

# THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCHERS: A DIFFERENT ARTICLE, A DARING PUBLICATION

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**ABSTRACT:** After reading chapter two of Russell's *In Praise of Idleness*, which discusses the history of the concept of knowledge, and the article by Ranjay Gulati who commented the wars of tribes ("Tent poles, tribalism, and boundary spanning: The rigor-relevant debate in management research"), this inspired me an image of gladiator battles between different groups in the scientific world. Inspired by Feyerabend's concept of fairy tales, I illustrate the struggle between quantitative and qualitative researchers that I witnessed in my research career...

**KEYWORDS:** quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers, Bertrand Russell, Paul Feyerabend

## The Confrontation

The sun finally rises and the gladiators are ready to fight. For decades, two groups confronted each other to gain control of and dominate villages but today, the price of victory is very important: the hand of Princess Recognition. This new alliance will allow the winner to set up its soldiers with it in Scientistcity, thus leaving the other group abandoned and without resource. On the left side, gladiator QualiJohn puts on its most beautiful blue armor to defend its place. On the right side, QuantiJohn proudly wears red to intimidate the opponent. The stands are filled with soldiers supporting their leader with the color of their clan. The two gladiators proceed into the arena and place themselves in front of Princess Recognition and her father King UniversiJohn. They then begin their battle of scathing words.

- Because words are my strength, I start the fight by saying that whatever happens, I'll still endorse my clan because we know that our way of exploring the world is the best.

- Words are precisely the problem because in Scientistcity, words are not as important as figures, as Porter<sup>1</sup> has so well said!

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*

- That is what your clan wants us to believe, but the important thing is to advance science by observing the events around you.

- How can you advance science with observations? As Chalmers told us, a "fact" is subjective, so your way of doing science is not serious.<sup>2</sup> Observable "facts" must be objectified using procedures as was suggested by Chalmers, and this is how our clan works.

- As Chalmers rightly said, you have to turn to PhysicsJohn to analyze the sociology because it is known to make good discoveries, but you forgot to ask whether this applies to our world of sociology.<sup>3</sup> We do not claim, like you, to move towards the truth; on the other hand, we can identify lots of interesting topics that you cannot measure with your instruments. Have you ever thought of the context when you collect data? This is not a priority, right? You prefer large quantities of numbers and forget to take into account the human aspect of these figures.

While QualiJohn and QuantiJohn discuss their scientific position, they dodge the sword of their opponent by stepping right or left and block shots with their own sword. The crowd looks at the fight and cheers when their leader lunges toward the opponent. QuantiJohn says:

- Ask Sir Porter, he will explain the process that could play a major role in the construction of the legitimacy of quantitative data.<sup>4</sup> We target generalization and universality. The figure has the power because it helps to build a standard.<sup>5</sup>

- And you should go look at Sir Foucault's work. He will tell you that figures led people to be regarded as objects to be manipulated.<sup>6</sup> What are you doing on your people out of standards? We are interested in them and like to understand why they what they are, contrary to you who ignores individuality as Porter told us.<sup>7</sup> We try to advance science by discovering and analyzing people in their context. As Foucault said, it sometimes seeks to deconstruct the truth and is "taken for granted" within the society to dig further.<sup>8</sup> While, like Popper, you try to advance science through trial and error.<sup>9</sup> You are always caught up in your

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Alan Francis Chalmers, *What is this Thing Called Science?* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Chalmers, *What is this Thing*.

<sup>4</sup> Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

<sup>5</sup> Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault reader* (New-York: Pantheon, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

<sup>8</sup> Rabinow, *The Foucault reader*.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

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black Latourian boxes as a starting point to your research.<sup>10</sup> You operate using assumptions that refer to previous research, but that makes you move so slowly. Latour tells us that we can have previous literature say what we want to so that it lends itself best to what it is meant to support.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, your way is no more objective than ours.

- Perhaps, but Latour tells us that the cost of dissent is not equal to our two clans.<sup>12</sup> Given that my clan currently receives more subsidies, we can do more research. Society supports us more, and where there is more research there is more progress.

- Kuhn told me one day that the role of the social in the constitution of knowledge creates an arbitrary element, resulting from personal and historical hazards. It is also a formative element of the beliefs adopted by a scientific group at any given time.<sup>13</sup> There is no evidence that your paradigm is better than mine.

- Kuhn also said that the current paradigms are better than the previous ones because they are held by the scientific community and there is no higher standard than the consent of the community.<sup>14</sup>

- While you follow the rules of your clan in your research, as anarchists like Feyerabend, we sometimes qualify it and contribute to progress because a science based on law and order succeeds only if anarchist movements occasionally have the right to manifest.<sup>15</sup> He explained that reasoning may delay science and that there are no objective conditions to guide research.

Tired of this debate running in circles for decades, the King's fool spoke, laughing at what people would think of what he said. He never thought like the others and was a peaceful person above all in this world of contradictions.

- My friends, Feyerabend once said to us: "Everything is good," no scientific method is better than another.<sup>16</sup> QualiJohn and QuantiJohn, what makes you think that you are superior to others? The scientific world often results from luck and not scientific rigor. There is not a particular method that can guarantee the success of a research. Plus, scientists often make errors and many of their solutions

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<sup>10</sup> Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>12</sup> Latour, *Science in Action*.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *La structure des révolutions scientifiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), chapter 12.

<sup>14</sup> Kuhn, *La structure des révolutions*.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Contre la méthode* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Feyerabend, *Contre la méthode*.

are often unnecessary. The world we want to explore is largely unknown but we must remain open to all options without limiting ourselves in advance. Uniformity weakens our critical power while the proliferation of theories benefits science. You performed a good discipline job, like Foucault explains.<sup>17</sup> You disciplined your descendants with your divisional ideas and they came to control our scientific world by receiving a good indoctrination from your part. Your clans follow your ideas without questioning them because you both work towards the survival of your clan. Those who do not think like you were excluded from your clan, making you more united, strong and powerful. You are worshiped for your knowledge, and your thoughts are legitimized and that gives you more power. You use this power at your leisure to gain even more power. As proof, you are here to conquer Princess Recognition and manage Scientistcity. Like Bourdieu,<sup>18</sup> emphasis the fact that you did recognize your paradigms such as being legitimate by performing symbolic violence to your clan. You played on the concept of habitus to inculcate a way of thinking to your members. You try to discuss the neutrality of your research but human sciences are not and cannot be neutral because they are part of a project meant to discipline and tame the human and produce significant effects in society. As Kuhn says, using violence to build boundaries between your two clans does not legitimize your knowledge on how the world works.<sup>19</sup> As Lyotard would say, you use different languages to play a game whose goal is the same: to advance science.<sup>20</sup> Never lose sight of that.

King UniversiJohn speaks in turn and explains to the two warriors that he is aware of the power that an advantageous position in the hierarchy of his family and Scientistcity means for the legitimization of their clan and that is why he has decided not to give the hand of his daughter to either gladiator.

- I know that if I give this position of dominance to one of you, as Bourdieu explains in *Homo Academicus*,<sup>21</sup> dominants will continue to dominate and create other dominants in their own image. This will be the death of the other clan because it will end up with no power in Scientistcity and the family of UniversiJohn. As Macintosh lived,<sup>22</sup> I am a key element of the reproduction of the scientific world at the dominant paradigm reproduction level and I have the

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<sup>17</sup> Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>19</sup> Kuhn, *La structure des révolutions*.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), chapters 11 and 12.

<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*.

<sup>22</sup> Norman B. Macintosh, "A ghostly CAR ride," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 15, 4/5 (2004): 675-695.

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power to choose one of you to marginalize the other. If I give my daughter Recognition to one of you, you will become an important teach to my villagers and, as such, you will teach them only the skills that are attributed to your paradigm and no others ideals, as Lyotard<sup>23</sup> pointed out to me. You would provide for Scientistcity players who would properly ensure their role in pragmatic positions and who would perpetuate the power of your paradigm. And if all the research in the world came to be in the same paradigm, it would have an effect of isomorphism on the subjects of research and on the way of carrying them out, as Adler and Harzing<sup>24</sup> advised us. I do not need to be one of yours to understand your positions, as Vermeulen<sup>25</sup> already explained to me, but I know one thing though: you are two rigorous clans in your research but you do not have the same rigorous criteria. I do not pretend to know the truth on what paradigm is the best but I have to decide between your two approaches. Kind of like Foucault's concept of the self-discipline,<sup>26</sup> Russell told me last month that the cultural elements in the acquisition of knowledge, when they are well assimilated, form our character and our way of thinking as well as our desires.<sup>27</sup> I can see that you are looking for two things that are the most universally desired according to Russell: power and admiration.<sup>28</sup> You are two educated men and you therefore have access to some form of power. There are more commendable ways to admire you than to beat you today. As repeated me my friend Russell,<sup>29</sup> today's world is filled with groups enraged and focused on themselves, each unable to see human life as a whole and wanting to destroy civilization instead of stepping forward together and heading in the same direction. So, I'll listen to my King's fool and will let us continue to oppose one another. Let us see if one day you will understand the strength of teamwork.

The fool was perhaps not such fool after all...

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<sup>23</sup> Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy J. Adler and Anne-Wil Harzing, "When Knowledge Wins: Transcending the Sense and Nonsense of Academic Rankings," *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 8, 1 (2009): 72-95.

<sup>25</sup> Freek Vermeulen, "'I Shall Not Remain Insignificant': Adding a Second Loop to Matter More," *Academy of Management Journal* 50, 4 (2007): 754-761.

<sup>26</sup> Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*.

<sup>27</sup> Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness* (New-York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Russell, *In Praise of Idleness*.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, *In Praise of Idleness*.