\)](#), I will take his last three headings first, since despite their formulation in the negative, these all relate to what grounded theory is and how it might be properly undertaken:

- Grounded Theory is Not Perfect
- Grounded Theory is Not Easy
- Grounded Theory is Not an Excuse for the Absence of a Methodology

A very simple formulation of grounded research is that constant comparative method informs theoretical sampling that is repeated until theoretical saturation is achieved. Theoretical saturation is the answer to the vexed question of “how many interviews are enough?” Theoretical saturation is a question of the sufficiency of the theory under development to account for the diversity of aspects found in the data gathered. If the theory is found to be incomplete, then two ways forward arise. One choice is to undertake theoretical sampling. This entails the gathering of further data in order to test and refine the grounded theory such that it encompasses and explains the now larger set of data. Alternatively, the issue that the theory seeks to address must be reined in such that the theory might encompass the data relevant to the newly reduced scope of the grounded theory. We might offer numerical rules of thumb to suggest that ten interviews is an unlikely foundation for a particularly sophisticated or interesting theory, and that 1,000 might safely accommodate one of considerable sophistication. In each case, however, these are guidelines, the test of which lies in the appreciation of the meaning of theoretical saturation.

Here we see, then, that Grounded theory does seek testing of theory against data. However, it does so from a Subjective and not Objective starting point. To see the importance of this and, hopefully, explain more clearly this distinction, we must return to the first four of [Suddaby’s \(2006\)](#) headings:

- Grounded Theory is Not an Excuse to Ignore the Literature
- Grounded Theory is Not Presentation of Raw Data
- Grounded Theory is Not Theory Testing, Content Analysis, or Word Counts

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the question of whether deception is allowable in experimental research is a question that divides researchers in working in the Economics and Psychology. Likewise, capital markets researchers have a different understanding of internal validity to experimental researchers.



- Grounded Theory is Not Simply Routine Application of Formulaic Technique to Data

The common theme of these sections of his article is that of the inappropriateness of discussing research premised on the basis of Subjective research assumptions drawing on the concepts and expectations of that underpinning Objective research. Objective inductive research is perfectly feasible and valid; however, that is not Grounded Theory, which is an explicitly Subjective approach:

Keep in mind that the purpose of grounded theory is not to make truth statements about reality, but, rather, to elicit fresh understandings about patterned relationships between social actors and how these relationships and interactions actively construct reality (Glaser and Strauss 1967). (Suddaby 2006, 636)

Subjective work is frequently subject to critique (and also its own reshaping in anticipation of such critique) in terms of its failure to conform to Objective criteria. Presentational strategies such as claiming that the data simply speaks for itself, that the research activity was unbiased by prior theoretical preoccupations, do not make sense from a Subjective standpoint.

Interview and meeting transcripts are often entered into qualitative data analysis software. This software facilitates counting and mechanical coding; however, it is also a valuable tool for more direct immersion in the field material. In discussing such software, a clear distinction is made between its role as a tool for data management (i.e., supporting the researcher as they actively make judgments) and its possible role as a tool for data analysis (i.e., supporting the application of routine analytical protocol) (Barry 1998). In considering what is the appropriate way in which such software might be used, therefore, it is essential to understand the methodological underpinnings of the particular study.

The central point to make here is that there are different possibilities for the rigorous undertaking of inductive reasoning, depending on whether an Objective or Subjective standpoint is taken. It is essential that this choice be explicitly taken into account when reviewing and evaluating such work:

Unless there is an explicit editorial policy that favors one reasoning strategy over the other, critics must choose words of exogenous critique carefully. There is no methodological basis for challenging the author's choice to pursue either idealization or contextualization [as strategies for inductive reasoning]. Absent any explicit policy, the task of the evaluator should be to determine whether the strategy the author has chosen is executed credibly. The author's choice of reasoning strategy should always be respected. (Ketokivi 2010, 329)

## CONCLUSION

Calls for research diversity are founded on the intuitively obvious point that accounting is a complex phenomenon. We should not be surprised, therefore, that a wide variety of research approaches exist, each drawing on long traditions of debate and development as to their principles, interests, and methodology. We have no basis for judging there to be "one best way," a fact clearly acknowledged in the following comment from the committee responsible for the award of Nobel prizes in Economic Science regarding research method:

It may also be argued that the Prize-awarding authority has demonstrated that there are many different ways to advance a science like economics: rigorous deductive theorizing, whether by way of verbal or mathematical techniques; the development and application of new concepts and methods of analysis; rigorous empirical testing of existing hypotheses,

as well as less formalized confrontation of various hypotheses with empirical fact; or “simply” profound observation and nonformalized innovative thinking about economic issues. (Lindbeck 2007)

Responding to the challenge of calls for greater research diversity is a tremendously difficult and unsettling task, however. We cannot be sophisticated readers of all possible forms of research. Engaging with diverse research frequently requires us to put on hold much of the expertise and judgment that we have worked long and hard to develop in relation to the execution and evaluation of our own familiar forms of research. From an Objective point of view, Subjectivity seems naturally odd, and the same is equally true in reverse. In helping to understand some of the strangeness, frameworks such as the one presented in Figure 2 offer some support by helping to delineate the nature of choices that underpin all research.

A part of the challenge ahead lies in ensuring that the explicit study of methodology becomes the foundation for Ph.D. training. The danger is that absent a vocabulary and set of methodological concepts (such as those discussed by Burrell and Morgan [1979], for example) for discussing the principles underlying our own research, we all too easily assume that rather than making choices as to the kind of research we wish to pursue, we are simply doing research that is natural and inevitable, and not, therefore, a matter of choice. If we believe this to be true, then we are in a poor position to engage with those making alternative choices.

Making more space in our Ph.D. training for methodology is not an easy suggestion in practice, and becomes potentially less easy over time. The danger is that all the “long words” may appear an unnecessary diversion from the more immediately pressing challenge of preparing doctoral students (and ourselves) for the publication of our current research project. Ignoring methodology as a foundational study in its own right might leave a researcher in a strong position to exploit existing forms of research in the short run. Given such a short-run potential, cries from other researchers that you are, thus, unable to engage with them might well seem a problem that can be lived with. The failure to invest in an understanding of methodology also undermines the capability of researchers to develop their own forms of research, however. Without a set of methodological tools, the evaluation of new techniques and the reinterpretation of past findings all run the risk of becoming matters settled by the prestige of innovators and questioners. It is to be hoped that prestige is to some extent correlated with quality. It seems prudent to build quality into our discipline more explicitly and directly, however.

All researchers undertake work that we hope is informed by complex sets of understandings of the nature of the problems they seek to address and the nature of the appropriate methods for engaging with them. There are signs that diversity is increasing. The efforts of non-Functionalist researchers to render their work more familiar to Functionalist ideals and approaches are yet to see much flexibility in the other direction (Radcliffe 2010). If quality judgments in predominantly Functionalist journals remain the preserve of only Functionalist researchers, this presents threats to both diversity and quality.

Diversity is threatened since unfamiliar research might be mistakenly dismissed as poorly executed through the mistaken critique of Subjective work on grounds only suitable for the evaluation of Objective work. Even allowing for a more forgiving attitude in the review process, the evaluation of quality based on common sense, as opposed to lengthy and specific scholarly training in Subjective research, threatens quality, as well as diversity. Such an evaluation exercise may produce work that is accessible to a new audience, but which is methodologically impoverished or, worse still, invalid. The danger is that the foundations upon which Subjective research draws strength and validity might be inadvertently stripped away through a common sense review process. To conclude, then, diverse forms of research require diverse understandings and criteria of evaluation. Only if editors may draw on editorial boards formally trained and equipped to deal with such diversity may we move toward a situation in which quality and diversity are appropriately assured.

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