Interview-based research in management and organisation studies: Making sense of the plurality of methodological practices and presentational styles

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this review paper is to identify the methodological practices and presentational styles used to report interview-based research in ‘leading’ management and organisation journals.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper reviews a sample of 225 articles using qualitative interviews that were published in management, human resource management, organisational behaviour, and international business journals listed in the Financial Times 50 list between 2009 and 2019.

Findings – The review found diversity and plurality in the methodological practices used in these studies and the presentational styles used to report interview research.

Originality – To make sense of this plurality, we map these practices and styles against the onto-epistemological paradigms identified by Alvesson (2003; 2011). The paper contributes to calls for philosophical diversity in the evaluation of qualitative research. We specifically articulate concerns about the use of practices in interview-based studies that derive from the positivistic logic associated with quantitative research.

Practical implications – The findings are expected to help doctoral students, early career scholars, and those new to using qualitative interviews to make decisions about the appropriateness of different methodological practices and presentational styles. The findings are also expected to support editors, reviewers, doctoral examiners, and conference organisers in making sense of the dissensus that exists amongst qualitative interview researchers (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). These insights will also enable greater ‘paradigmatic awareness’ (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021, p. 5) in the evaluation of the quality of interview-based research that are not restricted to standardised criteria derived from positivism (Cassell and Symon, 2015).

Key words – paradigms, qualitative interviews, qualitative methods, research methodology, research philosophy, rigour

Introduction

Interviews are the most prevalent qualitative method in management and organisation research (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011), either as a standalone method, as part of a mixed methods study, or within a multiple qualitative methods design. However, there is currently little systematic knowledge about the methodological practices (types of interview protocol, methods of data analysis, and use of quality checks) and presentational styles (how and where findings have been presented in academic journal articles) used to report interview-based research. This lack of knowledge is problematic in the light of Cassell and Symon's (2015) argument that scholars using qualitative methods such as interviews are subject to tension between those advocating philosophical diversity and those pushing standardised criteria that are often grounded in positivistic paradigms. While there is widespread recognition that the quality of qualitative research must be assessed in accordance with the distinct onto-epistemological paradigm underpinning a study (e.g. Alvesson, 2003, 2011; Cassell, 2015; Cunliffe, 2011), there is currently an incomplete understanding of how different methodological practices and presentational styles relate to these paradigms. This understanding is important if the field is to promote 'the diversity of qualitative research' (Cassell and Symon, 2015) while at the same time ensuring proper 'paradigmatic awareness' (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021, p. 5) about the epistemic norms underpinning the different paradigms. Notwithstanding, we also caution against the use of practices in interview-based studies that derive from the positivistic logic.

To address this gap, we undertook a review of interview-based research published in 'leading' management and organisation journals. Our review sought to answer the following two guiding questions:

1. What methodological practices are reported in interview-based research?
2. What styles are used to present interview-based research?

The scope of our review was a selected sample (where 'interview' was mentioned in the title, abstract, or keywords) published in Financial Times 50 (hereafter FT50) management and organisation journals between 2009 and 2019. Analysing this period provides an opportunity to reflect on what is considered 'high quality' interview-based research over the past decade. By 'high quality' we refer to the quality judgements made by reviewers and editors resulting in the decision to publish the article.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin by discussing the extant literature on qualitative interviewing in management and organisation studies. Then, we describe our approach before providing an overview of the methodological practices and presentational styles identified in the dataset. In the discussion, we map the plurality of practices and styles identified onto the distinct onto-epistemological paradigms underpinning interview-based research (e.g. Alvesson, 2003, 2011).

The contribution of this review, therefore, is to help researchers, reviewers, and editors to make more appropriate assessments of research quality in interview-based research. It will encourage critical reflection on the philosophical and methodological concerns associated with the use of neo-positivist approaches specifically. We also posit that such understanding will benefit the training and mentoring of doctoral students and early career researchers to maintain the integrity of qualitative research in the longer term.

Interviewing in management and organisation research

Generations of scholars have learnt what is considered as the accepted methodological standard in qualitative interviewing through research methods texts (e.g. Bell *et al.*, 2019; Blumberg *et al.*, 2014; Ghauri *et al.*, 2020; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). These texts typically explain technical and practical aspects, such as when to use different types of interviews, what kinds of questions can be used for what purpose, how to use pilot interviews, how to avoid leading questions, and how to build rapport. Given their broad coverage, these texts cannot discuss each method presented in depth and may give an impression that there is a single accepted way of designing, conducting, analysing, and writing up interview-based research. Yet, some textbook authors do acknowledge that different types of interviews are more suitable in particular paradigms (Bell *et al.*, 2019) and for particular purposes (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, while textbooks typically include a range of quality checks (e.g. triangulation, saturation, interrater reliability, and respondent validation / member-checking), they tend not to discuss whether these may be appropriate in a particular paradigm[i]. This may leave novice researchers unaware of the respective critiques and limitations, while giving an impression that these checks constitute a required standard. Overall, textbooks say more about how interview data can be collected and analysed, rather than how and where they are presented.

Beyond textbooks, only a limited number of scholarly sources have advanced the understanding of interviews as a research method. Importantly for our purposes in this paper, several authors have identified the philosophical plurality underpinning interview-based research. For example, Cassell (2015, p. 10) contrasts the assumptions and purposes of interviews designed from realist, phenomenological, and social constructionist paradigms. She concludes that there is no 'one best way' of doing interview-based research and, accordingly, no single set of agreed quality criteria to evaluate the potentially diverse practices used (see also Cassell and Symon, 2015). In a similar vein, Alvesson (2003, 2011) differentiates between the neo-positivist, romanticist, and localist paradigms (see also Silverman, 2019). These onto-epistemological differences matter because, as Cunliffe (2011, p. 648) argues, each paradigm is 'radically different and incommensurable with the others'. Crucially also for our purposes, these distinct paradigms differ in their assumptions about what makes a 'good' interview.

For 'neo-positivists' (Alvesson, 2003, 2011), interviews are a tool for gaining context-free truths about a reality 'out there'. Interviewers seek to minimise researcher influence and gather 'facts' about interviewees' attitudes, behaviours, values, etc. Here, questions are structured and standardised to avoid researcher influence or 'bias'. For 'romanticists' (Alvesson, 2003, 2011), interviewers should get close to interviewees and develop rapport to gain deep insight into interviewees' inner self, world views, and authentic experiences. Here, questions are more open, the schedule more flexible, and interviewers play an active part in offering tokens of agreement to encourage interviewees to 'open up'. For 'localists' (Alvesson, 2003, 2011), interviews provide insights into how people assemble versions of themselves and the world around them in the interview's local, situation-specific context. Here, interviews are viewed as a social encounter, and the focus is on the interviewer-interviewee interaction and/or the culturally available scripts or discourses that people use to produce accounts to specific audiences. Researchers do not seek to draw conclusions about what these accounts tell about other organisational situations or what might be going on inside interviewees' minds.

To the best of our knowledge, only few contemporary scholarly sources are dedicated to the academic study of interviewing in management and organisation research. The first strand of methodological research deals with technical issues, such as rapport (e.g. Dundon and Ryan, 2009), or proposes novel and innovative approaches to interviewing (e.g. Bourne and Jenkins', 2005, 'laddering' interview technique). Saunders and Townsend (2016) examined 248 journal articles reporting interview-based research to map and evaluate the practices used to justify the number of interviewees. They found a wide variance not only in participant size but also in whether and how it was justified. Importantly, Saunders and Townsend (2016) point out that what is considered to be an 'adequate' sample size in interview-based studies is dependent on both the onto-epistemological paradigm adopted in the study and the standards set by gatekeepers such as reviewers and editors.

The second strand of methodological research pertains to reflexivity. Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012) discuss an emerging 'reflexivist' position to interviewing that includes recognition of the relational, cultural, and political practices of interviewing while rejecting the use of procedures that claim to remove the often messy ambiguity, contradiction, and variation within and between interview accounts. Robinson and Kerr (2015) propose a critical hermeneutic approach that facilitates reflexivity by integrating the 'text' of the interviewee's account, the context of the interview conversation, and the researcher as co-creator of meaning. Reissner (2018) proposes 'conversational space mapping' as a visual tool to help researchers engage reflexively with their interviewing practice.

The third strand of methodological research advocates plurality in interview-based studies. Cassell and Bishop (2019) show how different analytic methods produced different theoretical insights into the same interview data. This is echoed by Harley and Cornelissen (2020, p. 16) who argue that 'the same [interview] data can be understood in different ways depending on how one approaches it'. These scholars caution against the trend towards standardisation in qualitative research, echoing calls for a more pluralistic approach towards research assessments (e.g. Alvesson, 2003, 2011; Cassell, 2015; Cunliffe, 2011) and the use of multiple evaluation criteria (Pratt, 2008).

The fourth strand critically evaluates quantification practices used in interview-based research. From interviews with 'epistemological gatekeepers' (Symon and Cassell, 1999), such as journal editors, Cassell *et al.* (2006) identified problems with their perception that quantification of qualitative data conveyed rigour and credibility. Similarly, Hannah and Lautsch (2010) caution against the use of quantification practices because these can produce misleading impressions of patterns, lose nuances of meaning, and miss opportunities to analyse infrequent but theoretically significant passages of text. In contrast, O'Kane *et al.* (2019) advocate the quantification of qualitative data to count word frequency and code frequency, which they claim can help to identify important patterns in the data and ensure transparency about the analysis process.

The fifth and final strand scrutinises the way in which data is collected, analysed, and reported. Bluhm *et al.* (2011) note the distinct lack of transparency in how interview-based research is reported, in particular the absence of full information about how the data was collected and analysed. In addition, Schaefer and Alvesson (2020) reviewed 30 interview-based studies to highlight the absence of source critique in studies of all three onto-epistemological traditions (neo-positivist, romanticist, localist, see Alvesson 2003; 2011). Their review offers guidance on how to improve intra-source and extra-source critique, for example by checking for signs that the interviewee is trying to (re)produce a politically correct answer, follow an organisationally acceptable script, advance a sectional agenda, or simply trying to please the interviewer.

However, despite these pertinent insights into interview-based research, there is currently no systematic understanding of what practices are used in reporting interview-based research in 'leading' journals and by what onto-epistemological paradigm they are underpinned. It is this gap that our review seeks to address.

Methodology

Data compilation

Our review comprised of selected scholarly articles reporting interview-based research in management and organisation studies published between 2009-2019. It covered all scholarly management, human resource management, organisational behaviour, and international business journals in the FT50 academic journals list. Our selection of journals from the FT50 list is not intended to imply that high quality interview-based research is not published elsewhere. We recognise the dangers of journal list fetishism (Willmott, 2011) and agree with Cassell *et al.* (2006, p. 301) that 'terms such as "top journals" and "prestigious" are in themselves value laden' given the 'many different interpretations of what is high quality work'.

We excluded practitioner-oriented journals (*Harvard Business Review*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*) as well as ethics, marketing, accounting, finance, economics, operations management, information systems, and entrepreneurship journals to retain our focus on management and organisation studies. We searched by journal in the EBSCO Business Source Complete database for those authors who chose to foreground the interview method by using the term 'interview' in 'subject terms' OR 'author supplied keywords' OR 'abstract'. We also excluded focus group interviews as a single method for the purposes of this study.

The limitation of this approach is that articles deriving from interview-based research that did not include the term 'interview' in title, abstract, or key words will be absent from our sample. The date range covered the period of 1st January 2009 to 31st December 2019, which resulted in 261 articles. Given our focus on interview-based research, we excluded articles reporting interviews with leaders and articles referring to other types of interview, such as job interviews. A total of 36 articles were thus excluded, bringing the number of articles in our dataset to 225 (details are provided in Table AI in the online appendix).

While our review does not involve all interview-based research, the sample is likely to 'tell something about disciplinary standards and ideals' (Platt, 1996, pp. 126, cited by Piekkari *et al.*, 2009,

p. 573) and therefore contributes to a better understanding of what methodological practices and presentational styles are appropriate in different onto-epistemological paradigms.

Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of three steps. In the first step, we downloaded the articles and imported them into NVivo 12. We started coding by assigning predefined codes for journal name and research design (interview only, mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, and multiple qualitative methods). Details about the dataset can be found in Table AII, Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the online appendix. A text search for the type of interview found that 159 articles reported using semi-structured interviews; 7 articles reported using unstructured interviews (using either the term 'unstructured' or 'loosely structured'); and 3 articles reported using structured interviews. These figures confirm Saunders and Townsend's (2016) findings that semi-structured interviews are the predominant type.

In the second step, we read the full text of the 225 articles with a particular focus on the methodology and findings sections, using open coding to identify the methodological practices reported and presentational styles used. Our coding was primarily qualitative, and the judgements made in categorising our findings were interpretive. In meetings between the authors, we discussed the emerging findings and supplemented them with automated searches using the search function of NVivo where appropriate (for example, when searching for terms such as 'saturation'). We then combined codes into analytical categories, namely practices pertaining to data collection, data analysis, and quality checks as well as reporting structure and placement of interview quotes (see Figure A3 in the online appendix). These analytical categories informed our guiding questions and provide the structure for reporting our findings below. In the third and final step, we returned to the literature to explore how our findings relate to the different paradigms of interview-based research (Alvesson, 2003, 2011), and we mapped our findings against the paradigms to make sense of the variety of practices we identified.

Methodological practices

We now turn to our first guiding question: What methodological practices are reported in interview-based research? We will discuss in turn the practices relating to data collection, data analysis, and quality checks identified in the dataset.

Data collection

Interview protocols: Most studies in our sample reported employing a single interview approach (e.g. semi-structured) as well as a single interview protocol for all interviewees. However, we also identified articles that employed different types of interviews in a single study, for example combining open-ended and structured interviews (e.g. Lupu *et al.*, 2018), combining group and individual interviews (Nielsen *et al.*, 2014), or selecting a smaller 'panel' for repeat-interviewing (Sydow *et al.*, 2012). Some articles employed different interview protocols for different groups of interviewees (e.g. Bano and Nadeem, 2018), and in international business research, conducting interviews in different languages was also mentioned (Tenzer *et al.*, 2014). Other articles employed a facilitated interview approach, which we define as a range of activities and/or artefacts that contemporary scholars have used to act as prompts or to guide the interview interaction. A summary of these practices is provided in Table AIII in the online appendix.

Reporting interview questions: Authors varied considerably in their decision about whether and how to inform readers about the interview protocol. We found that 31 articles out of the 225 in our dataset provided the actual interview questions in a list, table, or appendix. Some of these authors offered both a description of the overall interview themes or topics and the full list of questions (e.g. Marchington *et al.*, 2011). Others offered to provide the interview questions upon request (e.g. Hadley, 2014). We found that 47 articles provided neither a list of interview questions nor an author summary of the main themes or topics of the interview. These articles typically used interviews as a secondary method (to supplement a quantitative method, for instance), or where interviews were used in the beginning sections of the article to identify a phenomenon and build hypotheses (a practice that will be discussed further below).

The majority of articles summarised the interview questions in the methodology section. Some authors provided descriptions of not only *what* topics were probed but also *how* the questions were asked. For example, Reid (2015) stated that both structured and unstructured interview questions were used for distinct purposes: the former enabling 'comparisons across people' and the latter encouraging 'open ended reflection' (p. 1000). Peltokorpi and Vaara (2014, p. 606) mentioned their efforts to avoid 'complicated academic terms that might have alienated the interviewees'. Follmer *et al.* (2018) described using 'open-ended questions' (p. 443) to avoid influencing responses with their 'preconceived ideas' (p. 443) and using follow-up 'probing questions' (p. 445) to gain deeper insights. Helms and Patterson (2014) described using prompting questions when interviewees were silent or when they wanted interviewees to expand on their accounts. Grant *et al.* (2014, p. 1205) described seeking a 'balanced perspective' in their questions by asking about negative consequences when interviewees only mentioned positive implications.

Some authors also discussed the deliberate sequencing of questions. For instance, Reid (2015, p. 1001) described saving 'potentially threatening questions' to the end of the interview to encourage interviewees to feel 'comfortable and to be open and honest about their experiences' at the start. Roberts and Beamish (2017, p. 518) mentioned sending the interview questions to participants beforehand to help them 'prepare for the interview'. Other authors described designing their interview questions to elicit particular kinds of answers, for example narratives or stories as opposed to factual answers (e.g. Daskalaki and Simosi, 2018).

Data analysis

Coding system: Coding was the most prevalent term used to describe the system of analysis. Interestingly, since interview data is typically transcribed and therefore analysed as texts, we identified only two articles that specified the linguistic unit of analysis used in coding (such as word, clause, sentence, collection of sentences, turn at talk, or whole text): Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) state that they coded a ‘cluster of sentences that expressed a particular theme’ (p. 601), and Crilly and Sloan (2014) state that they identified the ‘18 most frequently used constructs after excluding proper nouns’ (p. 342). Since few authors include any information about their linguistic unit of analysis, it is possible that some researchers code at the level of a single word, while others code broader linguistic units such as sentences or turns at talk. We therefore cannot make any conclusions about what unit of analysis is currently considered the most rigorous or meaningful in different onto-epistemological paradigms[ii].

Sample split and compared: While most authors coded the interview data using one analytical technique for all interviewees, we also found articles which separated the interviewees according to various social or organisational categories to compare responses. Some studies separated interviewees according to established sociological categories (e.g. gender, ethnicity), organisational units of analysis (e.g. case organisation, department, hierarchical levels), or other categories that were relevant to the topic being investigated; see Table AIV in the online appendix for details. By separating and comparing interview responses, these studies sought to foreground particular differences in their sample while backgrounding others. For instance, separating and comparing responses by men and women led to gender differences being foregrounded, while other potential differences according to categories such as age, ethnicity, or class were backgrounded.

Quantification practices: We also found evidence of quantification practices, where scholars transformed the words of the interview transcript into numbers. Table AV in the online appendix provides details of the five quantification practices identified in our dataset. In contrast to those using quantification practices, Schlosser *et al.* (2017, p. 575) describe first attempting and later *rejecting* their attempt at counting the frequency of codes because it transformed their analysis into a ‘positivist exercise’ and failed to capture the fact that ‘the absence of words may be as important as frequency’.

Our finding that quantification practices are used by some authors needs to be evaluated in relation to the debate about the validity and value of translating words and other qualitative semiotic forms into numbers and statistics (e.g. Cassell and Symon, 2015).

In terms of quantification, it is also noteworthy that none of the articles in the dataset specified the volume or percentage of the interview transcript that was coded. Readers, including reviewers and editors evaluating research quality and students seeking to learn 'best practice', are therefore unable to evaluate (a) how much text was left un-coded, (b) what this un-coded text contained, or (c) the rationale upon which it was not coded. As such, density of coding (i.e. the volume or percentage of transcript that was coded) does not appear to be currently used as an indicator of methodological rigour in interview-based research.

Quality checks

Most articles in the dataset described the data analysis process without referring to a specific named technique for performing quality checks. However, across all journals we reviewed there were articles that explicitly referred to one or more of following four practices: triangulation, saturation, interrater/intercoder reliability, and respondent validation/member-checking[iii].

Triangulation: We found 47 articles that explicitly mentioned the term 'triangulation'. While it was most commonly used to refer to comparisons between data sources, we also found alternative uses of the term. Some authors used the more commonplace meaning of 'triangulation' to refer to *agreement* across different data sources to bolster claims to validity. Other articles used the term 'triangulation' to comparisons of data across different social or organisational groups or units. Other uses of the term 'triangulation' included the testing of emergent analytical categories on a new batch of data; comparison between the perceptions of participants and researcher; or comparisons between the interpretations of different members of the research team. In this latter use of the term 'triangulation' by Sumelius *et al.* (2014), the meaning appears to be similar to the concept of interrater reliability discuss below. In contrast, other scholars compared data sources to explore *discrepancies* in order to understand how and why they might occur. Details are provided in Table AVI in the online appendix.

Moreover, we found articles that triangulated interviews with a number of different other data sources, both qualitative and/or quantitative. (A summary is provided in Table AVII in the online appendix). The most prevalent triangulation practice in the dataset was the combination of interview data with multiple other qualitative data sources. Other articles reported using a combination of interviews with (a) multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources; (b) archival data; (c) survey data; and (d) focus groups. It was noteworthy that few articles discussed how or why data sources *failed* to triangulate (exceptions are Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Banks *et al.*, 2016). For example, Lander and Kooning (2013, p. 9) mention 'the use of triangulation where possible', without describing where it was *not* possible, or discussing where it *was* possible but the different data sources failed to cohere. This was a surprising finding given what is known about qualitative interviews as sites of moral storytelling, retrospective rationalisation, identity work, and impression management (Alvesson, 2003, 2011) – issues that make some level of 'discrepancy' or 'decoupling' from accounts given in other contexts (e.g. organisational documents, focus groups, observations) likely.

Saturation: We found 30 articles in the dataset that explicitly mentioned 'saturation'. While some articles simply referred to 'saturation' as a standalone term (e.g. Santistevan and Josserand, 2019), others used terms such as 'theoretical saturation' (e.g. Boiral, 2012), 'thematic saturation' (Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017), 'information / data saturation' (e.g. Toegel *et al.*, 2013), or 'phenomenological saturation' (Cruz and Meisenbach, 2018). Scholars use the term 'saturation' to refer to: reaching a point when no new information was gathered, no new themes emerged, no new categories were identified, or other unspecified meanings. (A summary can be found in Table AVIII in the online appendix.) It is noteworthy that two distinct practices of data collection and analysis underpinned the articles referring to saturation. Some studies (e.g. Sonpar *et al.*, 2018) implied that data collection and analysis took place in an iterative, chain-like fashion, where data *collection* continued until a point of saturation was identified because newly-collected data no longer generated new insights. Other studies (e.g. Owens and Hekman, 2012) implied that saturation was sought during the *analysis* of interviews conducted before data analysis formally began. Overall, however, we found that saturation remained a relatively obscure concept due to a lack of transparency and clarity about how, when, and why decisions about the point of saturation were made. We conclude, like Saunders and Townsend (2016), that saturation is not a widely used concept in interview-based studies in our field.

Interrater reliability: We found 25 articles that explicitly mentioned interrater or intercoder reliability (used interchangeably hereafter). However, we found no mention of 'intracoder' or 'intrarater' reliability, a technique that seeks to check the consistency of coding by each coder (see Van den Hoonaard, 2008). Four different techniques of interrater reliability were identified: Cohen's K, Fleiss method, Krippendorff's Alpha, and scholars who mentioned no specific method. (See Table AIX in the online appendix for a summary.) Most articles referred to interrater reliability using a kappa value ranging between 0.58 and 0.95. However, there was disagreement between authors about the threshold for claiming reliability using Cohen's K, with some authors using a threshold of 0.75 (e.g. Kim and Youm, 2017), others describing 0.95 as 'acceptable' (Ou *et al.*, 2014, p. 56), others again considering 0.8 to be problematic (Fu *et al.*, 2010), and others still referring to 0.58 as 'moderate yet significant agreement' (Alison *et al.*, 2015, p. 1313). We can therefore conclude that there is currently neither a single preferred method for undertaking interrater reliability tests nor a single agreed threshold at which sufficient coder agreement is claimed.

Respondent validation: We found seven articles in the dataset that explicitly referred to respondent validation or member-checking (used interchangeably hereafter). Meanings and uses of the term also varied. For example, Hutchins *et al.* (2010) and Rothausen *et al.* (2017) described checking the researchers' interpretation with a subset of research participants. In other articles, it was implied that member-checking was conducted with all research participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2014; Wilhelmy *et* *al.*, 2016). Other articles again did not specify how many research participants were involved in respondent validation (e.g. LeBaron *et al.*, 2016). We also found variance in the descriptions of what happened following member-checking. McAllum (2018, p. 956) mentioned 'adjusting transcripts accordingly', and Hutchins *et al.* (2010, p. 610) wrote that 'through member-checking, one of the participants' interview data was eliminated because her answers were not specific to training transfer'. Others discussed using member-checking to ensure validation of their findings (LeBaron *et al.*, 2016) or validity (Rothausen *et al.*, 2017), but did not state whether respondents agreed with the researchers' interpretations.

Presenting interview data

We now turn to our second guiding question: What styles are used to present interview-based research? We start by examining the analytical category of reporting structure.

Reporting structure

Placement of interview quotes: Perhaps not surprisingly, most authors placed interview quotes in the findings section of the article. However, we found some articles where interview quotes were included in other sections: in the Introduction where the phenomenon being studied was introduced and explained (e.g. Zhang *et al.*, 2017), in the Literature Review to illustrate concepts from theories being discussed (e.g. Graffin *et al.*, 2011), in the Theory section where hypotheses were developed (e.g. Almandoz and Tilcsik, 2016), in the Discussion (e.g. Kistruck *et al.*, 2013), and in the Conclusion to sum up the contributions or discuss future research directions (e.g. Byron and Laurence, 2015).

Structure of findings: We found that most articles reported the findings in sub-sections based on thematic coding using three variations. Firstly, in deductive studies, themes were identified theoretically and then applied to the data (e.g. Luciano *et al.*, 2018). Secondly, in inductive studies, themes were identified as part of a grounded data analysis (e.g. Helms and Patterson, 2014). Thirdly, a thematic structure was also used in multi-level analysis (Crilly *et al.*, 2012) and cross-case analysis (Garg and Eisenhardt, 2017). Other authors structured their findings according to the *practices* or *tactics* (as opposed to themes) they identified in the data (e.g. Nelson, 2016), or how these addressed the guiding questions (e.g. Arp, 2014).

While most articles reported the overall findings, some authors selected individual interviewees (or particular groups or units) as a 'case study' or 'focal case' for more in-depth analysis, (see Table AX in the online appendix for details). The justifications given for selecting particular individuals or units varied. Most authors claimed that their selection best illustrated or provided the clearest example of a particular analytic theme or theoretical construct (e.g. Liu, 2017). Other justifications were also used. Roberts and Beamish (2017) justified selecting four individuals out of a sample of 45 interviewees for more detailed analysis because these had more experience and seniority. Fang *et al.* (2015) selected particular individuals from a sample of 28 entrepreneurs to contrast them on the basis of criteria such as level of political skill. However, Litrico *et al.* (2011) provided no explicit justification for the selection of one case to illustrate each of four analytic constructs. Overall, while the selection of such 'focal cases' might not be widespread, it is viewed as an alternative way to presenting interview data from a broader range of interviewees.

Methods of presenting data

Methods of presenting interview quotes: The majority of articles presented quotes from the interviews alongside the authors' interpretation using a narrative style. We observed six such presentational practices in the dataset (see Table AXI in the online appendix for details). The first practice came from articles which reported interview research without presenting any interview quotes. Instead, the author(s) provided a summary of the interviews in their own words. The second practice involved the author(s) 'sprinkling' shorter 'snippets' of the words (typically a few words or selected phrases) of multiple interviewees within a sentence. The third practice involved presenting interview quotes in a table format. Some articles presented interview quotes only in tabular form, whereas others combined quotes presented in a table with quotes presented in the text. The fourth practice involved authors introducing the theme in their own words, followed by one or more interview quotes, followed by their own interpretation. We call this style the ‘sandwich’ format, where the words of the interviewee are ‘sandwiched’ between the words of the author(s). The fifth practice involved authors using a format we refer to as the ‘open sandwich’, where the author(s) introduced the theme in their own words, then presented one or more interview quotes to illustrate the theme, before moving on. Sixth and finally, a rarer practice (14 articles) involved authors presenting the interviewee’s words together with the interviewer’s utterances in an interactional sequence. Some articles provided one or more excerpts showing the sequence of question-and-answer interaction. These articles tended to derive from discourse analytic or interactionist research underpinned by a localist paradigm (Alvesson, 2003, 2011). Other articles combined some standalone interview quotes with others that included the interviewer-interviewee interaction.

Transcription and notation systems: Almost all the articles in our review gave a verbatim transcription of the interview talk without using a particular notation system to indicate elements of speech such as pauses, cut-offs, overlaps, emphasis, or volume. There were only a few exceptions to this. Thomas *et al.* (2010) mentioned including audible pauses and laughter in the transcript. Hoedemaekers and Keegan (2010, p. 1029) mentioned that ‘all interviews were fully transcribed with our own notation system for pauses, fumbled words, laughter, and coughing. Variations in intonation were noted, for example utterances that were clearly intended to be sarcastic, or where the pitch or volume changed suddenly.’ However, neither was the notation system provided nor did the analysis that followed reference these features. In addition, Dick and Collings (2014) stated their preference for a fuller transcription system that could not be achieved without access to the original recording, but no further detail was given.

We found that authors using a notation system to indicate emphasis (e.g. using bold or italics) sought to emphasise certain words *for analytic purposes*, rather than to indicate emphasis by the speaker (e.g. Arp, 2014; Byron and Laurence, 2015). In addition, we found that notation practices using three consecutive dots ('…') had unspecified uses (e.g. Ellis and Ybema, 2010, p. 290; Kanji and Cahusac, 2015, p. 1428) ,without indicating whether the dots referred to an unfinished sentence or a section of talk that had been omitted. Overall, we observed a dominance of verbatim transcripts that emphasise *what* was said over *how* it was said, together with the use of unspecified notation systems, with implications for how meaning is studied and analytical conclusions are made, as will be discussed below.

Discussion

Our review of a sample of interview-based research in FT50 management and organisation journals between 2009 and 2019 has identified a variety of methodological practices reported by authors. We follow Alvesson (2003, 2011), Cunliffe (2011) and Cassell (2015) in proposing that this plurality needs to be understood in the context of the underlying onto-epistemological paradigm of the study. To conceptualise the array of practices we found in this review, Table I links these to the onto-epistemological paradigms identified by Alvesson (2003, 2011).

------ TABLE I ------

Table I has implications for how qualitative research using interviews is being conducted and evaluated. The first implication is that scholars should be mindful of which methodological practices are compatible with the epistemic norms of the paradigm underpinning their study. In other words, scholars should avoid a 'pick and mix' of using methodological practices from different paradigms. A study which purports to adopt a localist paradigm but actually uses a standardised and structured interview protocol, splits up the interview sample into social categories, quantifies the interview data, or employs triangulation and interrater reliability would indicate onto-epistemological confusion.

The second implication concerns fundamental disagreements between paradigms about the 'correct' way of collecting, analysing, and quality-checking interview data. For scholars adopting a neo-positivist paradigm, the romanticist and localist paradigms are beset with problems such as bias, subjectivity, and a lack of rigour. However, neo-positivist studies are themselves subject to critiques from the other paradigms for having a naïve realist view of language and human interaction; for claiming to have attained an 'unbiased' standpoint; for ignoring reflexivity; and for failing to understand the interview as a site of impression management, identity work, and moral storytelling (e.g. Alvesson, 2011; Silverman, 2017).

The disagreements between these paradigms have further implications for how scholars make methodological decisions. Some practices are only valid within certain paradigms. For example, for scholars adopting a neo-positivist paradigm and seeking a single, true and objective reality, interrater reliability checks would be an appropriate method of removing personal bias and ensuring correctness and consistency in coding. However, for interpretivist, social constructionist, and phenomenological scholars adopting a romanticist or localist paradigm, it would not be valid to attempt to find a single 'correct' or 'objective' interpretation of the interview data. Rather, 'it is only meaningful to talk about truth with reference to the perspective taken by the researcher' (Sandberg, 2005, p. 52) based on the set of theories, assumptions, and cultural knowledge used in the interpretation of the data (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012). Hence, interrater reliability tests would not be used to identify which interpretation is correct because it more accurately 'corresponds' with objective reality, but rather to enable reflection on the social process through which the competing interpretations were generated (Robinson and Kerr, 2015; Schaefer and Alvesson, 2020) or discussion of how the transcript led different coders to reach different interpretations (Silverman, 1997). To establish research quality, scholars would instead seek 'interpretive awareness' (Sandberg, 2005, p. 59) by reflexively checking their interpretations throughout the study, scrutinising their background assumptions, and actively seeking out rival interpretations.

Incompatible assumptions also shape other methodological practices, but for different reasons. Member-checking is a good example. The practice is most commonly associated with a romanticist paradigm (Alvesson, 2003, 2011), which seeks to capture a 'true' reflection of research participants' authentic voice and experience. Research underpinned by a neo-positivist paradigm rarely uses this practice because interviews are treated as an objective reflection of the truth 'out there'. For those adopting a localist paradigm, member-checking is not typically used because divergent interpretations would not necessarily mean the participants' interpretations would be given a superior epistemic status and therefore be treated as more valid (Brettell, 1996; Fielding and Fielding, 1986)[iv].

Our review has also identified a variety of presentational styles. To conceptualise these, Table II links each style to the onto-epistemological paradigms identified by Alvesson (2003, 2011).

------ TABLE II ------

Table II demonstrates a degree of divergence and incompatibility between the three paradigms. For neo-positivist studies, where interviews are often used within a mixed methods design, the interview questions are not reported or only a short summary is provided. Romanticist studies tend to prefer open-ended and free-flowing unstructured interview guides, meaning authors typically only list broad topic areas. Localist studies tend to provide a list of interview questions or summary of topics, with only interactionist studies typically providing the question asked within the interactional sequence.

The underlying paradigm of the study also appears to influence epistemic norms concerning the presentation of interview data. In particular, the paradigms differ in their assumptions about the extent to which an interview excerpt 'speaks for itself'. In the sandwich format, typical of the romanticist and localist paradigms, the meaning and analytic significance of the interviewees' words is treated as requiring interpretation by the author. The open sandwich format, the 'sprinkling' of shorter quotes, and the tabular format, more associated with a neo-positivist paradigm since the meaning and significance of the interviewees' words are treated as self-explanatory in light of the theme introduced by the author. Articles grounded in a localist paradigm that analyse the interactional sequence invite the reader to interpret the interviewee's words in light of what they were asked, how they were asked it, and how the interviewer responded. Articles that provide no interview quotes and only summarised the findings in the author's words are particularly problematic, in our view. If qualitative analysis is an interpretive process through which the authors interpret the meaning of the interview text (Alvesson, 2011), then failing to present any quotes means that readers are unable to scrutinise this process. For researchers, then, the choice is not only between using a qualitative or quantitative method, or a mixture of the two, but also about whether to transfer the positivistic logic of objectivity, generalisability and quantification associated with quantitative research into interview-based studies. As such, we share the concerns raised by Symon *et al.* (2018) and Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar (2021) about the use of epistemic norms and conventions from quantitative research in qualitative research.

Finally, we found that almost all articles provided a verbatim transcription of the interview talk without any specific notation system. Features of spoken language use (e.g. cut-offs, pauses, overlapping talk, emphasis, volume and pitch of speech) were treated as irrelevant from an analytic point of view and removed, cleaned up and 'corrected', or glossed over as 'noise'. This finding suggests that the authors were more concerned with presenting *what* was said rather than *how* it was said. While this practice might be unproblematic for researchers adopting a neo-positivist paradigm, it involves a theory of meaning which assumes that meaning is derived from the words themselves rather than aspects of how they are uttered, where they are placed within an interactional sequence, or other aspects of the social context – a view that has been subject to criticism in the social sciences more broadly (e.g. Dingwall, 1997; Potter and Hepburn, 2012; Rapley, 2007; Silverman, 2017).

Conclusion, implications and directions for future research

In recent years, concerns have been expressed about the dominance of positivistic quality criteria (e.g. Cassell and Symon, 2015) and a trend towards the development of standardised 'templates' (Harley and Cornelissen, 2020) in qualitative research. This review of a sample of interview-based research published in FT50 management and organisation journals over the past decade has found a pluralistic array of methodological practices and presentational styles which have passed the bar of quality and rigour in the eyes of institutional 'gatekeepers' in so-called 'leading' journals. When judgements about research quality are made, this plurality needs to be evaluated in relation to the different onto-epistemological paradigms underpinning interview-based studies (e.g. Alvesson, 2003, 2011; Cassell, 2015; Cunliffe, 2011). Importantly, the existence of this 'dissensus' about the 'best' way to conduct and write-up qualitative interview research can also lead conflict with regard to how it should be evaluated (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). Like Tracy (2010, p. 838), we wish to 'promote dialogue amongst qualitative scholars from different paradigms' but also to resist the trend towards 'methodological conservatism' grounded in positivistic research. Understanding the connection between practices, styles and underlying onto-epistemological paradigms will enable scholars not only to accept 'philosophical diversity as legitimate' (Symon *et al.*, 2018, p. 134) but also to guard against the practice of making judgements about quality and rigour grounded in one paradigm when evaluating scholarship from other paradigms. As Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar (2021, p. 5) suggest, 'criteria used to evaluate quality from a positivistic stance ... may not capture quality in a study that adheres to an interpretivist or social constructivist ontology'. Our findings, therefore, have important implications for the wider management and organisational research community, as discussed next.

Implications for scholars using and evaluating interview-based research

Our review will enable scholars embarking upon interview-based research to make informed decisions about the most appropriate methodological practices and presentational styles based on their underlying assumptions about the nature of social reality and the role of interviews in generating new knowledge. Such reflexive engagement with one's 'philosophical stances' (Symon *et al.*, 2018, p. 134) would avoid a 'pick and mix' approach to using practices and styles that confuse incommensurable paradigms (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 648). The three onto-epistemological paradigms (Alvesson, 2003, 2011) that we have connected to the diversity of methodological practices and presentational styles each have their own distinct assumptions about knowledge production that render them incompatible with others, as we have discussed above.

Institutional ‘gatekeepers’ (Symon and Cassell, 1999) such as journal editors, reviewers, conference committees, and doctoral examiners will be able to assess the appropriateness of different methodological practices and presentational styles when evaluating research quality. This review will encourage quality judgements that are grounded in recognition of the distinct underpinning onto-epistemological paradigm of a study and counteract both the perception that ‘anything goes’ and also the trend towards ‘standardized criteria’ (Symon *et al.*, 2018, p. 134) for designing and evaluation research purporting to be universally applicable.

Supervisors and mentors of doctoral students and early career researchers will also be able to help them to develop greater ‘paradigmatic awareness’ (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021, p. 5). In other words, students should be encouraged to articulate the philosophical basis not only for their choice of interview type (structured, semi-structured, unstructured) but also for their use of particular methodological practices and presentational styles. Moreover, the wide variety of practices identified in this review could provide inspiration for the development of further innovation in research design or presentational style, thereby addressing calls for more innovation in qualitative research (Lê and Schmid, 2020).

Directions for future research

There are three directions for future research that would build on our review. Firstly, a more comprehensive and complete picture would be gained by identifying interview-based studies which did not appear in our sample because they did not include the term ‘interview’ in the title, abstract or keywords. Secondly, future research could extend our review to journals beyond the FT50 list to identify additional diversity in practices and styles as well as the epistemic norms underpinning particular journals or subject areas.

Third and finally, as noted above, we found that scholars have typically assumed that meaning can be ascertained from *what* is said rather than *how* it is said. However, according to Gabriel (2015, p. 334), even a single word, such as ‘No’, ‘can be uttered in many different ways denoting many different ideas, feelings and dispositions – confidence, determination, denial, doubt, guilt, shame, disgust, anger and so forth' depending on aspects of how it was said, such as vocal inflection, facial expression, or gesture. In addition, Butler (2015, pp. 171–172) demonstrates how analysis of the verbatim interview transcript compared to the embodied experience during the interview itself – with its richness of tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language – led to radically different analytical conclusions. According to Davidson (2009, p. 1), researchers tend to 'naturalize what is an interpretive process' by presenting their interview transcripts 'as transparent rather than the result of a series of choices in need of explication'. Future research could therefore develop further by exercising more caution when potential meanings are discarded 'through the whims of the transcription process' (Gabriel, 2015, p. 334). Scholarship could be enhanced by including analysis of both the features of spoken language use (such as cut-offs, overlapping talk, volume, and pitch) and non-verbal actions (such as wink, smile, or shrug of shoulders) that are crucial to the meaning of an utterance. For those concerned with using interview-based research to study meaning-making in or about management and organisations, the dominance of verbatim transcripts warrants a moment of reflection and provides an avenue for development to capitalise on the strength of localist paradigms (Alvesson, 2003, 2011).

In conclusion, our review indicates that there is no 'one best way' (Cassell and Symon, 2015) of conducting and reporting interview-based research in management and organisation studies. However, we have also found evidence of the use of positivistic assumptions in the reporting of interview-based research. We echo the concerns of other qualitative scholars about the use of positivistic logic in the evaluation of qualitative research (e.g. Alvesson, 2011; Cunliffe, 2011; Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021; Symon *et al.*, 2018). As shown in Tables I and II, the different onto-epistemological assumptions about the nature of social reality and the production of knowledge lead to certain practices being appropriate in some paradigms but not others. Future generations of scholars and institutional gatekeepers can use this review to ensure they have paradigmatic awareness (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021, p. 5) of the distinct and incompatible assumptions about social reality underpinning interview-based research. In so doing, we join Symon *et al.* (2018, p. 135) in their caution against the 'cultural and institutional pressures towards standardization' in qualitative research more generally.

While our focus has been on management and organisation research, these debates have long been had in the wider social sciences. For example, from a postmodernist perspective Scheurich (1995) criticises the conventional positivist approach where the interviewer and their set of questions are neutral conduits for gathering 'data'. The 'slippery, unstable and ambiguous' (p. 240) nature of language and meaning and the human encounter of the interview situation are denied or forgotten about when they should be brought into the analysis. Tanggaard (2009) also rejects the idea that interviews correspond to events 'out there' or experiences 'in here'. Instead, from a Bakhtinian perspective, she proposes that interviews should be viewed as 'setting[s] in which dissenting opinion, diverse discourses, and personal narratives are produced through the social, dialogical context of the interview' (p. 1498). Similarly, Lippke and Tanggaard (2014) question the research interview as a neutral conduit for gathering 'data' by highlighting how it can 'slide into' some other form of social encounter where identities matter. From a posthumanist perspective, Frigerio *et al.* (2018) point towards wider ethics and politics of analysing interview data, arguing that interview research is 'entangled within forces (like discourses and policies) that dictate and justify what is legitimated and allowed to be researched' (p. 392). However, this movement away from a neo-positivist paradigm towards alternative perspectives of interview-based research is certainly yet to be fully embraced in FT50 management and organisation journals. We would therefore encourage more scholars in our field to question the practices associated with the neo-positivist logic and allow for research underpinned by a diversity of onto-epistemological paradigms to be published in so-called 'leading' journals.

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Table I. Mapping methodological practices used in interview-based research to onto-epistemological paradigms

	Onto-epistemological paradigms (Alvesson, 2003, 2011)		
	Neo-positivist	Romanticist	Localist
Research design	Mixed methods	Interview-only Multiple qualitative methods	Interview-only Multiple qualitative methods
Data collection	Preference for structured and standardized interview protocol. Interview questions not necessarily provided, brief overview of topic areas typically provided.	Preference for open-ended interview questions that allow for interviewee input into conversation. Interview questions typically provided to demonstrate quality and appropriateness of question schedule.	No preference, any question structure can be analysed. Interview questions fundamental to the analysis where they are viewed as part of the discourses and/or social interaction of the interview context.
Facilitated interview approach	Facilitation tools can be used to gather more accurate and unbiased answers and/or to provide an additional data source for triangulation.	Facilitation tools can be used to gain deeper insights into the interviewee's experiences, emotions or meaning-systems.	Facilitation tools can be used to ascertain what discourses or cultural scripts they elicit or what kinds of interactions they prompt.
Reporting of interview questions	Where interviews are used within mixed methods study, interview questions or topics not typically provided. For interview-only studies, summary of topics typically provided.	Interviews typically more open-ended and free-flowing, with freedom to deviate from prepared questions. Interview questions, or list of topics, typically provided.	Poststructuralist studies typically provide list of interview questions or topics. Interactionist studies involve full transcript of interviewer-interviewee interaction.
Sample split and compared	Interview sample can be split according to demographic or organisational variable to identify causal relationships.	Interview sample can be split according to social or organisational categories to compare their distinct	Interview sample can be split according to social or organisational categories to compare the discourses or cultural scripts

		experiences, emotions or meaning-systems.	drawn on by different groups or how they respond to the interview interaction.
Quantification practices	Counting the number of codes and/or number of interviewees mentioning a code to demonstrate prevalence and/or distribution of themes. Translating interview data into numerical form to make statistical claims.	Counting the number of codes and/or number of interviewees mentioning a code to demonstrate prevalence and/or distribution of themes.	Counting not normally advocated because counting of words does not capture local meaning (except where quantifiable cultural categories or interactional dynamics are the focus of analysis).
Quality checks	Triangulation with multiple qualitative and/or quantitative used to establish a single objective truth. Interrater reliability methods used to assess the reliability of the coding structure through coder agreement. Claims about saturation used to assert completeness of analysis or claim a reliable threshold of sample size has been obtained.	Triangulation used to gain richer or deeper insights into participants' emotions or meaning-systems in different contexts. Respondent validation to empower/give voice to respondents and ensure validity of codes/categories grounded in emic meaning-systems. Claims about saturation used to assert integrity of analysis grounded in experiences, emotions or meaning-systems.	Triangulation not used. Rather, the researcher analyses the different discourses or cultural scripts drawn on in different social contexts. Respondent validation can be used as a source of reflexive insight into participant categories and/or organisational processes. Neither researcher nor participant interpretation of data is privileged. Claims about saturation not typically made. For interactionists, quality is assured not through coding (which extracts interview talk from its interactional context) but

rather through analysis of collections of interactional phenomena.

Table II. Mapping presentational styles used in interview-based research to onto-epistemological paradigms

	Onto-epistemological paradigms (Alvesson, 2003, 2011)		
	Neo-positivist	Romanticist	Localist
Placement of interview quotes	Where interviews are used within mixed methods study, interview quotes typically placed in Introduction or Theory section for hypothesis generation. For interview-only studies, interview quotes placed in Findings section.	Interview quotes placed in Findings section.	Interview quotes placed in Findings section.
Structure of findings	Variety of practices used to present findings.	Variety of practices used to present findings.	Variety of practices used to present findings.
Methods of presenting interview quotes	Prevalence of 'snippet' (selected words or phrases embedded into text) and 'open sandwich' format (author introduces theme, followed by one or more interview quotes). Interview quotes can be presented in a table to display wider evidence base. Presenting no quotations and summarising interviews in author's own words accepted practice.	Prevalence of 'sandwich' format (author introduces theme, followed by one or more interview quotes, followed by author(s) interpretation). Summarising interviews in author's own words not accepted practice because it fails to capture interviewee's interpretations and experiences.	Prevalence of 'sandwich' format (author introduces theme, followed by one or more interview quotes, followed by author(s) interpretation). Interactionist studies analyse full transcript of interactional sequence, presentation of interview quotes in table format not accepted. Presenting no quotations and summarising interviews in author's own words not accepted practice because it fails to show evidence of

			cultural scripts or local interactional context.
Transcription and notation systems	Verbatim transcription method prevalent.	Verbatim transcription method prevalent.	Verbatim transcription method prevalent, except for interactionist studies which use more detailed notation systems (e.g. pauses, cut-offs, overlaps, emphasis, or volume of speech).

Online appendix

Table AI. Overview of dataset

Journal	Articles identified using search terms*	Articles excluded (not relevant)**	Total
Academy of Management Journal	28	1	27
Administrative Science Quarterly	18	0	18
Human Relations	50	3	47
Human Resource Management	40	5	35
Journal of Applied Psychology	20	17	3
Journal of International Business Studies	10	0	10
Journal of Management	8	1	7
Journal of Management Studies	11	1	10
Organization Science	29	3	26
Organization Studies	28	1	27
Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes	5	4	1
Strategic Management Journal	14	0	14
TOTAL	**261**	**36**	**225**

* Term ‘interview’ in ‘subject terms’ OR ‘author supplied keywords’ OR ‘abstract’ in selected FT50 journals

** Articles reporting interviews with individual executives or leaders (leader profile segments) and articles about types of organisational interviews (e.g. job interviews, performance appraisal interviews) were excluded.

Table AII. Overview of research designs by journal

Journal	Interview only	Mixed methods	Multiple methods	Total
Academy of Management Journal	3	15	9	27
Administrative Science Quarterly	1	13	4	18
Human Relations	33	3	11	47
Human Resource Management	21	8	6	35
Journal of Applied Psychology	0	2	1	3
Journal of International Business Studies	2	4	4	10
Journal of Management	0	4	3	7
Journal of Management Studies	5	2	3	10
Organization Science	5	12	9	26
Organization Studies	12	2	13	27
Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes	0	1	0	1
Strategic Management Journal	2	8	4	14
TOTAL	**84**	**74**	**67**	**225**

Figure A1. Research designs of interview-based research published in the selected FT50 journal articles (2009-2019)

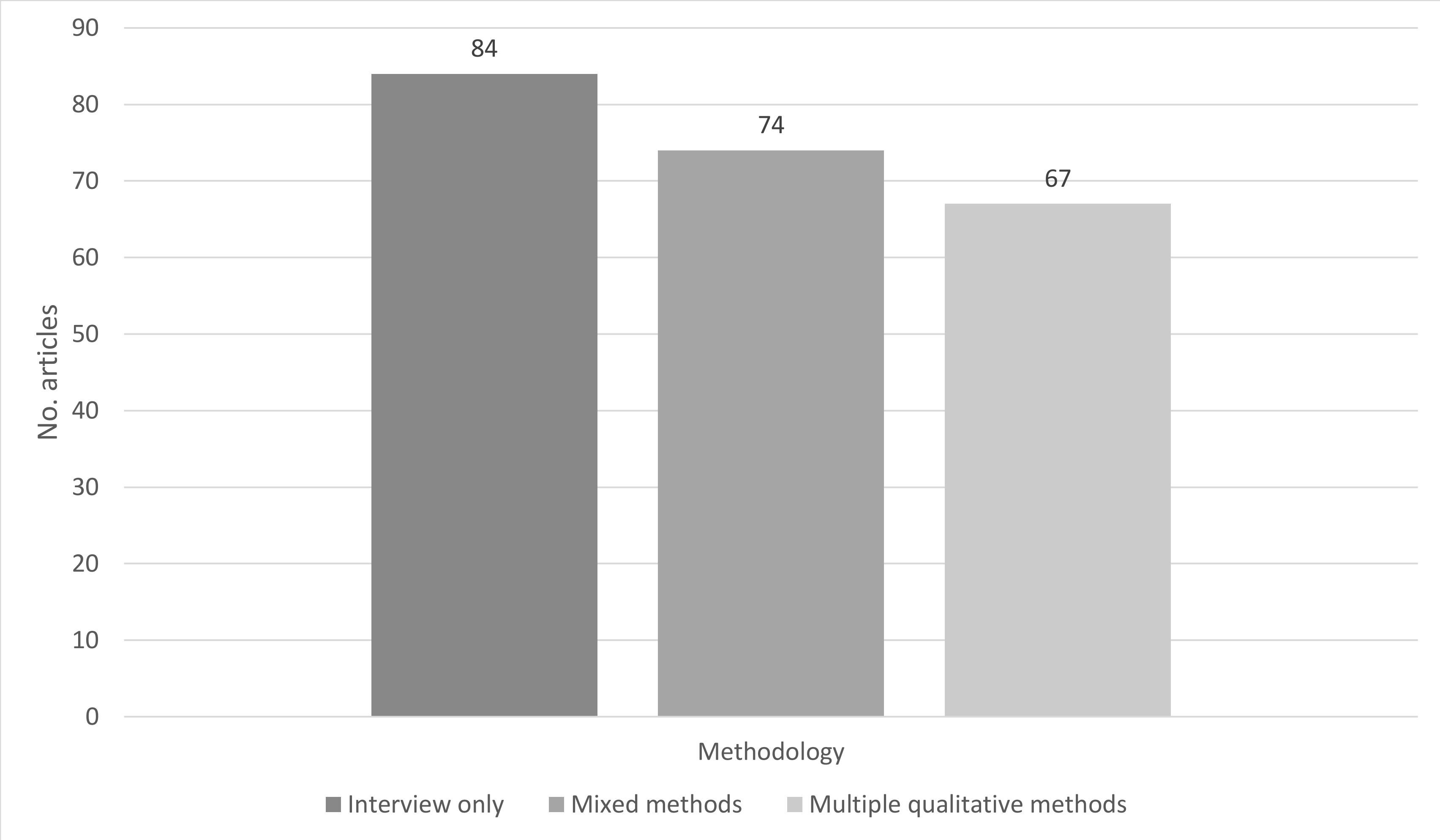
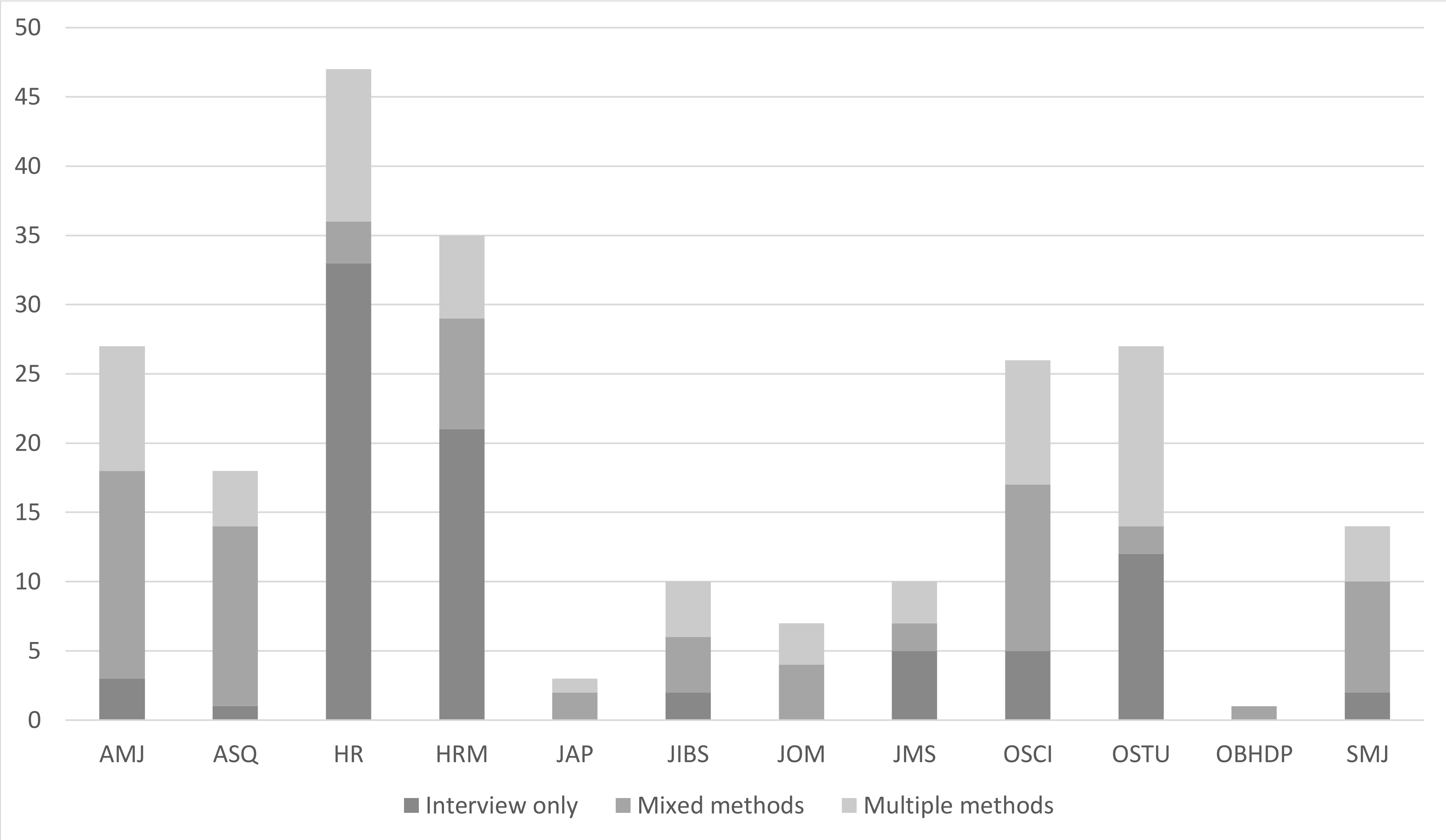


Figure A2. Research designs of the selected studies by journal



KEY TO JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS	
AMJ	Academy of Management Journal
ASQ	Administrative Science Quarterly
HR	Human Relations
HRM	Human Resource Management
JAP	Journal of Applied Psychology
JIBS	Journal of International Business Studies
JOM	Journal of Management
JMS	Journal of Management Studies
OSCI	Organization Science
OSTU	Organization Studies
OBHDP	Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes
SMJ	Strategic Management Journal

Figure A3. Coding framework, inspired by Gioia et al. (2012)

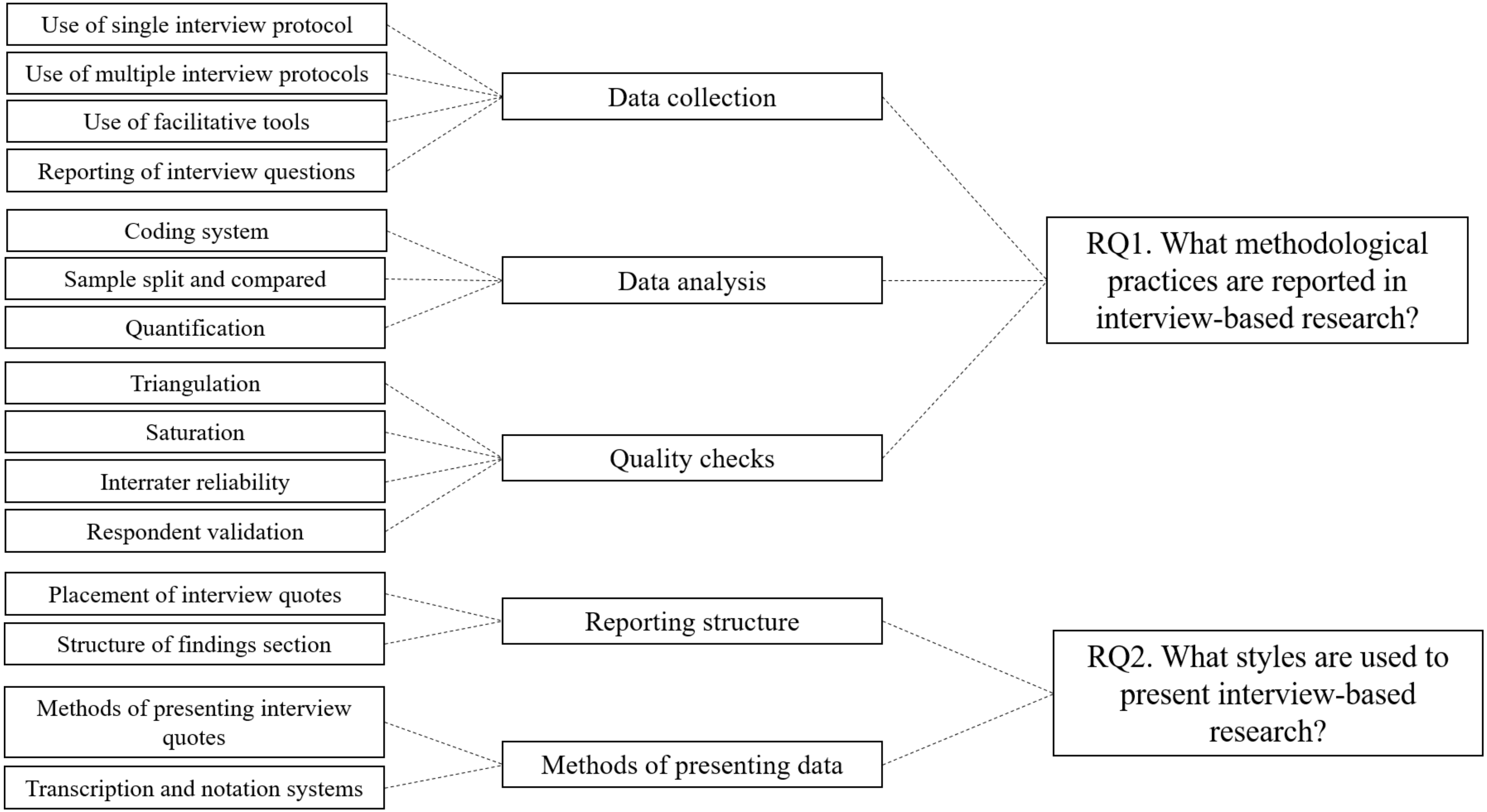


Table AIII. Examples of facilitated interview approaches

Type	Facilitation approach	Tools	Article(s)
Focal	Use of textual and/or numeric information to focus the interviewee on a particular issue, topic, or event	Survey scores	Berg *et al.* (2010)
			Detert and Treviño (2010)
		Critical incident technique	Bristow *et al.* (2017)
			Sheehan *et al.* (2014)
		List of findings	Sumelius *et al.* (2014)
		Post-event interview using logs	Alison *et al.* (2015)
		Hypothetical scenario	Athanasopoulou *et al.* (2018)
		Professional resume	Oelberger (2019)
Visual	Use of visual prompt to elicit an account that relate to that visual prompt	Participant-led photography	Tyler and Cohen (2010)
		Career timeline	Litrico *et al.* (2011)
			Wyatt and Sylvester (2015)
		Drawing-based method	Riach *et al.* (2014)
		Video and audio diaries	Riach and Warren (2015)
		Photographs	Timming (2017)
Active	Use of activity designed to elicit accounts relating to the doing of that activity	Card sort	Saunders *et al.* (2014)
		Sticky notes mapping exercise	Nielsen *et al.* (2014)
Reflexive	Act of reflecting on the process and/or outcome of the interview encounter	Researchers' impression of interviewees' spoken language	Śliwa and Johansson (2014)

Table AIV. Interview-based studies that separate sample by social or organisational categories

Categories	Examples	Article(s)
Demographic	Gender	Cardador (2017)
		McDonald (2018)
	Ethnicity	Wyatt and Silvester (2015)
Organisational	Case organisation	Crilly and Sloan (2014)
		Lindberg and Rantatalo (2015)
	Department	Kannan-Narasimhan and Lawrence (2018)
	Hierarchical level	Jack *et al.* (2019)
Other	Projects	Srikanth and Puranam (2011)
	Profession	Kanji *et al.* (2015)
	Religious outlook	Soylu and Sheehy-Skeffington (2015)
	Timing of autism diagnosis	Johnson and Joshi (2016)
Multiple	Discipline, age, contractual status, tenure	Lam and De Campos (2015)
	Gender and upbringing	Lupu *et al.* (2018)
	Age, country of origin, country of education, gender, professional experience, time in host country	Zikic and Richardson (2016)

Table AV. Practices involving quantification of interview data

Quantification practice	Article(s)	Illustrative example(s)
Number of times coded	Cardador (2017) Malsch *et al.* (2012) Matsunaga (2015) Mühlhaus and Bouwmeester (2016) Ramaswami and Dreher (2010) Reid (2015) Schilpzand *et al.* (2015) Srikanth and Puranam (2011) Sumelius *et al.* (2014) Woodhams *et al.* (2015)	'The most frequently coded themes relate to ways of rationalizing high remuneration in favor of top executives (155), competencies of CC members (121), processes followed in setting remuneration (110), and attitudes on the regulation of executive compensation (86). Whereas one should be cautious in interpreting this type of data (which does not take into account how interviewees give weight to their sentences), the latter is nonetheless consistent with the initial intuition that followed our initial reading of the transcripts, in that the individualistic and hierarchic biases largely predominate with 433 and 258 sentences respectively.' (Malsch *et al.*, 2012, p. 401).
Number / percentage of respondents	Detert and Treviño (2010) Kulkarni *et al.* (2010) Litrico *et al.* (2011) Muratbekova-Touron *et al.* (2018) Oelberger (2019) Schlosser *et al.* (2017) Shortland (2016) Tatli *et al.* (2017) Weibel *et al.* (2016)	'Our analyses confirm that immediate supervisors strongly influence employee voice perceptions. In total, 93% of informants (83/89) gave one or more examples coded as either supportive or inhibiting behavior by an immediate boss.' (Detert and Trevino, 2010, p. 251)
Number of times coded plus number / percentage of respondents	Arp (2014) Bamber *et al.* (2017) Shortland (2016)	'Interpretation of the data required analysis of the relationship between the number of sources and references made to a particular issue. For instance, where the number of sources and references were equal, each interviewee mentioned the issue once. Where the volume of references exceeded the number of sources, the data were examined to determine whether the pattern of responses was broadly even (most interviewees mentioned the issue a similar number of times) or whether the issue was of concern to just one respondent who mentioned it multiple times. Care was taken to ensure that the main themes identified from the research (and illustrative quotations) represented the

		respondent population and did not just reflect the concerns of particular individuals.' (Shortland, 2016, p. 662)
Number of respondents that fit researcher-defined categories	Oelberger (2019) Fu *et al.* (2010) Ellis (2011)	'In contrast, the remaining 15 per cent of participants (n = 12) either did not perceive self-transcendence through their work (n = 4), their work did not enable self-actualization (n = 5), or they perceived neither of these aspects through their work (n = 3).' (Oelberger, 2019, p. 565) 'We used a counting and coding strategy for content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) and recruited two graduate students majoring in management for the task. We gave the coders a definition of the two types of values and specific items that measured each value dimension. … After completing the coding, the coders provided an overall assessment of the CEO's value orientation, using a code of either more self-enhancing or more self-transcendent.' (Fu *et al.*, 2010, pp. 234-5) 'During the semi-structured interviews, informants in the Hong Kong sample revealed nearly ten different methods for identifying international social ties and international entrepreneurship exchange opportunities. These were subsequently aggregated into tie-based and non-tie-based methods for opportunity identification. … In the analysis, tie-based exchanges, or tie-use for short, were coded as 1 and nontie-based exchanges were coded as.' (Ellis, 2011, p. 110)
Other constructs	Crilly and Sloan (2014) Hoedemaekers and Keegan (2010) Thomas *et al.* (2010)	Multiple correspondence analysis (Crilly and Sloan, 2014) Quantitative analysis of signifiers using NVivo (Hoedemaekers and Keegan, 2010) Calculation of percentage of codes present against total word count of interview transcript to control for varying 'wordiness' across interviews (Thomas *et al.*, 2010)

Table AVI. Uses and meanings of 'triangulation'

Meaning of 'triangulation'	Article(s)	Illustrative example
Comparison across data sources to validate claims to single objective truth	Andreeva *et al.* (2014) Garg and Eisenhardt (2017) Marchington *et al.* (2011) Pahnke *et al.* (2015) Lehdonvirta *et al.* (2019) Reid (2015)	'We triangulated data from several sources to develop a comprehensive and accurate database.' (Pahnke *et al.*, 2015, p. 610)
Comparison across data sources to explore discrepancies	Ashforth and Reingen (2014) Banks *et al.* (2016)	'Triangulation revealed not only convergences but ''disjunctures'' […] that provided important insights.' (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014, p. 482)
Comparison across different individuals or groups (e.g. organisation, gender, etc.)	Arp (2014) Crilly (2011) Dougherty and Goldstein Hode (2016) Marchington *et al.* (2011) Roberts and Beamish (2017) Thorén *et al.* (2018)	'Data were triangulated through same-sex discussion groups, mixed-sex discussion groups and individual interviews.' (Dougherty and Goldstein Hode, 2016, p. 1736)
Comparison between participant and researcher perceptions	Rothausen *et al.* (2017)	'For the 44 informants who left four specific organizations, we triangulated data on the voluntariness of leaving, confirming the organization report with the perception of the informant and our own perception on hearing their stories.' (Rothausen *et al.*, 2017, pp. 2362-3)
Comparison between researchers	Sumelius *et al.* (2014)	'We considered the triangulation of investigators as an important step in improving the process and outcome validity of our study.' (Sumelius *et al.*, 2014, p. 576)
Testing of emergent analytical categories	Bertels *et al.* (2014) Bourgoin and Harvey (2018)	'At this stage, the second author interviewed 27 management consultants from six different consulting firms to triangulate our data.' (Bourgoin and Harvey, 2018, p. 1620)

Table AVII. Triangulation of interview data with other data sources

Data sources triangulated	Articles	
Interviews with multiple other qualitative sources	Andreeva *et al.* (2014) Drori *et al.* (2011) Farndale *et al.* (2010) Fayard *et al.* (2017) Grant *et al.* (2014) Hajro *et al.* (2017) Hatch and Schultz (2017) Jonsson and Foss (2011) Lander and Kooning (2013) LeBaron *et al*. (2016)	Mathias *et al.* (2018) Ozcan (2018) Perkins (2014) Roberts and Beamish (2017) Shortland (2016) Sydow *et al.* (2012) Teerikangas *et al.* (2011) Van der Borg *et al.* (2017) Wilhelmy *et al.* (2016)
Interviews with multiple other qualitative and quantitative sources	Ashforth and Reingen (2014) Bapuji *et al.* (2019) Garg and Eisenhardt (2017) Owens and Hekman (2012)	Pahnke *et al.* (2015) Prange *et al.* (2018) Reid (2015)
Interviews with archival data/documents	Beck and Plowman (2014) Brenner and Ambos (2013) Crilly (2011) Crilly *et al.* (2012)	Paroutis and Heracleous (2013) Sun *et al.* (2010) Szkudlarek and Sumpter (2015)
Interviews with survey data	Bruning *et al.* (2012) Crilly and Sloan (2014) Lehdonvirta *et al.* (2019)	Wang *et al.* (2018) Weibel *et al.* (2016)
Interviews with focus groups	Banks *et al.* (2016)	

Table AVIII. Uses and meanings of ‘saturation’

Meanings of ‘Saturation’	Articles	
No new information gleaned	Boiral (2012)	Mathias *et al.* (2018)
	Butler and Stoyanova Russell (2018)	Owens and Hekman (2012)
	Byron and Laurence (2015)	Toegel *et al.* (2013)
	Kulkarni *et al.* (2010)	Wood (2016)
No new themes emerge	Cruz and Meisenbach (2018)	Teerikangas *et al.* (2011)
	Greguletz *et al.* (2019)	Van der Borg *et al.* (2017)
	Mitra and Buzzanell (2017)	Weibel *et al.* (2016)
No new categories emerge	Banks *et al.* (2016)	Roberts and Beamish (2017)
	Chan and Anteby (2016)	Rothausen *et al.* (2017)
	Garg and Eisenhardt (2017)	Schlosser *et al.* (2017)
	Giorgi and Palmisano (2017)	Sonpar *et al.* (2018)
	Kannan-Narisimhan and Lawrence (2018)	Wilhelmy *et al.* (2016)
Meaning unclear or not specified	Baldridge and Kulkarni (2017)	Schilpzand *et al.* (2015)
	Bapuji *et al.* (2019)	Tenzer *et al.* (2014)
	Santistevan and Josserand (2019)	Thite *et al.* (2014)

Table AIX. Methods of calculating interrater reliability

Method	Articles	
Cohen's K	Autio *et al.* (2013)	Kistruck *et al.* (2016)
	Banks *et al.* (2016)	Ou *et al.* (2014)
	Dahlander and Frederiksen (2012)	Weibel *et al.* (2016)
	Fu *et al.* (2010)	Wilhelmy *et al.* (2016)
	Kim and Youm (2017)	
Fleiss Method	Chua *et al.* (2015)	
Krippendorff's Alpha	Crilly *et al.* (2012)	
No method specified	Alison *et al.* (2015)	Kossek *et al.* (2016)
	Bamber *et al.* (2017)	Mühlhaus and Bouwmeester (2016)
	Bruning and Campion (2018)	Paroutis and Heracleous (2013)
	Bruning *et al.* (2012)	Perkins (2014)
	Detert and Treviño (2010)	Saunders *et al.* (2014)
	Jammaers *et al.* (2016)	Tatli *et al.* (2017)
	Kistruck *et al.* (2013)	Thomas *et al.* (2010)

Table AX. Articles selecting 'case study' individuals from interviewee sample

Article	Selection of 'case study' interviewee(s)	Justification for selection
Cruz and Meisenbach (2018)	Selection of two 'exemplar' interviewees ('Sergio' and 'Susan') from interviews with 38 people who volunteer	'To further demonstrate this process [of using multiple boundary management strategies], we offer a more detailed discussion of Susan's case in particular.' (p. 197) No justification provided for selection of 'Sergio' in Table 2 (p. 198)
Driver (2013)	Selection of one interviewee ('Phil') from interviews with 15 'leaders' collected during a class project for a graduate course on leadership	'Before I examine instances of lack in the following narrative, I first present it as a broad, perhaps coherent, picture in which we can see a substantial part of the imaginary construction of this leader, Phil, who constructs an imaginary self around the lessons he has learned, his development and core values.' (p. 414) 'What I hope to illustrate in Phil's narrative is that one has to pay careful attention not to what is being said in order to construct from it the imaginary self, but to what is not said and all that indicates unusual rhetorical creations that point to a fissure of the imaginary.' (p. 417)
Fang *et al.* (2015)	Selection of paired opposing cases from interviews with 28 entrepreneurs Example: Table V (p. 193) contrasts Respondent S1 (entrepreneur with low political skill) with Respondent D3 (entrepreneur with high political skill)	'Below we illustrate two between-case comparisons of how entrepreneurs with high versus low political skill construct their networks. … This cross-case comparison demonstrates how political skill is conducive to social capital access through networks.' (p. 192)
Hajro *et al.* (2017)	Six teams selected from 48 teams included in study (143 interviews in total)	'We next focus on the key themes from our data that illustrate the relationships among diversity climates, team knowledge exchange, and effectiveness. We present short case descriptions of six teams which provide the clearest illustration of these relationships.' (p. 355)

Hoyer and Steyaert (2015)	Selection of one interviewee (‘Steve’) from interviews with 30 former management consultants	‘We focus here on Steve (interview 25) because his life narrative clearly depicts the ongoing interplay between coherence and ambiguity – and thus the three narrative strategies – through conflicting yet compatible storylines.’ (p. 1852)
Liu (2017)	Selection of one local councillor and former Major (‘An-Rong’) from interviews with 21 Chinese Australians in senior leadership positions	‘To illustrate how these complex and contradictory processes played out through the identities of the professionals, the section will conclude with a detailed profile of a local councillor, An-Rong.’ (p. 789)
Litrico *et al.* (2011)	Selection of single interviewees as case studies from interviews with 36 professionals working voluntarily on a reduced-load basis across 17 firms over two time points.	No explicit justification provided. Individual interviewees selected to illustrate analytic concepts: ‘Anne’ to illustrate ‘co-optation’ (p. 1692), ‘Laura’ to illustrate ‘synergy’ (p. 1693), ‘Shelley’ to illustrate ‘decoupling’ (p. 1693) and ‘Georgia’ to illustrate ‘tug of war’.

Table AXI. Styles used by authors to present interview quotes

Style	Description	Illustrative example
Author summary	The author provides a summary of the interviews in their own words, without presenting any interview quotes.	'In the manager interviews, when asked about accommodations for employees with disabilities, perhaps not surprisingly all of the managers said the companies are supportive and they try to accommodate every request. One manager went further and said the company tries to make accommodations regardless of whether or not you have a disability. Managers at another company stressed that the employer is concerned about work-life balance—for example, employees were given the option of telecommuting to meet personal needs or family obligations.' (Schur *et al.*, 2014, p. 605)
Sprinkling	The author places shorter 'snippets' of the words of multiple interviewees within a sentence (typically a few words or selected phrases).	'Evidence from interviews showed that many among those local resource providers aspired to "do well and do good," or were motivated in their participation by the "pride they felt in their community"'(Almandoz, 2012, p. 1386)
Table	The author presents interview quotes in tabular format, typically presenting one or more quote per analytical category or theme.	Andreeva *et al.* (2014, pp. 975–977)
Sandwich	The author introduces the analytical category or theme in their own words, followed by one or more interview quotes (typically indented and on a separate line), followed by their own interpretation.	'In this sense, the dynamic relationship between age, sexuality and work was mobilized by Winston as an opportunity to construct an empowering sense of himself as an older, gay man at work, and the advantage of looking at things "from a different way and a different approach": *I mean, I've gone in and I've met the most quirky or oldish sort of person. You know, bald head but hair down the back of their neck kind of touch, and flamboyant suit with handkerchief hanging out the top pocket but doing really well, because they're just looking from a completely different point of view to an eighteen year old who's coming in with goth gear on …. and you only get that with age and experience. (interview with Winston, August 2012)* 'Here, Winston reflects on how ageing provides him with both an opportunity to play with cultural associations of sexuality and style, within an organizational

		sector (IT) which values not just experience but also the alternative perspective that is associated with being “quirky”. This culmination of occupational relations alongside age and sexuality allowed the potential for both differentiation and “a different way of being” (Byrne, 2006, p. 51).’ (Riach *et al.*, 2014, p. 1688)
Open sandwich	The author introduces the analytical category or theme in their own words, followed by one or more interview quotes, then immediately moves on to the next.	‘Women themselves were not always eager to take on the gender-specific mantle of mentor: “She left …”, and one of the reasons was “‘I didn't want to be the initiatives queen.’” [037].’ [placed at end of section] (Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2018, p. 626)
Sequence	The author presents the interviewee’s words together with the interviewer’s utterances in an interactional sequence	‘Interviewee: The next [career] step would be to get into a line position. That is basically the question now whether it works with the line position or not, that’s a decisive factor. If it works, then everything is great. If it doesn’t work, something has gone wrong . . . Then I will keep looking around within the organization, or change the organization or start my own business. ‘Interviewer: Is that something you want to do in the future? ‘Interviewee: Sooner or later, 150 percent. Because I think that is the only thing that makes sense in life, I mean career-wise, to start your own business. (Anton, industry, interview 18)’ (Hoyer and Steyaert, 2015, p. 1850)

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[i] A notable exception is Bell *et al.* (2019).

[ii] Becker and Geer (1957) note the problem associated with justifying the researcher’s interpretation of the single word ‘crock’ (p. 29), something only later understood after months of non-participant observation.

[iii] We performed a text search for these terms, including different terms and spellings (e.g. interrater reliability, inter-rater reliability, intercoder reliability, inter-coder reliability) and stemmed words where appropriate (e.g. triangulation, triangulated, triangulating). A limitation of this approach is that we could have missed articles that discussed issues of triangulation, saturation, interrater/intercoder reliability, and respondent validation/member-checking without explicitly using those terms. Future research could address this through more detailed qualitative analysis of the articles in our sample or a wider sample.

[iv] Any such epistemic privilege accorded to the participants’ interpretations is also imbued with power, as Tietze’s (2012) reflexive account of conflict with her participants over the ‘correct’ interpretation shows.