

**ESOMAR SEMINAR ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

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**'THE FUTURE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH'**

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**SUMMARY**

This Paper sets forward proposals for enhancing the International standing and reputation of Qualitative Research by establishing an International Body specifically to serve the needs and interests of Qualitative Researchers worldwide.

Our argument, in brief, is as follows:

A paradigm shift is taking place in Business, Marketing, Social and Political decision-making, and the Social Sciences generally, which is placing new demands on Research.

Qualitative Research is now widely used in local markets and internationally, and is increasingly influential in modern marketing and social policy-making. Its

methodologies, analytic tools and philosophy however, are different from those of quantitative or survey research which traditionally has provided the guidelines for the Market Research Industry as a whole.

In addition, 'Qualitative Research' practices are variable or patchy. There is therefore a case for raising Professional Standards and establishing internationally recognised principles, within the essential freedoms which are characteristic of Qualitative Research. We include specific proposals for clarifying the 'domain' of Qualitative Research, raising its theoretical and applied standing, and improving its basic Professionalism or 'hygiene' factors.

We raise these proposals at this ESOMAR Seminar because of the 'Qualitative Mission' themes being discussed. In our view it is desirable to encourage this widening of perspectives since it will add vigour to the industry, and the theory and practice of Qualitative Research.

## **I. CURRENT STATUS**

According to ESOMAR, Qualitative Research accounted for around 10% of European Market Research expenditures in 1994. Continuous Research (Panels, Omnibus) accounted for 47%, and Ad Hoc Quantitative Studies 43%. Reported usage of Qualitative Research varies. For example, in France, UK, Italy and Spain it is around 12-13%, and in Germany according to these statistics it is lower at 4%.

These statistics are obtained from National Trade Organisations representing the larger Research Agencies. Accordingly, ESOMAR note that 'the role of qualitative research may be understated to a certain degree due to the under-representation of the smaller qualitative research companies in the trade associations providing data and market estimates'.

In the U.S, the figure quoted for Qualitative research is 12%. In Japan, it is estimated at 15%. In Developing Markets there are indications that Qualitative research has a share of 15% or more. These too are probably under-estimates.

Thus, given the under-estimation in the statistics Qualitative Research may conservatively account for 15% in value of all market research worldwide and up to a third of all Ad Hoc research. In other words, well in excess of one billion ECUs.

Various commentators have suggested that in some areas like concept development, idea evaluation, portfolio planning and strategy and policy-making, Qualitative research is the prime source, and growing. Similarly, as indicated by the subject of this Seminar, Buyers of Research are seeking understanding of all aspects of the Organisation as part of the Marketing function. Qualitative Research is also being applied to these new and complex areas.

We should note too that fundamental changes are taking place in the make-up of market research as a whole. Continuous Research is steadily increasing (up from 41% in 1992 to 47% in 1994), at the expense of Ad Hoc Quantitative Research. Because of computerisation, bar coding, single source data, ultimately we may see a greater increase in Continuous Consumer data. Marketing then will be faced with two data requirements.

First, continuous data for measuring performance, with increasing access, speed and accuracy. Second, to understand, anticipate and plan using Qualitative Research. This is where we will also see the future of Qualitative Research to lie. Part of the future growth in Qualitative Research is then likely to result from the increase in sheer information - more and more information but less and less meaning. More importantly, it will also result from genuine needs by Management, Marketing and Social Decision-Makers to come to grips with the complexities and intricacies of Modern Consumers and the Consumption process.

## **2. QUALITATIVE ORGANISATIONS**

At this point in time, there are Professional Market Research Associations and Trade Bodies in most of the major markets around of the world (the 1995 ESOMAR Directory for example lists 33 Countries with at least one national Organisation). They aim to represent and police the market research industry as a whole, and have historically focused their efforts on Quantitative principles and standards.

There are two countries (to our knowledge) with active organisations dedicated to Qualitative Research. In the UK, *The Association of Qualitative Research Practitioners (AQRP)*, and in the U.S, *The Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA)*. Both developed in the early 1980's, in order to serve the needs of Qualitative Researchers. Both have very similar objectives.

AQRP was established in 1980 and has a current membership of 650 (including 14 from overseas). Their stated objectives are:

- \* To promote the professional interests of qualitative research among practitioners and field personnel and within the market research arena as a whole. We also aim to enhance the perceived value of qualitative research outside the industry in the wider business world.
- \* To raise standards in qualitative research, most importantly in training and education and also by formulating and establishing best practice guidelines.
- \* To encourage debate and develop new thinking in qualitative research.
- \* To provide a medium through which members can interact and provide mutual professional support.

QRCA was established in 1983 and has 510 members (of which some 40-50 are Canadian and 6 from overseas). Their objectives are:

- \* To enhance the professionalism of qualitative marketing research and social research.
- \* To promote and maintain the highest standards of ethics and integrity on the part of the qualitative researchers in their work and in their relationships with clients and field suppliers.
- \* To broaden awareness and appreciation of qualitative research within the marketing research community.
- \* To provide a communication channel among members and between qualitative research consultants and others engaged in marketing and survey research.

AQRP has a wider membership - 'Qualitative Researchers - whether Freelance or working in Qualitative Research Companies or Advertising Agencies, as well as Field Directors, Field Controllers and Qualitative Buyers'. QRCA membership is more selective and limited to practising Qualitative Researchers - 'Members must be principles or employees of independent marketing and social research companies. Their professional roles must be primarily designing, conducting and analysing qualitative research. Since members must also qualify as Consultants, qualitative researchers who work for advertising agencies, manufacturers, or service firms outside the research industry are not eligible'.

These two are largely national organisations, with a predominantly national membership, working with the principles which typify Qualitative research in their country. There is certainly no current International Body representing Qualitative Research around the world. Judging from membership of AQRP and QRCA there must be several thousand individuals internationally working in one way or another in Qualitative Research in the market research industry, let alone others who are involved in Qualitative work in related fields.

National Trade Bodies representing the interests of major research companies do sometimes feature Qualitative Research. For example, Syntec in France in its latest edition of *Guide Pratique de la Qualité en Etudes de Marché*, gives 'Les Etudes Qualitatives' its own distinct chapter on good practice, placed at the beginning of the book. This may reflect the chronology of Market Research, i.e. that you should do qualitative research first, but also maybe symptomatic of the perceived status of Qualitative Research in France.

Qualitative Research in France is of course well established and some French researchers, at least, believe that 'real' Qualitative Research ('*Qualitatif à La Français*') started there. The Americans, on the other hand believe that it started in the U.S and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Focus Group in 1991. Both appear to have forgotten the famous 'Mass Observation' studies conducted in the UK in the 1930's - undoubtedly a first!

However international cooperation is beginning to take place, to share and exchange ideas, in response to the growth of international qualitative research. Indeed it was a Workshop, at the 1994 ESOMAR Congress, that then inspired a further Workshop which took place in Rome in January 1995 organised by Carlo Santucci and Susanna Casarini. Here, some 13 participants from 7 European Countries discussed issues particularly related to different practices employed by different agencies and different countries, and relationships between partner agencies.

There is a general desire to raise the status of Qualitative Researchers. Over recent years however the situation has started to change, partly as a result of demands from outside that we police ourselves better but also amongst our own ranks, in terms of a wish to raise Status and Professional standing.

As seen in the U.S, the QRCA describe themselves as 'Consultants'. The AQRP describe themselves as 'Research Practitioners'. Earlier this year AQRP in the UK conducted a membership survey. As a result a new logo and a brochure were produced. The reasons for this change in image were given as 'demands, highlighted in our own research, for a more professional image', and for the AQRP to 'raise its own profile and that of Qualitative Research amongst the wider business community'.

The desire for 'Professional' Status is becoming increasingly obvious. Membership of an International Qualitative Research Body would potentially be a step in the right direction.

### **3. HYGIENE FACTORS**

Respondent Recruitment methods and practices differ widely around the World, and it is an issue which is often linked to questions over the reliability and validity of Qualitative Research. Key concerns are how are Respondents recruited? How reliable are they? How do we avoid 'Professional Respondents'?

Questions about recruitment are critical of course because qualitative samples are small and hence there is great dependence on interviewing the correct Respondents. Whether they are or not becomes obvious to the Qualitative Researcher, and to the Client if interview sessions are viewed.

The answers to these questions lies with the individual research agency but it is also beneficial to lay down standards. At present this has not been satisfactorily adopted. ESOMAR Guidelines for the Harmonisation of Fieldwork Standards (1991) did attempt to bring Qualitative recruitment practices around Europe closer together. However, there is still discrepancy between National practices.

For example, in specifying recruitment criteria in the U.S, UK and other countries, common practice is to design a screening questionnaire. In France, on the other hand, the recruiter is often supplied with a list of the Research Objectives and a description of the type of Respondents required. Recently, the UK All Industry Working Party Report on Qualitative Recruitment (MRS Conference, 1995) came to a conclusion that is closer to the French model than the current practice.

The UK's Working Party also came to the conclusion that in detecting fraudulently recruited Respondents:

That task remains the responsibility of qualitative researchers, research buyer observers, and field office personnel, (through checking mechanisms). We believe though that implementing a system where rules are applied when they are appropriate, instead of in a blanket fashion will create a culture of honesty that is probably not present under the current system.



Syntec, in France, claims to have a centralised list of all Respondents interviewed (at least by the 60% of research agencies represented by Syntec) in order to avoid Professional Respondents.

Also as part of the 'Hygiene' factors are issues of Training, Conducting and Reporting of Qualitative Research, and International Coordination. There are different styles and practices in different cultures, and of course language differences. They call into question the need for greater mutual cooperation and understanding of what Qualitative Research means within different cultures, its strengths, as well as weaknesses, and what can be learnt from their different approaches.

For example, the differences between U.S and European approaches to Groups are well known. In the U.S, Groups are often more structured, with lengthier topic guides, and Reports come with a statistical 'health warning'. Whereas in Europe, Groups are more open, and more often used in their own right. These differences in practice reflect philosophical differences between Europe and the U.S. At the risk of exaggeration, in Europe more emphasis is placed upon subjectivism and interpretation, while in the U.S more emphasis is placed on objectivism and description.

These differences also affect how research is conducted in Developing Markets, depending on whether they have been influenced by the 'European' or 'American' model. Both clearly work and have value within their own markets. So rather than being chauvinistic about 'our' methods, what can we learn from each other?

Similarly we can talk about the differences between 'Individualism' and 'Collectivism'. 'Individualism' is a characteristic of Western Cultures generally. Collectivism is more evident in Asian and Developing Markets (Tower and Cooper, 1995). Groups conducted in a Western style require interaction between individuals, which in Asian markets can produce stilted reactions unless local conventions are recognised.

#### **4. RATIONALE**

The origins of the Qualitative and Quantitative dilemma (in the West at any rate) lie in Descartes dualism, inspite of attempts to reconcile them. Thus, Qualitative investigation is about the senses, which are prone to error and flux, the imagination, which is prey to fantasy, and the emotions, which distort reason. In contrast the idea of objective qualities that can be perceived clearly and analysed in quantitative terms, have beckoned scientists and social scientists with a promise of control and mastery. But it is there very qualities of Qualitative Research which define its relevance, especially in the modern and postmodern worlds.

These two images of the nature of knowledge and how to investigate them are still very much with us. They are expressed in opposing themes of:

**Art - Science**  
**Humanism - Rationalism**  
**Subjectivism - Positivism**  
**Symbols - Objects**  
**Empathy - Control**  
**Right Brain - Left Brain**

The latter is undoubtedly the more seductive in conventional Marketing hence the majority of market research expenditure to measure and monitor market sizes, brand shares, penetration, awareness, trends, and ultimately profit.

‘Qualitative’ is defined by what it is not, rather than what it is, i.e. in contrast to Quantitative research. This has the effect of implicating quantification issues and criticism whenever we refer to ‘Qualitative’. The term is therefore arguably ‘politically’ biased.

We can define Qualitative Research in methodological terms, say in terms of groups, in-depth interviews, listening, observation. This draws attention to how the work is done. By focusing on method we draw attention to the importance of experiencing Qualitative work, and the skills of interviewing, listening, probing, interacting, animating - perhaps with the use of projection and elicitation techniques - and of skilled observation. But Qualitative Research goes far beyond these tools.

We also can define Qualitative Research in terms of contact with consumers, empathy, or *verstehen*. This has more going for it, in that these are obvious benefits of seeing, feeling and sharing consumer experiences especially for Marketing where that contact is distant and subject to prejudice. It can also be an antidote for stresses caused by the 'data deluge' of modern marketing information systems.

Direct, or theatrical, contact creates insights and prompts intimacy with what consumers are looking for. There are trends here, notably 'naive listening' where Scientists or Marketing are encouraged to watch Groups, visit homes, and observe. The Japanese are particularly noted for this, to observe and soak up foreign culture by contact and experience.

Contact and empathy are major values of Qualitative Research, but are not sufficient, and of course can mislead. They are dependent upon the one-way mirror and observation, with the Qualitative Researcher as conduit between Observer and Consumer.

The values of Qualitative go beyond these. A fuller and more fruitful definition of Qualitative Research lies not only in its open, interactive and experiential methods, but in its interpretative models which derive from these methods. That is, the identification of structures which account for consumer behaviour, and which can guide strategy and decision-making, especially those in the applied fields of Marketing and Social policy.

The first 'scientific' Qualitative research studies probably developed out of the observational investigations of kinship and community types (e.g. Le Play) in the 19th

century, inspired by liberal politics. The 'Chicago' school in the early 20's further popularised the study of personal documents and participant observation. William James played his earlier profound part in this study of introspection

Quite separate movements like the 'free association' or 'depth' interviews of psychoanalysis, the 'empathic' method of modern psychopathology, group therapy, NLP, and a host of other means of getting inside the mind, as well as ethnomethodology, grounded theory, structural analyses and intense interest in 'decoding' the consumer experience, have lead to what we now call 'Qualitative Research'

We need a formal investigation of these roots, to be sure of our genealogy. After all, there may be some skeletons in the cupboard. One of these may be 'Motivational Research'.

Ernest Dichter (1964) is usually accredited with the origin of Motivational Research in the U.S in the 1950's. In practice, Dichter took a somewhat 'symbolic interactionist' view. To him virtually every object surrounding everyday life has 'a soul' of its own which influences actions by its quality, appearance and subtle psychological meanings. These objects have 'symbolic meaning' as well as utilitarian value. He also argued incidentally that mental illness can be due to loss of contact with this world of 'things', and that therapy to re-establish such contact may represent a new approach.

Pierre Martineau, another instigator of Motivational Research writing earlier (1957) defined Motivational Research as understanding people by using techniques and theories from the humanistic sciences. Psychoanalysis and the study of the unconscious is central to this. He adds that 'great creative ideas invariably are the thoughts furnished by the unconscious mind. But there is no subconscious mind in an IBM machine'.

But Motivational Research as practised at that time succumbed to the pressures of Marketing Science and the Survey Method in the 50's, 60's, and 70's, and got relegated to the role of sanitized precursor to quantification, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Since then, a revolution has taken place in views of the world, and Marketing. Qualitative research is now used in its own right, it is a source of consumer contact as we have noted, and its interpretative models are now becoming familiar and essential to contemporary Management. This growth goes back to the 70's but started to come into fruition in the 80's and 90's. The year 2000 and onwards will as we suggest see this development become more urgent with complex and radical changes in society and globalisation, and as Business, Social Policy, and Politics recognise the values they obtain from Qualitative research.

Qualitative market research itself participated in this revolution in method and theory. Projective and elicitation techniques expanded. Psychodrawing, collages, clay, role play, NLP, semiotics, structural analysis have all made their appearance. We ourselves announced the introduction of the 'New Qualitative Technology' in 1987 (Cooper, 1987). A number of other papers have reviewed the practices, requirements, validity and reliability of Qualitative Research in the Market Research Industry over the years, to mention just a few; Wilson (1952), Goodyear (1971), Sampson (1978), Sykes (1990), as well as previous ESOMAR Seminars on Qualitative Research.

The innovations in Qualitative Research have occurred because of changing demands of Marketing - technical parity of products, importance of branding, shifts from demographics and lifestyles to needs and Needsapes, portfolio planning, globalisation, and the crucial role of the 'Consumer Experience' in Planning.

## **5. CHANGE**

The revolution we are seeing is in the meaning of knowledge, and how to investigate it, in the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Business, Organisations, Law, Politics, Art, Social Policy-making, Marketing, and Research. Essentially, there is a shift away from the dominant paradigm of quantitative logico-positivism to a new qualitative view of how things work.

We can, along with others, call this view 'Postmodern', although the term is not quite satisfactory. However, the main working principles are that the world is not made up of single or simple truths that are open to measurement and objectivity, but complex, ambiguous, subjective and relativist. There is a growing appreciation that reality is fluid, multi-layered and multi-dimensional. What seems real in one situation, or in a culture or by a generation, is determined by the context, as opposed to alleged abstract or 'objective' principles.

Experience is expressed in concepts and symbols rather than 'hard' reality. Knowledge itself, including marketing knowledge, is subjectively determined, which we need to be constantly exploring, updating, and revising. Consumers are not passive, but actively and creatively interacting with and changing their environment, which itself is also changing. 'Identity', who one is, how one does things, what one believes in, are critical Postmodern factors.

The investigation of this world requires methods which are capable of exploring the complex emotions and needs that drive consumption, and the discourse, language, symbols and signs used to express it. Hence the importance of 'deconstructing' the marketing, advertising and social realities consumers experience.

Qualitative research has developed to satisfy these 'new' requirements. Its 'bundle' of interactive, experiential and empathic methodologies, and its interpretative analytic models help open up the complex subjective, pluralistic world of the Consumer.

Qualitative Research now encompasses a range of disciplines; in-depth psychology, social psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and distinctive methodologies, groups, extended groups, individual interviews, observation. Use is being made of structuralism, semiotics, text and historical analyses, connectivism, hermeneutics, grounded theory, contingency theory, action theory, ethnomethodology, as well as psychodynamic, social and organisational analyses.

Although these differences in approach make it hard to pin down, its essential characteristics are humanistic, phenomenological and interactive, compared to the logical positivism of survey research.

We here of course are reflecting the work of Peirce on semiotics, de Saussure's theory of signs, Wittgenstein's analysis of linguistic structuring of experience, Whorf's and Sapir's view that language shapes perception of reality, Lacan's theory of signifiers and the unconscious, Levi-Strauss on mythology, as well as the Postmodern giants Barthes, Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault, Eco. And many others who are applying these views to Modern Business and Social Research.

It should be noted that these theoretical and practical tools available to Qualitative Research are not solely the province of European Researchers. Although the prime qualitative preoccupation in the U.S has been on focus groups there have been a number of seminal publications dealing with forms of qualitative research which some European researchers would regard as close to themes of phenomenology and humanism more typical in Europe, in particular the writings of Hirschman and Holbrook (1992) on Postmodern Consumer Research, Belk et al (1989) on the Consumer Odyssey, and Patton (1990) on Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods.

Ethnomethodology and Grounded Theory have also become a feature of some modern Qualitative Research in the U.S. Ethnomethodology is the stock of common knowledge about everyday life, the facts and ideas people view as factual or rules of thumb, beliefs, attributions, or maxims, by which people categorise the world around them, and which contribute to Qualitative understanding. Most Qualitative researchers would subscribe to this view, even if they do not employ the 'field' approaches to studying consumer behaviour.

Grounded Theory (e.g. Strauss and Corbin, 1990) is based upon collecting data which is 'faithful to the everyday reality' being studied which 'makes sense to the persons who were studied and to those practising in that area'. Ideally it meets the 'good' scientific criteria of significance, theory observation, compatibility and verification. It therefore attempts to continue the traditions of positivistic research in the context of the Qualitative method.

There is plenty of evidence from Management Sciences, Medicine, Law, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology that the qualitative dimension in these disciplines is being given special interest and encouragement. For example, in the USA. Sociology has shown a return to an empathy and intuitive understanding of individual and collective needs. In the UK, the British Psychological Society is assembling the interests of Researchers and Practitioners in the 'qualitative dimension'(Henwood and Nicolson, 1995). Management Science is drawing upon Qualitative methodologies and the interpretative structures described.

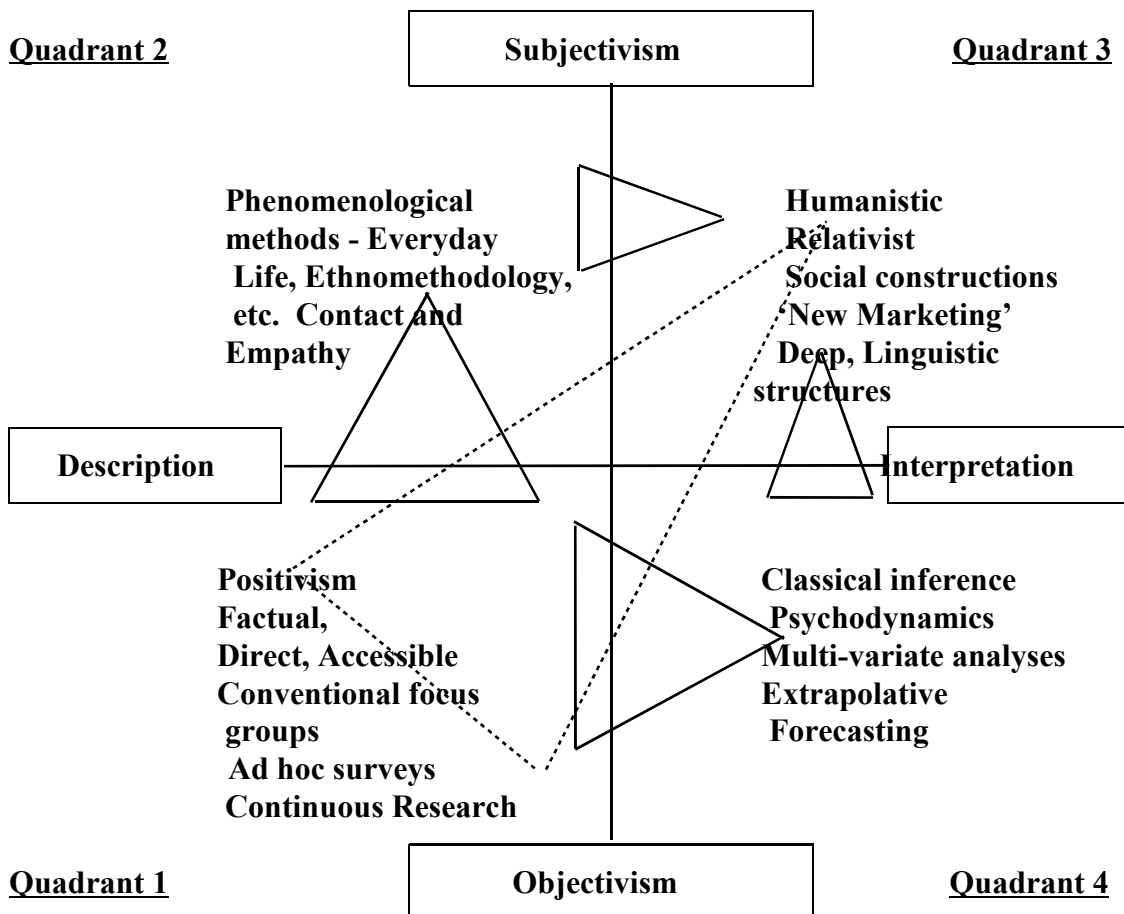
These movements are taking place worldwide, in Business Schools, Management Institutes, and in the practice of Management Consultants. In conventional Market Research, however, there is still the heavy weight of conservatism. Qualitative research is demonstrating itself as adaptive and evolving. As Kuhn (1970) points out in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, this shift of paradigm does not come easy. It involves deep emotions and social resistance on the part of the incumbent paradigm since its structure, organisation, education and texts are under attack. Only slowly will its institutions change, either to eventually embrace change, or to become extinct. The new paradigm itself requires the infrastructure of institutions, education, theory and standing to ratify its credibility.



## 6. STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS

To give some structure to the type of knowledge that Market Research has available and the movements taking place to meet these challenges, we can distinguish between description and objectivism, and interpretation and subjectivism, creating four Quadrants as follows (Fig.1):

**Fig.1: Structure and Dynamics of Market Research Knowledge and Methods**



Qualitative Research can lie in all 4 quadrants. In Quadrant 1, we find conventional focus groups, along with Ad hoc surveys, Continuous Research. In Quadrant 2 are the phenomenological methods of everyday life, ethnomethodology, the 'Consumer Odyssey' (Belk et al), where contact and empathy are prime features. In Quadrant 3, we see the humanist, relativist, and complex social structures and linguistic methods for dealing with the Postmodern world. In Quadrant 4, are 'classic' ways of dealing with raw data out of QI, e.g. psychodynamics, but also the quantitative methods of multi-variate analyses and extrapolative forecasting.

Our general point however is that there is a shift away from Quadrant 1. Researchers may move to the empathy and often exciting areas of Quadrant 2, and may go hence to Quadrant 3. Some may choose the path from Quadrant 1 to classical psychodynamics in Quadrant 4, and either rest there or move upwards.

Also, the particular methods have a 'footprint'. In our mapping, we have put conventional Focus Groups in Quadrant 1, but they can also be the source of interpretation in the other Quadrants, depending upon the Researcher. Projective techniques also tend to carry such qualitative research into Quadrant 4. 'Field' methods take it into Quadrant 2.

An important point is that all four Quadrants have their own 'face' validity depending upon the Marketing Models involved. There is no such thing as absolute truth in Marketing or Market Research, only those truths which will assist the Client Organisation in achieving its aims. Thus research is used to fit corporate values - even if these may longer term be unhealthy.

As we know, ways of thinking influence organisations and management, including their perceptions of Marketing, Brands, and Market Research (Morgan, 1986). These help to account for the different requirements of market research and qualitative market research in particular. For example, Organisations which operate with a mechanistic or positivistic Marketing Model are likely to demand Research of the Quadrant 1 type. Organisations which see their products and brands as rich, emotional, living entities are more likely to engage in the other Quadrants.

Similarly, Advertising which assumes a 'linear sequential' model (e.g AIDA or DAGMAR) requires quantitative measurement of the Quadrant I types to maintain organisational continuity. However Marketing which assumes a more 'holistic cultural' (myth and ritual) model of Advertising will on the other hand see their Consumers as interactive. The key question for them will be 'What do Consumers do with Advertising?', not 'What does Advertising do to Consumers?' (Lannon and Cooper, 1983). They too will avoid Quadrant I.

The contemporary condition is making it more and more difficult for conventional marketing and therefore conventional market research of the mechanistic sort to work. 'Postmodern Marketing' (Brown, 1994) is spawning a variety of techniques for engaging Consumers, e.g relationship marketing, micro-marketing, niche marketing, data-base marketing, multiple distribution channels and fragmented advertising media. Complex and sometimes obscure communication and TVC's are becoming more common, which can be mini-dramas or recycle the past (retro), using parody, and self-referencing, i.e ads about ads, or ads borrowing from art and popular culture.

There is an increasing ability of Consumers to decode and use images and signs themselves often with irony and sophisticated satire. Consumers generally are increasingly active participants in the Marketing process. Generation 'X', in the West at any rate, are a classic case in point, skilled in multi-layered thinking and symbolism and certainly resist the forced choices of conventional research.

In Developing Markets too, we see that Consumers are not just passive recipients of marketing but often 'leapfrog' Western Consumers into new expectations and demands. Forms of 'Postmodern' can be argued to be more likely in newly emerging countries where there is a strong clash between Modern and Traditional values. On the one hand, globalism, international media and standardisation of products and distribution, and on the other a heightened interest in local activities and local identity. The result can be a paradox of conflicting forces and an increasing questioning of the world according to conventional Marketing practice.

According to this view, possibly the most significant reason for the future growth of Qualitative Research will be the 'failure' of conventional Marketing Theory. For all the

Marketing Concepts - Brand Image, New Product Development, Portfolio Planning, Targeting, Boston Matrix, Consumer Needs, there is little agreement of what for example a Brand Image is, nor much use of Quantitative market research in creating successful brands. Those Brands which Marketing Executives admire derive from creativity and insight, and use of qualitative contact or interpretation, rather than from Marketing Theory or Scientific Method.

## **7. PROPOSALS**

Our proposals concerning the future of Qualitative Research cover its theory and application to marketing problems, as well as the 'internal' issues or 'hygiene' factors of recruitment, training, coordination, etc. The latter of course need detailed, close attention in order to establish professionalism and clear client quality expectations. But it is the former - what Qualitative Research is about and how it can inform Marketing decisions - that the future of Qualitative Research will depend upon.

There are three broad and interactive issues therefore which need addressing:

- (1) **The 'domain' of Qualitative Research, i.e what it covers, what constitutes qualitative research and what does not.** We need to 'deconstruct' the discourse of market and social research, as we have partly attempted to do in this paper. Our views are that although we can agree broadly on the theory and methods that constitute 'Qualitative' - within the essential freedoms essential to Qualitative Research - this does not exclude the qualitative interpretation of quantitative data, nor their integrated use. Naming becomes important.
  
- (2) **Raising the theoretical standing and practical application of Qualitative Research.** Here we need to come out of our limited worldview and use our new power and influence. Senior decision-makers are already being introduced to Qualitative Research through Organisational practices and Management Science. The adoption of the Qualitative Paradigm is clear.

To achieve the objectives of putting Qualitative Research firmly and squarely at the centre of these developments suggest that we need the formalities of an academic source working independently, disseminating the theory and practice of Qualitative Research. We therefore propose that our Qualitative Industry should fund and sponsor such an effort in one of the Business Schools or other Management Institutes. Related to this the possibility of the publication of a respected Journal devoted to Qualitative Research, to develop theory and application amongst Qualitative Researchers around the world. We do not see

this as exclusive to Market Research, but the growing body of Management, Social Science, cross-cultural studies, all with a keen interest in local and international 'Qualitative' Research.

An essential matter is Education for those wishing to enter, or develop within, the Qualitative Research Industry. This implicates Developing markets as well as Developed. The overall point is that for Qualitative Research to consolidate the new paradigm it needs to develop an infrastructure, standards, educational systems, literature, and communication.

- (3) **Improving the 'Hygiene' of Qualitative Research.** As noted, these improvements are the responsibility of local agencies. But we may also expect that National Bodies, including ESOMAR, to have a guiding hand here, establishing basic Principles of good 'Qualitative' practice, internationally agreed guidelines and raising Professional Standards. Recruitment, training, coordination, etc, all fall in this remit.

Clearly these proposals raise issues and questions which need debate. Our intention is to open that debate.

To quote the revision of the ICC/ESOMAR International Code of Marketing and Social Research Practice, the object of Marketing Research is:

*'Effective communication between the suppliers and the consumers of goods and services of all kinds is vital to any modern society. Growing international links make this even more essential. For a supplier to provide in the most efficient way what consumers require he must understand their differing needs; how best to meet these needs; and how he can most effectively communicate the nature of the goods or services he is offering.'*

The term 'needs' goes to the heart of Qualitative Research. We would suggest that the formation and development of an International Qualitative Research body would aid the development and vigour of our Industry as a whole.

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