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Celebrating Entrepreneurial & Small Firm research – “embracing qualitative research philosophies and methods”

Guest Editors: David Higgins, Pauric McGowan, Kiran Trehan

Over the last decade Entrepreneurship and Small Firm Research (Entre/SME) has become a popular field of inquiry with a growing research community (Welter, 2011; Wiklund *et al.*, 2011). It is widely acknowledged that the Entre/SME field remains dominated by functionalist methods that neglect to illustrate to the research community the social nature of the research field. If the field of Entre/SME inquiry is to prosper further, it needs to be approached from a more critical perspective, as opposed to the accepted functionalist ideologically driven perspective which currently dominates so many studies, (Blackburn and Brush, 2008; Leitch, *et al.*, 2009). This is not to suggest that either quantitative or qualitative perspectives are good or bad, we are suggesting that there is something missing which current functionalist approaches are not illustrating, some questions simply cannot be posed when undertaking quantitative research. It is this very issue which we seek to address by asking the question “what can qualitative methods offer to us?”

This SI serves as a timely point to reflect upon, critique and debate the skills and knowledge which are required by researchers to develop meaningful, informative and trust-worthy qualitative research. The editors define qualitative inquiry as a means of exploring and understanding the subjective nature of what one can term “lived experience” from the perspective of those who have experienced, seeking to make sense of the explanations and meanings which individuals assign to their experiences. The yearning to explore and understand a person’s definition of an experience and the meaning which is attributed to it, locates qualitative research within an interpretivist tradition (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). While such a tradition has existed for many years in the social sciences, its use and adoption in the Entre/SME field has gained interest but is currently under represented, (Chell and Pittaway, 1998; Rae and Carswell, 2000; Neergard and Ulhoi, 2007). The variety of approaches offered by qualitative perspectives allows researchers to embrace and appreciate the complexity of human dynamics and behaviour. The editors seek to encourage the development of reflexive articles, (conceptual and empirical), which illustrate the messy, heterogeneous and problematic nature of Entre/SME research. We invite contributions which highlight and advance the use and adoption of various qualitative approaches, (such as interpretivism, action research, constructionist/ postmodernism ideologies, to name but a few). The following represent some questions and/or issues which contributors may wish to engage with in regards to the above themes, (but not definitively limited to) –

Researcher Knowledge - Methodological Debates

1. What contribution has/ or can qualitative approaches make on Entre/SME field.
2. Critiquing the appropriateness of various qualitative methods & designs currently used in Entre/SME that could enrich understanding and improve practice.
3. What are the methodological challenges in the designing and conducting qualitative research in the Entre/SME field
4. Strategies for establishing the value of qualitative research in ways analogous to the demands for internal and external validity and reliability in research.
5. What are the current methodological gaps in Entre/SME research and why do these exist, how can qualitative approaches contribute

Researcher - Skills & Quality

1. The relationship between skills development and the critical understanding of qualitative research methodology.
2. Critical discussions around the use of ICT, such as (NVivo, Max QDA) with non-numerical data analysis.
3. The relationship between reflexivity and becoming a qualitative researcher.
4. The learning of unorthodox or novel approaches and methods in qualitative research.
5. How can one evaluate and recognise what is deemed to be high quality, authentic qualitative research.

For further information: Spl_editors@hud.ac.uk , Submission deadline 1st of Dec 2013

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