A hitchhiker's guide to the public administration research universe:
Surviving conversations on methodologies and methods

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Abstract

Scientific conversations can be riddled with confusion when contributions to the discussion are based on notions about ways of knowing that remain implicit. Researchers often mix different methodological positions in their research designs due to their lack of awareness of distinctions between different ways of knowing and their associated methods. We engage and reflect on these differences, with particular attention to four areas: research question formulations, the character and role of concepts and theories, hypotheses versus puzzles, and case study research. We call on all researchers, including both academics and practitioners, to be aware of the ways in which scientific terms serve, in research debates, as signifiers of different logics of inquiry. Awareness of these differences is important for the sake of productive scientific discussions and for the logical consistency of research, as both of the ways of knowing that we discuss are legitimate scientific endeavors, albeit invoking different evaluative criteria.

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An inter- or multi-disciplinary field of study and practice, public administration draws on a rich array of scientific disciplines, each of which brings its own specific theories, concepts, and methods to the classroom and the research table. As a consequence, the field is also rich in ontological and epistemological positions. These different ways of knowing are, however, often left implicit when scholars with diverse disciplinary, theoretical, and/or methodological backgrounds gather to discuss their scientific and applied research. At conferences and other venues, "methodology" and "methods" are often used interchangeably, a widespread confusion of terms but one that contributes to the significant misunderstandings we are discussing in this essay. As this terminological distinction is central to the argument we are advancing, we need to make clear what it is before we continue.

We draw a distinction in this essay, one that is fairly common in the methodological literature, between "methods" and "methodology." The former designates all those tools and techniques that are used to carry out research: surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observing, participating, and the like. The latter refers to what might be called the applied philosophical positions that underpin and inform those tools and techniques: the ontological and epistemological infrastructure that forms the groundwork for a research question. In brief, these are the presuppositions about the "reality status" (ontology) of the subject of study and about its "know-ability" (epistemology) through research procedures of various sorts. Methodologies can be seen as ways of knowing or logics of inquiry, two phrases that we shall use throughout this essay. Methodological presuppositions inform the methods used – the various techniques that a researcher draws on. As Kenneth Waltz put the point, although suggesting more of an intentional, conscious selection than we think is the case, "…once a methodology is adopted, the choice of methods becomes merely a tactical matter" (quoted in Moses and Knutsen 2007, 4).

Methodological statements – the articulation of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions underlying the choices and uses of research methods – are typically absent from published journal articles, applied research reports, and even, at times, disciplinary books and textbooks, including those that treat methods (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2002). It is our experience that, as a consequence, many researchers – both newer ones, Ph.D. students in particular, and more senior ones – are unaware of the differences in the scientific grounding that underpins, for instance, positivist or interpretive research, as well as of the implications of

these differences for the conduct of research (see also Moses and Knutsen [2007, 2]).

We have encountered this situation most explicitly since beginning to co-teach the "General Methodology" course for the Netherlands Institute of Government, the nationally accredited, inter-university Research School for Public Administration and Political Science. The course brings together Ph.D. students from nine member-universities throughout the country, plus two from Belgium, for an intensive, week-long seminar focused on research design. They come with prior education and degrees from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs: anthropology, environmental studies, organizational studies, planning, political science, public administration, and so forth. The course is intended, among other things, to provide them with an opportunity to present and discuss their work with us and their classmates. Our most surprising experience has been just how unaware they have been of methodological differences and how much benefit they derived from having the differences explicated.

In general, the distinction between methodology and methods is missing from these discussions. To be sure, there are many MPA and other students who have been exposed to methodological issues and a variety of analytic "tools." But as an interdisciplinary field of study, public administration draws beginning researchers from many disciplinary backgrounds, each of them strongly rooted in a particular methodological tradition, and the students typically do not reflect on logics of inquiry other than those that are dominant in the departments in which they received their initial education or are presently enrolled. For instance, economics and most of political science are rooted in positivist-informed logics of inquiry, whereas a significant focus within organizational, political, and policy anthropology follows an interpretive methodology (see also Haverland 2010). When students from these fields come to the study of public administration, they typically assume that all research follows the logic of inquiry familiar to them. This course has not been our only experience with this problem: each of us has found similar situations in teaching other methodology/methods courses elsewhere in both the US and Europe.

We begin this essay with a description of the problem in general and then turn our attention to the two ways of knowing that underlie many of these miscommunications. But first, to be clear about our own position: we do not argue that one way of knowing is better than the other. Both ways of knowing discussed here represent legitimate modes of doing science and being scientific. Our position is that choices of methods and their underlying ways of knowing should depend on and reflect the goal or purpose of the research – the research question, in other words. Our argument is that researchers should be more explicitly aware of these differences and that, in a particular piece of work, they should follow the approach chosen in

ways that are internally consistent. In the best of all possible worlds, researchers should be able to read, understand, and comment on research conducted using different approaches from the one they have decided primarily to work in, and to do so in terms of the particular way of knowing enacted in that research.

Problem description: Mixing logics of inquiry

The lack of awareness of the existence of different ways of knowing becomes particularly problematic when (newer) scholars leave their own habitat – their research group – with its taken-for-grantedness about such matters to present their work at departmental seminars, Ph.D. courses and summer schools, conferences, meetings with research contractors, and so on. This is especially so in The Netherlands and other countries of continental Europe, where students are most often not part of a graduate school or departmental Ph.D. program with its own curriculum, as in the North American model, but instead are tied closely to a research supervisor – typically, a full Professor, who may delegate daily supervision of the dissertation project to an Associate or Assistant Professor in the research group. Ph.D. students absorb that group's own taken-for-grantedness with respect to the fit between methods and research, which, in the absence of a broad curriculum, is typically not balanced by exposure to other ways of knowing than what is used in that research group. This is where our course (or others like it) comes in. But we also note that such taken-for-grantedness is likely to be built in to graduate programs in the US which require their doctoral students to take only, or predominantly, quantitative methods courses, especially when these are taught as stand-alones, without being contextualized by philosophy of (social) science courses.[note 1]

The lack of awareness that there are different ways of knowing leads not only to misunderstandings or a lack of appreciation of work done using other approaches; it can also lead to inconsistencies in the researcher's own work, thereby lessening its quality. In discussing the work of others approached through another way of knowing than the one the researcher has him- or herself used, this lack of knowledge may lead to an inappropriate and unintentionally misleading critical assessment. On the receiving side, this miscommunication can generate confusion and even inappropriate revisions of the work. It is as if the two parties are speaking different languages – but without being aware that they are doing so. These kinds of miscommunication take place as well in the journal peer review process (and perhaps also in reviews of book manuscripts), as work drawing on one ontology-epistemology "package" is negatively critiqued for not conforming to the standards expected of research using a different

package. So, for example, a researcher using metaphor analysis might be faulted for not operationalizing concepts *ex ante*, although this not appropriate for this form of inquiry. Such a critique would find its equivalent in faulting a survey researcher for not providing the "data details" describing research settings, actors, acts, and interactions, and documentary and conversational interview quotes – all those elements that comprise organizational or policy ethnography research and writing.

Scientific terms are important signifiers in research discussion and debate. They are one of the ways in which researchers, when presenting their work, signal membership in one epistemic community or another. Whether one speaks of "variables" or of "shadowing" matters: not only do the terms denote particular meanings; they also point to particular kinds of research, thereby leading readers (or listeners) to expect particular treatments of the empirical material being presented (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2002, 2009, 2011, Yanow 2009). Using such terms without understanding where they come from, methodologically speaking, can lead researchers to mix different ontological and/or epistemological positions together in the same piece of research writing (or other form of presentation), without being aware that they are doing so.

For example, the language used to discuss the research project's knowledge claims may be inconsistent with the way of knowing enacted through the prosecution of the research itself. "Variables" language might show up in research that claims to follow an interpretive methodological stance – although the latter is not variables-based. "Sampling," "sample size" or "sample selection" might appear, although there has been no randomization. "Unit of analysis" – the entity being studied, such as "citizens" or "organizations" – might be used, despite the fact that it denotes a particular meaning that does not hold for all forms of research. In experiments, statistical research, and comparative case studies, it is important that variables on which information is collected concern the same unit of analysis. But this does not hold for causal research focusing on within-case analysis, nor does it obtain in interpretive research which, given its intention to be "holistic" in studying situations and settings, typically does not "narrow" the focus down to a particular "unit" of analysis (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, Yanow forthcoming).

When research treatments follow a different way of knowing from that signaled by research methods terms, readers' expectations are confounded, and the project is likely to be judged inadequate. For a methodologically-aware reader, such mixing can make the research as a whole appear internally illogical and inconsistent, as it appears based, implicitly, on different and at times methodologically incompatible ways of knowing.

Another problem is the lack of awareness that similar terms have different meanings, serve different functions or purposes, and occur in different places in the research process, depending on the way of knowing being used. For example, "concepts" and "theories" are used differently and are developed and presented differently at different stages of the research process, depending on the methodological approach chosen. For these reasons, terms should not be used casually and in uninformed ways.

Citations are another means through which scholars signal a research approach. But the lack of understanding of methodological differences can lead researchers to cite literature that is inappropriate for the research they are trying to carry out. A common example these days (and not just in our classrooms) is citing Robert Yin's work on case studies (e.g., 2008) in support of interpretive research. What makes this problematic is that Yin's work, for all its not inconsiderable accomplishments, is highly realist in its ontological presuppositions and objectivist in its epistemological ones -- in other words, he assumes that reality exists and can be observed independently from the observer – whereas interpretive research rests on methodological stances that are incompatible with those: constructivist-interpretivist presuppositions that assume socially-constructed ideas about social realities and the impossibility of independent, external observation of these realities (points we further clarify in the next section). What explains this incompatible usage of Yin's work on the surface is its widespread availability and, hence, familiarity with it, along with the dearth of less positivist treatments of case study research designs. But underlying this explanation is a lack of awareness of the philosophical differences informing these two approaches.

Such lack of awareness of fundamental differences between ways of knowing may lead others to register comments that are inappropriate for the particular research design being pursued, and these can hamper the exchange of ideas. One of our favorite examples comes from a conference panel on interpretive methods at which a doctoral student was presenting his ethnographic research for the first time. The opening question in the discussion was directed to him. It came from a more senior researcher, who said: "I can't tell from what you've presented which are your dependent variables and which, the independent ones" – a question that is not relevant to ethnographic research, given that it is not based on variables. The questioner's lack of awareness that his terms and his very framing of the question came from a different way of knowing from that used by the presenter led to confusion for the latter – all the more so as the doctoral student had anticipated an audience of researchers familiar with interpretive methodologies (and the comment required extensive methodological elaboration in response, derailing the discussion from an exploration of the research that had been presented and its

theoretical arguments). Had his advisors not been attuned to these sorts of methodological challenges, the doctoral student might have felt the need to rewrite his paper – perhaps even his entire dissertation – in light of that question, leading him to try to include dependent variables or perhaps a formal hypothesis. In these ways, cross-methodological (mis)communications can spawn inappropriate revisions of research proposals and designs. It is also not uncommon, in our experience, for dissertation research supervisors not familiar with ethnographic methodology to require advisees to study 3, 4 or even 5 cases, involving 20, 50 or 100 situational actors, out of an understanding of the logic of positivist science (mis)applied to interpretive science (for a detailed explanation of these differences, see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011).

In short, research conversations can be riddled by confusion when contributions to the discussion are based on implicit notions about ways of knowing, the role of theories, the uses of concepts, and so on, *when these remain implicit*. Scholars talk and argue past each other. What might help in these matters is a fuller understanding of the basic ideas behind the two most commonly used ways of knowing in public administration and related fields of study and their manifestations in research designs.

Two ways of knowing

There are different ways to slice the cake of ontological and epistemological positions, and this is not the place to argue for one way or the other. We take a pragmatic stance here and argue, for the sake of simplicity, that in public administration and other social science research, there are predominantly two ways of knowing, which are often denoted as quantitative and qualitative. This distinction is reflected in major textbooks, which have contributed to its institutionalization.[note 2] However, we would prefer to speak of positivist versus interpretive research[note 3] because that language clearly signifies the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of these different ways of knowing (see e.g., Hiley, Bohman, and Shusterman 1991, Jun 2006, Lincoln 2010, Rabinow and Sullivan 1979, 1985, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006; see also Healy 1986, Jennings 1983, Torgerson 1986). In a nutshell, research informed by positivist presuppositions takes the view that reality exists independently from the observer and can, therefore, be observed objectively – from a point outside it. Although description is important for them as well, most "positivist" researchers aim at explanation of a particular sort – that which identifies the *causes* of a phenomenon, which they do typically by testing causal hypotheses. The researcher has to demonstrate as convincingly as possible that one factor (the independent variable) has caused another factor (the dependent variable). This implies, first,

that this cause and this effect are correlated – in other words, that the presence of the (independent) cause increases the chance that the effect will occur; second, that this cause precedes the effect in time; and, third, that the effect has not been caused by another factor, meaning that the researcher needs to "control" for alternative explanations (see, e.g., Babbie 1998). In addition, most scholars agree that the researcher has to offer a plausible causal mechanism: an argument explaining why that cause has that effect. The better the researcher succeeds in this task, the greater the "internal validity" of the research.

The goal of interpretive research, by contrast, is to provide *reasons* for a phenomenon. The distinction we point to here is preserved, for instance, in contrasting terms of inquiry (albeit in rather outmoded "Shakespearean" English for the first of them, as well as in contemporary German and Dutch). One asks "Wherefore?" (*wodurch/waardoor*), as in positivist research, pointing to "formal" causal relationships; the other asks "Why?" (*warum/waarom*), pointing toward the search for an understanding of meaning, the central characteristic of interpretive research. What is driving such a meaning-focused approach is, in Clifford Geertz's words, the desire to gain "access to the conceptual world *in which our subjects live* so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them" (Geertz 1973: 24; emphasis added)**.** Such research does not begin with formal hypotheses, does not specify variables, and, therefore, does not test hypotheses. Instead of seeking to test pre-defined concepts, researchers following this way of knowing make concerted efforts to avoid a "rush to diagnosis" and analytic closure in order to allow an understanding of the key concepts- and meanings-in-use among situational actors – those that are significant to them in their own lived experiences – to emerge from the research itself. (We return to this point in section b, below.) Interpretive researchers hold that knowledge of or ideas about social realities are inter-subjectively (or "socially") constructed and that research-related knowledge can only be developed in interaction with actors in their own settings and situations; "objectivity" – knowing from the outside – is, in this view, not possible.

As a form of explanation, interpretive science's emphasis is on contextualized meaning-making, including not only that of situational actors but also of the researcher, who is also situated or "positioned." This means that researcher "positionality" – geographic or other physical locational factors with respect to what or who is being studied and/or demographic factors, both of which might enable access to some persons and sites and block others, thereby affecting the information available to the researcher – is key to generating insight and to knowledge claims, and researchers are increasingly expected to reflect on this explicitly in their writings. But as those making meaning are also those being studied, this research entails layers

of interpretation. Researchers' truth claims, then, rest on the trustworthiness of their interpretations; and this rests on the systematicity of data generation and what might be called the "attitude of doubt" – of ongoing probing and self-questioning – with which it is carried out (see, e.g., Moses and Knutsen 2007, Polkinghorne 1983, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009, 2011, Yanow 2009).

These distinctions between positivist and interpretive ways of knowing have implications for, among other things, (a) the treatment of the central research question, (b) the character of concepts, (c) the development of hypotheses, and (d) the particular character of case study research. We take these up in turn.

a. Developing research questions: Meaning- versus variables-focused

As an example, assume the topic of research is mediation in the decision-making process concerning an infrastructure project. A "topic" is not a question, in either way of knowing. But for interpretive research it is entirely appropriate to phrase a research question in what from a positivist-research perspective appear to be rather general terms, such as "What is the role of the mediator in the infrastructure project's decision-making process?" The research goal – understanding the mediator's role – proceeds by seeking to grasp the meaning(s) "mediator" and "mediation" have for situational participants, including different meaning-making (epistemic, discourse, interpretive) communities for which these meanings might not be identical. A too-specific question may blind the researcher to unforeseen meanings, possibly imposing too much of the researcher's preconceptions on respondents' own meaning-making. Interpretive researchers try to structure their research designs in ways that will avoid premature diagnostic closure, maximizing their ability to identify a wide range of interpretations relevant to the research setting or situation.

Positivist research is different. Researchers need to avoid what for them would be vague terms, like "role." They need to make up their minds early in the research design process as to what exactly they want to know, with great precision. Perhaps the researcher is interested in whether the presence of a process mediator increases the legitimacy of the outcome of the process, or in whether different kinds of mediator orientation (e.g., a legitimacy-orientation versus an efficiency-orientation) cause different outcomes. Such formulations already frame the research question in terms of dependent and/or independent variables, in ways that readily lead to "operationalizing" (naming and defining) them and specifying their relationships, as we discuss next.

b. Concepts and theories: Starting points or end products?

Variables-based research is about testing hypotheses derived from theories. Drawing on a deductive logic of inquiry, theoretical formulations are worked out prior to the empirical research acts of data collection and analysis. Theories and hypotheses are built on concepts which need to have precise meanings, so it is important to provide theoretical (or formal) definitions for all concepts, such as "mediation orientation" or "outcome legitimacy" in our extended example, before beginning the empirical phase of the research. Concepts are abstractions; they cannot be observed directly in the "real world." Because they need to be "translated" into indicators – to be "operationalized" – in order for the research to proceed, concepts need to be defined in ways that render them observable phenomena, with a definition representing each concept in the real world. These definitions come from the theoretical discourse to which the research question is linked. For instance, the abstract concept "outcome legitimacy" can be "observed" by looking at the answers given by participants in the relevant decision-making process to a series of questions (aimed at measuring outcome legitimacy) in a survey. The survey is a research procedure (an operation) that yields "empirical observations" of activities that represent the concepts the researcher is interested in studying (see, e.g., Babbie 1998). The closer the indicators are to reflecting those theoretical concepts, the stronger the measurement validity.

Interpretive research does not work with pre-defined concepts and theories, and so it has nothing to operationalize in a formal sense in advance of empirical observation. However, concepts and theories might be the outcome of a research process. These give voice to understandings of the social world as constructed by situational participants in interaction with the researcher, in light of the researcher's understanding of theoretical concerns pertaining to the research question. An interpretive researcher is, in other words, far more interested in "everyday theories" used by situational participants and concepts as *they* define them – i.e., the meanings *they* attach to them, rather than the researcher's foreordained definitions (see, e.g., Schaffer 2000, 2006, on meanings-in-use of "democracy").

This does not mean that interpretive researchers have no theories or theoretical concepts in mind when starting their research. But here, concepts and theories that appear in the relevant scholarly literature are used to "sensitize" the researcher for what he or she may find in the research setting (see Blaikie 2000, 136-38, quoting Blumer). If theory-inspired concepts do not "work" in field realities, interpretive researchers (should) abandon them and work with the concepts that participants use (see next section, and the example in Zirakzadeh 2009). Researchers attempt to avoid the "rush to diagnosis" mentioned above that would

foreclose the possibility of concepts "emerging" in the field, seeking instead to learn participants' meaning-making by enhancing their own awareness of it.

c. Hypotheses versus puzzles

For a research project informed by positivism, having a precise question is not enough to dive into empirical research. Most positivist research follows a deductive mode of reasoning. Hence, hypotheses need to be formulated, formally: the researcher conjectures possible answers to the research question, such as "the presence of a mediator increases outcome legitimacy" or "more experienced mediators are more legitimacy-oriented." These hypotheses do not fall out of the sky but are typically derived from theories articulated in the scientific literature, which commonly lead a researcher to expect that certain things obtain. The researcher proceeds to test the hypotheses derived from a theory (by operationalizing the variables that have been identified) in order to corroborate or falsify the theory. This does not preclude exploratory data collection and data analysis to get a feeling for whether the theories may work at all, whether the necessary data can be collected, and so on. Preliminary exploration to gain potential "explanations" from the field, however, may bias the research toward idiosyncratic features of particular cases and distract from the overarching goal of identifying systematic, general features of a phenomenon. In particular, if the research (also) aims at theoretical relevance, hypotheses should be derived from the dominant theoretical debates in the discipline, which these days are likely to be conducted on the pages of internationally-circulated, English-language journals and books (i.e., rather than those published in national languages by state-based publishing houses).

Also, it is not enough just to focus on hypotheses that the researcher may find interesting or important. Since positivist-informed research requires controlling for rival explanations, relevant hypotheses concerning alternative explanations need to be taken into account as well. In the above example, this might mean looking for other potential causes for level of outcome legitimacy.

As interpretive research is not about explicit, formal hypothesis–testing, the term "hypothesis" makes little sense here because of its technical associations with a positivist conception of research and its specific meanings there. This does not mean that interpretive researchers start from a totally blank slate. Their questions can also be, and often are, framed by theoretical discussions in the literature, but they can equally as well be driven by prior knowledge of the field setting in which research is to be carried out, juxtaposed against the research-relevant literature. What researchers bring to the field are expectations about the world

in which the participants live (literally or figuratively, as in studying a workplace or a public policy) and how that lived experience relates to some theory (whether confirming, extending or refuting it). Informed by prior theoretical readings or other sources, these expectations are often surprised by experienced social realities in the field, and the "puzzlement" provoked by the tensions between expectations and lived experiences becomes the starting point for theorizing.

This follows a line of inquiry that is both iterative and recursive, moving back and forth between expectations and theories, on the one hand, and field realities, on the other, in an abductive logic that begins with noticing a puzzle or a surprise (see Agar 2010, Locke, Golden-Biddle, and Feldman 2008). Researchers need to be responsive, often in the moment, to what is being said (in conversations or interviews) or done (as observed, with whatever degree of participation). This means that research designs need to be flexible, as they may be changed in the midst of the research project, something a variables-based researcher, especially an experimentalist, would (or should) not do (see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011 for a full discussion). In the example, instead of beginning with theoretically-determined definitions of the terms "legitimacy" and "efficiency," an interpretive researcher would seek to learn what meaning(s) the mediation processes have for the situational actors in the setting(s) they are studying. Researchers relinquish or modify a preliminary theoretical formulation on discovering that it is not a good explanation of the social realities they are observing and/or participating in, hearing about, or reading about. This also means that interpretive research is not "rigorous" in the sense in which that term is used in variables-based research to mean strongly controlled movement stepwise in a linear fashion. Although not controlled in such ways, interpretive research is, however, highly *systematic* in the many processes that comprise its prosecution (as detailed in Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011).

d. Case study research

The preceding three issues are characteristic of research in many areas. We take up case study research as our fourth topic of concern because it is one of the main ways in which public administration research is carried out.

As the word case indicates, it is an instance (an exemplar) of something. But "case study research" means something different when done in keeping with these two different ways of knowing. Although many researchers treat interpretive research and case study research as equivalent, this is problematic, due to these differences.

In positivist research, the researcher determines from the outset what the case is a case of. Cases are deliberately selected for the particular properties they have in relationship to a

theory or a population. They might, for instance, be least likely cases or most likely cases in relation to exhibiting the phenomenon under discussion in the theoretical debate being investigated (see Eckstein 1975, Rogowski 2004). Or they hold the property of being most similar with regard to alternative explanations while exhibiting maximum variation regarding the independent variable of interest, in the so-called most similar systems design (see Haverland 2007, Przeworski and Teune 1970).

In interpretive research, by contrast, although talking about cases might invite the question, What is it a case of? an interpretive researcher's answer at the beginning of the research should be, I do not know, although I have some informed expectations, and I want to find out more. In this sense an interpretive researcher is concerned with what Ragin (1992, 17) calls "casing," in which the study's goal is to find out what the entity studied is a case of, rather than to speculate or specify that ahead of time. "Case" in interpretive research is often used as a synonym for "site" or "setting," the (semi-) bounded location which is considered to have potential for illustrating the focus of the researcher's interest, in which the research is carried out. Because of this confusion of nomenclature, it might be better in certain research circumstances to use that terminology rather than "case." The differences in treatment are usually clear from the context of the research and its logic of inquiry, but the distinction becomes muddied when researchers doing interpretive case analyses cite positivist work in support of their methods. Further miscommunication arises when readers then look for detailed explanations of case selection criteria, which are required for positivist case studies in very different ways than for interpretive case studies (see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011, Yanow forthcoming). At the very least, researchers need to articulate the sort of case study research they are undertaking, including citing the methods literature appropriate to that logic (as discussed above).

Concluding thoughts

The variety of academic backgrounds held by public administration researchers is a clear indication of the interdisciplinary character of public administration scholarship (see, e.g., Raadschelders 2010). Whereas Raadschelders is concerned there with what it means in practice to be interdisciplinary in a conscious way, our concern here is with the implications of being "inter-methodological" in an unconscious way. Our hope is to make all of us more cognizant, and conscious, of research design choices and their implications for research practices and writing. We have distinguished two ways of knowing and delineated their implications for conducting research, including the need to be aware of the meanings and

relevance of methodological terms and their place in the research process. We have argued for the importance of knowing these different implications for improving the quality of one's own research, as well as for being able to offer informed commentary on others' work.

One of the implications of our discussion addresses a key part of contemporary methods debates: the desirability of mixed-methods research. Our position on this follows from the logic of the argument we have been developing: whereas we have no objection to drawing on multiple *methods* within a single research project, we hold that mixing *methodologies* within a single study is problematic, as it confounds the logic that inheres in ontological and epistemological positions that are incompatible, leading to confusions in the logic of inquiry. It is not uncommon for positivist and interpretivist ethnographers, for instance, to draw on a variety of methods types (to triangulate on method or to "map" for exposure [Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011]): formal interviews, conversations at the water cooler or on the street corner; memos, correspondence, annual reports; situated observations, with whatever degree of participating in those circumstances. Here is the use of various types of method – talk, documents, observation – as well as various sources within each type.

But trying to conduct research using tools that presuppose both a realist, objectivist social world and at the same time an intersubjectively-socially constructed, subjectively known one strikes us as logically inconsistent and, hence, impossible to achieve in ways that make for convincing claims to knowledge. In short, in our view:

- each research question demands its own methodology: either interpretive or positivist;
- logics of inquiry cannot be mixed with regard to a specific question;
- within a single logic, mixing methods is possible (see, e.g., Lieberman 2005 on various ways to mix large n and small n research within a positivist line of inquiry).

It is also conceivable that within a single research "project" – understood as a collection of research questions – some questions might be answered following a positivist logic of inquiry and some, an interpretive one (see, e.g., Schram 2002, Schram, Soss, and Fording 2003). But in formulating each question and designing the research to explore it, all of the implications outlined in this essay need to be taken into account.

Understanding the methodological underpinnings of different ways of knowing will help make research design strategies and their execution clearer, more internally consistent, and more transparent to researchers working in other modes. It would also potentially make manuscript reviewing and research funding processes more efficient, as work in keeping with

one way of knowing would be judged on its own methodological terms, rather than seeking to conform it to criteria that are more appropriate to the other way of knowing.

Notes

1. We have not researched graduate curricula exhaustively, but looking at three of the top public administration Ph.D. programs in the US makes the point:

> - the Maxwell School's Ph.D. (Syracuse University) requires four methods courses: two of these are quantitative; one is an elective; the fourth is the Ph.D. research seminar;
> - at SPEA's Public Affairs Ph.D. program (at Indiana University), required research skills include a two semester quantitative analysis sequence, plus two additional elective courses (or foreign language proficiency); the two additional courses appear to be quantitative; and
> - Virginia Tech's Ph.D. requires six hours for the Measurement and Analysis unit: a course that carries a general title – Public Administration & Policy Inquiry – but which has an introductory statistics course as prerequisite for enrollment; and Intermediate/Advanced Statistics or other quantitative or qualitative skills.

That is, even when one of these programs allows the possibility of a qualitative methods course, it is not required; the number of quantitative methods courses outweighs the other possibilities, when they are available; and required courses then set the tone for the program. It is possible that Maxwell's research seminar or Virginia Tech's inquiry course provides methodological contextualization; we cannot tell from the webpages. But even here, the weight of required quantitative courses carries the message of what is deemed significant in the program. See Schwartz-Shea (2003) for a parallel argument based on systematic analysis of political science methods requirements.

2. Examples are Bryman (2008), Cresswell (2008), and Neumann (2004). Note that some introductory social science methods textbooks are solely based on a positivist approach, e.g., Babbie (1998), Johnson and Reynolds (2007), O'Sullivan and Rassel (1999); for a discussion, see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2002). We are aware of the fact that there is a literature that argues that both approaches follow, or can follow, the same logic (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994) or that they share the same standards (Brady and Collier 2004). We disagree; or at least we argue that the logic of inquiry treated in those two books does not cover the full spectrum of qualitative methods (see Haverland 2010, Yanow 2003).

3. Strictly speaking, research is not positivist or interpretive per se, but rather is built upon and shaped by positivist or interpretivist presuppositions; and "positivist" itself is not completely

accurate nomenclature, the word summing across four different phases of positivist thought. Still, these are the terms that have become prevalent in methods discussions today, and so we use them without further discussion for reasons of space. See Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006) for further discussion on this point.

Acknowledgements

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