

Women in Research Methods

Interview with Dr. Anne Smith

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(interviewed by Jayci R. Pickering, Ph.D. candidate at Oklahoma State University on 8/2/24)

1. *How would you encourage early scholars who are interested in research methods, specifically related to qualitative research? What specific opportunities, and with whom, might you encourage them to seek out?*

Thanks for having me today, I'm looking forward to talking about these topics. First, I'd like to focus on encouragement for junior scholars. I think that's really important throughout their methodological journey. I have four main things I'd like to share.

First, I urge doctoral students to make sure they are involved in and attending professional development workshops at the annual Academy of Management meetings. These are incredibly important, not only for the information you'll receive when attending, but also for the opportunity to meet people, and maybe volunteer. What I've done over the years for one particular PDW that I've been involved in, is to include our first- and second-year doctoral students as facilitators for the session. I think it's really important for them to volunteer and get to know these people whose papers they have read in class, and to meet them in-person.

The second piece of advice I would have for junior scholars, to encourage them to pursue their interest in research methods, is to get involved in Research Methods division at the Academy of Management. I was told early in my career I needed one 'big' division to be a part of – such as Strategy, or BPS as it was known at the time, or Organizational Behavior – but also to find smaller divisions where you can really make an impact and get involved. The first small division I was part of was the Research Methods division. They were very open people who wanted to talk to you at the socials without being intimidating, so I thought that was really great. More recently, I've been involved in the SAP, or Strategizing Activities and Practices interest group at the Academy of Management. A large preponderance are qualitative scholars, so that's something I've enjoyed.

A third piece of advice or encouragement for junior faculty is to seek out CARMA. CARMA is run by Larry Williams at Texas Tech University, and it's an excellent organization. It has many videos and lectures that have been given. They offer short courses in the summer – three-day courses, and such – on many different topics. And there are also workshops for doctoral students that they offer, so that's an organization that I would recommend getting involved in. And fourth, build your network. You do that by attending professional development workshops, asking questions, getting involved. Attending smaller conferences – for instance, if you're a qualitative scholar, you might consider going to EGOS, or the European Group for Organization Students. And also, I

urge young scholars to say yes to reviewing. I would definitely review for conferences and journals because this is a great way to learn and improve your reviewing, as well as your methods skills by reading what other commentators have to say.

So my main point, the main takeaway – these are a lot of activities I’ve identified, but my main point is don’t get discouraged. Look around for resources and people willing to help. In my career, Karen Golden-Biddle and Karen Locke were very important to me moving beyond being discouraged to getting published. So find those people who encourage you. You want to be surrounded by people that shoot straight, but not to kill – those people who will give you honest, needed feedback. To end, know that there is no easy way. You have to put in the work and learn about methods by doing them, and making mistakes, and getting feedback. And I have found, really in my own career, there are no methodological shortcuts. But I think if you get involved in these activities and really try to hone your methodological skills, these are good places to begin.

2. *What initiated your interest in qualitative research methods and thorough methodology?*

Well, I’m probably more associated with qualitative research, but I never had a qualitative research course when I was in my graduate school program. The kind of research questions that I was interested in for my dissertation led me into that area. That said, I took pretty much every kind of methods course you could take at the University of North Carolina – over in sociology, psychology, political science... wherever I could take them. So, I would highly recommend that. There was one particular course – it was a sociology course – and we were assigned different studies. I was assigned Tearoom Trade by Humphreys, which is a kind of controversial study about a lookout in a public men’s room. So I presented on that, and I was so fascinated with the practice of research, and why this study was controversial – and what they actually did, I thought was quite intriguing. So that was my first taste that I may end up undertaking my own qualitative research.

I think that, you know, I wish I had done a postdoc with someone who knew how to make sense of and publish qualitative research. I think that would have been really helpful in my career. But I didn’t do that – I learned by doing. Reviewers were really instrumental. Both Karen Locke and Karen Golden-Biddle were AE (Associate Editors) on papers of mine – early papers of mine – and they were very developmental. Bob (Robert) Gephart as well, and others who were very encouraging – I think that was really important in my career. And yeah, I think that’s how I was initiated into it. I also developed an entire network at AOM. Those of us who were doing qualitative PDWs, we got to know each other really well, and they have ended up being like lifelong colleagues.

3. *Can you speak broadly to the necessity of rigorous methods, both within the field of management and throughout academia as a whole?*

So, on the necessity of rigor in research methods – it’s absolutely critical. Rigor is the name of the game. If you don’t believe someone executed a project well, why would you

ever believe their results. To me, one of the best things written about rigor in the qualitative methods area is Harley and Cornelissen's 2022 ORM. It provides you with some things to think about – checklists, if you will – in terms of approaching your study rigorously. Qualitative research is about being transparent and having trustworthiness. Transparency is explaining what you're doing – so it's the concept of not telling, but showing what you did, the process you used, and how that led to your theoretical insights. Now, criteria for trustworthiness – traditionally, trustworthiness has been associated with criteria that we have brought in from quantitative methods. So, reliability, internal validity, etc. But what we see now, is that we have moved beyond those to consider additional criteria. Things such as Pratt, Sonenshein, and Feldman's 2022 ORM paper that talks about different criteria of trustworthiness in a qualitative paper. The first is researcher competence – does the researcher seem to understand the methodology that they have chosen? Have they provided appropriate cites and undertaken the appropriate actions? The second is benevolence to the data, which means explaining *all* data – even those that may not seem to “fit.” And third is integrity of decisions across the project – is there a coherence, logic, and rationale for the different decisions that were made across the qualitative research process? So these three criteria are something I look at when I'm thinking about ‘Do I believe this qualitative paper was done in a rigorous manner?’ When I'm thinking about rigor, I'm thinking about this paper and others like it.

I'm also thinking about a paper I wrote with a team of researchers, led by Hans Hansen, in which we talk about the creeping objectivism coming into our qualitative research papers. By that we mean, the researcher seems to disappear – their voice, the context, and/or the data. Why was the researcher interested in this? How did they get access to the data? And what was so special about the data? What was so important, and what can we learn by leveraging the unique aspects of the context and the data? This project began because we saw an incredible focus on interview data, even when researchers had a lot of other types of data – documents, videos, observational notes, they sort of disappeared in the analysis and findings. So, we talked a little about that in the paper, and I think rigor is bringing forward many of these aspects that have, in essence, been silenced in many of our papers. This was a project that we worked on for many, many years. We met every two weeks throughout COVID, it was a real labor of love, and I thought this was something I'd recommend reading if you're interested in transparency and trustworthiness. And finally, I wanted to comment about AMJ, Academy of Management Journal, moving into a more methodological space, and really trying to focus on furthering the data-methods-theory connection. I'm delighted to be a part of that, and help stand up this initiative and act upon my 18-month commitment because I think it's really important for developing our theoretical insights and future papers.

4. *Sometimes it's difficult to explain our work and what goes on inside academia to people who are outside of it. What role does methodology play when translating our findings to those outside of the field?*

I think maybe qualitative research has a bit of an advantage when you're trying to share the results of a content study. I always think of Donde Plowman et al's paper, [2007 AMJ](#). It was best paper of the year in Academy of Management Journal. It was about this one

church that went through this radical transformation that was not planned. It's wonderful because you can walk around thinking about this story, but there's a theoretical connection to complexity theory that I think is so approachable. That's one thing I like about it, and I think maybe that's maybe why a lot of qualitative papers end up winning best papers. The story captures – it speaks to us, theoretically, but it's also a very rich story for people that aren't familiar with our methods. It's much trickier when you're trying to get people excited about a methods piece. But, let me give you an example of one way in which I make methods come alive to people that aren't really that familiar with what we do.

Every year, for the past couple of years, I asked my undergraduates to listen to Bob Iger's CNBC "last" interview as a top executive at Disney. This was right around December of 2021. I have them listen to it because it's really important for them to understand the rigor with which we go through and analyze text. The students listen to his stories, and then we discuss in class. I start by asking them if anything surprised them – the tone of the interviewee, the interviewer's questions, etc. Usually, they talk about the interviewer not interrupting and displaying deep knowledge about Disney. And that's interesting. But what is even more interesting is that, in the interview, when Bob Iger starts speaking about his successor, Bob Chapek, his voice and his cadence – everything is different. Once I point this out, it's noticeable to them. And in hindsight, we know Bob Iger then returned to replace Bob Chapek, which reflects back on his apparent unease about this relationship during the interview. So I give this example to students and tell them this is the type of text analysis that we do; it's interpretative, but also detailed and rigorous.

5. *How would you encourage scholars who find methodology to be intimidating and/or overwhelming to get involved?*

Don't be afraid to talk to people. I think the point about being prepared before you talk is a good one – that you've read some of the basic things. Just don't get discouraged. I got very discouraged at one point in my career. During that four- or five-years after my dissertation. But – I don't know if Karen Golden-Biddle or Karen Locke know, but they were instrumental in me turning around and thinking, 'Yeah, I can do this.' This is not something that's... it's something that you can do if you put the time in. And there's no easy way to do it. So, you've got to put in the work. There are no shortcuts. So, I guess I would end with that mantra – if you think there are shortcuts, you're probably not in the right profession.

6. *What are some of the developments you foresee being relevant in regard to qualitative research methods?*

So, future trends in methods – I mean, obviously one of the first things that pops into anyone's mind these days is AI. And it is something we're going to have to grapple with. My approach to AI – I'm a late adopter, not a leader in new technology. And I do see there are aspects that help make us more efficient, but I also think it needs guardrails. I would point an interested listener to the AMJ 'From the Editors' that Matthew Grimes

and others wrote very recently. They talk about the degree of regulation and uncertainty, and what role it's going to play – the impact (AI) could have on our profession. I think it's really interesting to think about positive uses vs. negative uses, and they lay out these four different scenarios in a way that's very intriguing to think about.

The other thing is, I actually think as qualitative researchers, we are in very good shape. We go into the field as multisensory human beings, we sit an interview and we wonder whether we really trust this person, we take rich field notes about what's happening in the organizational setting. So, I don't think that's going to be replaced in the short-term – I don't think I'm naïve in saying that. I think we, as the researcher, are the main interpreters of qualitative findings, and we may not give equal weight to each interview. So, I just can't see down the road that we will capture true field experiences and insights through online chats with a chatbot, etc. It is a human experience to go into the field, to be sensitive and embedded into a context, and I think that's what leads to rich theoretical insights.

7. *In 2022, Lisa Schurer Lambert and Tina Köhler took over as co-editors of ORM, representing the first time the journal has been led by female scholars. Can you briefly speak to the importance of increased representation throughout the area of research methods? How might we continue to encourage this representation?*

I'm delighted to be part of (Women in Research Methods), I think it's a really needed and important group. And I also think it's great that Tine Köhler and Lisa Lambert took on the co-editorship at ORM. I think the Edelman quote, "You can't be what you can't see" fits here, and it's fit in my career. I have benefited from those who went before – not only those who said yes to reviewing and guiding, but also those who have taken on editorial roles, which are a lot of work.

When James LeBreton asked me many years ago to be an editor at ORM, I was surprised. I appreciated his trust in me, and I said yes. So, saying yes to reviewing and taking on large, visible assignments like Tine and Lisa have done – I believe that leads the way for other female scholars.