



Using Arts-Based Methods of Research: A Critical Introduction to the Development of Arts-Based Research Methods

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As academic researchers we are schooled in rigorous, scientifically informed research practice. From identifying our ontological and epistemological assumptions, writing detailed and focused research questions, selecting appropriate methods of data collection, ensuring our research has ethical approval through to engaging robust methods of analysis. Every PhD programme in every University will be focused on delivering this learning. Of course, this teaching is absolutely necessary to ensure we produce research that is ethical, has integrity and is the product of robust research practice. Yet, at the same time, these rules, processes and procedures have at times unintentionally stifled academic creativity and innovation in relation to methods of research. In fields of qualitative enquiry, the semi-structured

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interview reigns supreme, closely followed by focus-groups. But what is this monochrome palette of qualitative methods doing to, and for, qualitative research? Are these methods always the most suitable for exploring our research questions? What might they leave untouched, unspoken or unaddressed? Are they fit for purpose in a visually led twenty-first century?

Our concern in editing this book is not to dismiss the methodological orthodoxy or even to directly challenge its supremacy in the field of organisation and management studies. Instead, we intend to consider other methods of qualitative enquiry and what they might contribute to our understanding of contemporary organisational life. In order to achieve this, we must step out from the comfort provided by the routines and familiarity of the semi-structured interview to embrace the discomfort, unfamiliarity, disruption and uncertainty of alternative methods of qualitative inquiry. More specifically, we are concerned with exploring the potential of arts-based methods of research in business and the humanities.

Arts-based methods of research including visual, performative and collaborative forms of enquiry have the power to mobilise and provoke individuals and communities to reflect and engage (Mitchell 2011). Visual works facilitate reflexivity (Berger 1972; Sontag 1977) by situating the individual within. In this way, art has the capacity to engage with tensions and ambiguities whilst holding open possibilities for critical reflection, reconstruction, sense-making and change (Wicks and Rippin 2010). As Schein (2013) identifies, art provokes, shocks and inspires us to see, hear and experience ideas, concepts and contexts differently. In this way, art and artists have the potential to inspire change, or in the vocabulary of the academy—to have impact.

Arts-based and visual methods of research have the potential to elicit deeper, more emotional, more reflexive accounts when compared to more traditional approaches to qualitative research, address a variety of power dynamics within the researcher/participant relationship and are particularly useful in reaching vulnerable or marginalised voices communities and stakeholders (see Easterby-Smith et al. 2012; Slutskaya et al. 2012). By way of extension, artistically informed approaches to research have the residual potential not only to elicit richer data but might also engage a wider variety of audiences more readily.

Indeed, a variety of arts have been used in management and organisation research including poetry (Armitage 2014); textiles (Rippin 2013), photography (Warren 2002; Shortt 2015; Slutskaya et al. 2012; Ray and Smith 2012); drawing (Vince 1995; Vince and Broussine 1996; Stiles 2004, 2011, 2014; Ward and Shortt 2012, 2018), film (Wood and Brown 2012) and knitting (Ahmas and Koivunen 2017). Each method has begun to speak to the value of exploring ‘a different way of thinking, feeling and doing’ (www.artofmanagement.org). Certainly over the past two decades we have seen a steady growth in the number of papers, special issues and books that have advanced the arts-based field in business and management research and offered new and creative routes for research design and method for new and experienced researchers, as well as practitioners across the business, management and humanities disciplines.

But why this book, and why now? One of our key concerns in editing this book is to foreground the range of visual, creative, arts-based methods on offer to researchers and bring them together in one place. Our hope is that this book will help readers explore and consider the ways in which the arts can be embedded into research design and enable them to understand alternative ways of researching. We want to take this opportunity to highlight the growth in the field—both from a researcher and practitioner perspective. We can no longer say that visual, arts-based methods are overlooked—indeed, as we evidence in our acknowledgements, conferences, communities, special issues and leading scholars in this field have all helped to build capacity in the arts-based methods field, certainly over the past 15 years or so. However, we feel it is time a volume brought together some of those scholars who have been instrumental in developing such methods over the past decade and, most importantly, draw on their experiences and evidence to help support those wishing to develop their methodological knowledge and practice.

Our other key concern for creating this book is to address a gap in the arts-based methods field. This is a practical and pragmatic gap; not only did we want to showcase some of the current, leading-edge approaches in arts-based methods, but we wanted to compile a guide on *how* to actually *use* these methods, in practice. So, we want to provide readers with a ‘how to...’ guide and help our readers navigate their way through these non-traditional methods in terms of understanding the foundations from

which they have emerged, how they might be applied to a specific research project, and step-by-step what to consider in relation to, for example, ethics, participant's emotions, and how to manage and analyse the data gathered. Too often (we find!) the messy, challenging and unexpected parts of research are ignored or left out of methods books. We find methods are presented as 'clean' systematic processes and, as we know, most research does not follow this neat pattern. It has been important to us to present the 'real life' of these methods and we hope this 'how to' approach throughout this volume tells such a story.

The authors in this volume present their stories from practice and experience and, as you will read in the chapter summaries below, they map out their own guides on how to navigate each distinct method and steer the reader through the exciting opportunities and complex challenges that such methods present.

Jenna Ward and Daniel King, in Chapter 2, provide a review of participant-produced drawing methods and address how under-utilised this method is in business and management research. They focus on the advantages of this method in order that researchers can potentially awaken or reveal difficult or challenging emotions in the context of their research studies, and the power drawings have in expressing emotions that people might find difficult to articulate verbally. Their 'how to guide' includes: *how to plan a drawing activity, how to tackle challenges you may face like participants' graphic aptitude and lack of self-confidence, and how to choose your drawing materials and other resources.*

In Chapter 3 of this volume, Claus Springborg presents how dance might be used in business, management and humanities research. He suggests that this particular arts-based method is useful for those researchers keen to study the unconscious, affective and aesthetic aspects of organisational life. A history of dance as a research method is presented first, followed by reflections on what sort of research questions this method may be most appropriate to explore. A step-by-step guide is presented in terms of how researchers may go about designing research that incorporate dance, movement and the body and how to go about collecting data. Throughout the chapter Springborg illustrates the research process using detailed vignettes from his own research practice. This 'how to' guide includes: *how to observe dancing, movement and bodies, how to design dance*

sessions in order to engage participants, how to capture relevant data, a variety of approaches to transcribing and analysing dance data and movement data, and how to use dance and choreography as a metaphorical lens to analyse non-dance phenomena.

In Chapter 4, Robert McMurray draws on his experience of using pocket-films with first year undergraduate and MBA students. He presents a case for using film and film-making on smartphones in the context of learning and teaching and provides an argument for the pedagogic merits of such a method. In particular, he shows how film-making may encourage research-based learnings and how film may persuade students to think differently about their world and their experiences. McMurray also addresses the value of film-making as a form of collaborative enquiry. This ‘how to’ guide includes: *a user-friendly, nine-step guide to using pocket-films for researching and learning, how to write a film assessment marking criterion, and how to write ethical principles for film-making for your students.*

In Chapter 5 of this volume, Alia Weston and Zev Farber introduce us to food in organisational research. They show how food and eating can be used in a research context for examining social engagement and how food can be used as a tool to enhance and enrich social interaction within a research context. They offer two illustrative examples from their own practice, and reflect on how food can be used firstly, as an arts-based method in action research as part of an artist-talk dinner series, and secondly how food can play an important role in disseminating research knowledge. This ‘how to’ guide includes: *how to set up your own food intervention using different approaches to a ‘dinner series’—including the ingredients you will need for orientating your participants, the intervention itself, and how to manage a debriefing session.*

Chapter 6 presents a case for knitting and handicraft and its potential as an arts-based research method. Niina Koivunen and Kristina Ahmas draw on their work on guerrilla knitting as an organisational intervention that inspired, empowered and mobilised a resistant museum workforce into collective and creative action. They present a culturally sensitive review of the gendered and material nature of knitting and other handicrafts. This ‘how to guide’ includes: *reflections on how to privilege silence in organisational research settings, exploring participatory action research and how to create ‘data’ for analysis from handicraft projects.*

In Chapter 7 Chris Stamper introduces us to the art of letter writing and how it can be used as a research method. Drawing on research from English literature to criminology, he shows how the hand-written letter can be a visual, textual and sensory tool with which to engage with a variety of participants in research studies. Stamper's chapter specifically examines how letter writing can be a fruitful method of qualitative inquiry when working with hard to reach groups—namely here, prisoners and those with a criminal record. Along with vignettes and examples from his own study, Stamper moves through the research process and guides the reader through sampling, correspondence, storage and analysis, and candidly reflects on his own mistakes and what we might learn from them. This 'how to' guide includes: *detailed guidance on how to sample, recruit and select your participants, how to write your own and read others' letters, and how to transcribe and make sense of hand-written correspondence.*

In the penultimate chapter of the book, we see Andrew Armitage and Diane Ramsay show how the visual production of poem houses alongside poetic text creates a unique sense-making process for exploring organisational experiences. The chapter examines how poetry provides an alternative way of understanding organisational challenges to the more dominant organisational voices and discourses we are used to. The authors show how 'poem houses'—an assemblage of found objects and poetry in a box, using arts-based materials and words—provides a visual narrative of individual and/or collective organisational experiences. Armitage and Ramsay showcase powerful examples from their own practice through vignettes and images. Through their reflections, they make useful suggestions and recommendations for those wanting to follow such a method in their own research or organisational intervention. This 'how to' guide includes: *how to work with 'non-poets' in your participant group, how to make poem-houses and how to make sense of poem houses with your participants.*

In the final chapter of our volume, Harriet Shortt and Samantha Warren offer a guide for those researchers keen to engage with social media platforms as a research tool. Specifically, they examine how Instagram can be used to gather visual data as part of participant-led field studies. They discuss the recent advances made in visual studies and how social media platforms bring a 'new wave' of visual studies into focus. In order to contextualise the use of Instagram in a research study, they draw from

their own research practice and present a field study, that explores the post-occupancy evaluation of a UK Business School building. They provide some useful and insightful reflections from this work, involving the complexities of participants' attitudes to social media and how this might impact research and researchers, as well as considering the ethical issues associated with using visual public platforms for data collection. This 'how to' guide includes: *how to set up your Instagram feed, how to create a suitable hashtag for your research, how to manage your data on your Instagram feed, and how to analyse the images posted, and their captions.*

Together, our authors and their 'how to' guides will help new and experienced researchers navigate their way through a rich variety of arts-based methods. Yet, not only is this text a useful resource for sharing best practice, within and across the diversity of methods, contexts and vignettes presented we see recurrent themes emerging which, we propose, act as an agenda for those interested in advancing the field of arts-based methods in business and the humanities. Here we present an overview of those critical questions and themes that are beginning to percolate.

Inclusivity and Exclusivity

To what extent are these participatory methods inclusive? The use of social media and participant-led pocket-film-making for example, allows us to access those we might, as researchers, not otherwise be able to reach. However, although we may be drawn to such methods because of their wide-ranging and wide-reaching capabilities, we must critically reflect on how *exclusive* these methods can be. Whilst participatory methods are an appropriate vehicle through which to raise the voices of the unheard or overlooked, some of our contributors in this book have helped us consider how this might not always be the case—there are groups we may work with who do not have access to social media, or smartphones or are not technologically enabled, adept or culturally literate in these forms of communication (see Chapter 2 for a critical discussion of participatory visual methods). Or, even those who *are* technologically savvy with regards to social media (such as the undergraduate students in Shortt and Warren's chapter), may not wish to engage with them in a research context as it does

not fit the cultural setting in which they would ordinarily use this mode of engagement— for some students Instagram is a place for the presentation of a certain identity, which may not include ‘work’. Furthermore, our Drawing chapter notes the expense associated with participatory drawing methods—Ward and King remind us that some resources and materials used in arts-based approaches require researchers or research teams to have a substantial budget. And we might continue to question what groups or individuals may be excluded from some of the other methods we discuss—some might argue a number of these methods are for the able-bodied only, or would question how such methods might be used when working with people who are visually impaired, and how might some writing/word-based methods (see Chapter 7 on Letter Writing and Chapter 8 on Poetry) work with those who are dyslexic or who struggle with language barriers? We encourage our readers to reflect on such questions.

Technology vs. Handmade/Handcrafted

With the above point in mind, this leads us to consider how technology can play a role in research with regards to what it both enables and removes from field studies. In this book we see the use of both smartphones and social media, as well as craft-based ‘handmade’ approaches. For example, we see how Instagram based, visually-led projects can enable a researcher to work with large sample sizes, but how the brevity of captions about the images taken for the research project at times compromises the richness of the data gathered. In the Letter Writing chapter, Stamper reflects on the hand-written letter (rather than email) in data gathering and notes the importance of the sensory elements of letters received from participants—the doodles at the side of the page, the smell and the feel of the letter itself. The material, physical elements of these pieces of data add something to the research that would perhaps be lost if letters were made digitally. That said, some of our authors have reflected on the possibilities of incorporating technology into methodological approaches that currently prefer handcrafted ways of working—for example, the benefits of participatory drawing on tablets, rather than paper removes some of the ‘exclusionary’ elements of the method we noted above in relation to high-cost resources

such as paper, pens, pencils, and the ability to scan in handcrafted drawings for the purposes of publication. As readers work their way through this book, the benefits and drawbacks of each method should be questioned in relation to contemporary digital ways of working.

Ethics

As technology develops and our access to tools and materials with which we engage with research methods advance, so too must our ethical guidelines. Such advancements offer new and exciting opportunities, but they often present new challenges for both research teams and ethics committees. Across this volume authors reflect on the ethics associated with their own practices and their experiences of dealing with (often) University ethics committees and usefully outline how others might go about seeking approval for projects that use non-traditional methods. But in speaking with our authors we have found that so often arts-based approaches are not fully understood by the processes and procedures associated with research or by those ‘signing off’ on such projects. As we highlighted earlier in this introductory chapter, this lack of understanding has at times unintentionally stifled academic creativity and innovation in relation to methods of research. We therefore hope this volume helps to build capacity in the area of arts-based methods and their associated ethical guidelines, as well as helping our readers build their confidence when designing rigorous research projects and negotiating with procedural gatekeepers.

A Hierarchy of Methods

The methods discussed here also highlight a hierarchy in the arts-based methods field itself. For example, as Ward and King note in their Drawing chapter, visual methods specifically have seen the dominance of photography and participant-led photography in visually-led research. Drawing is at times considered secondary in the visual field. We would like to see other arts-based and visual methods that are not so familiar (to researchers and participants alike) to be considered on an equal footing. Each should

be contemplated in relation to its specific context and what it offers the researcher and the research: Drawing, for example, may initially worry some who feel they ‘can’t draw’ but the emotions it raises in interviews and the freedom and power it gives participants to express themselves gives a depth to research findings that are arguably unprecedented. Although a variety of methods might be used with participants in order that they reflect on embodied experiences of everyday life, surely a method such as dance and the observation of bodily movement (see Chapter 3 on Dancing) fits perfectly with such a project; and despite a wealth of approaches we might use to disseminate research findings beyond the academy, there are few other practices that really bring communities and people together like food and eating (see Chapter 5 on Food). We therefore encourage our readers to consider this book as a palette of methods from which they can select the most appropriate for their own project and move away from simply considering the methods that have perhaps been traditionally privileged.

Activism and the Power of Creativity

Our contributors’ work across this book has enabled the unseen to be seen. Hidden emotions, experiences, and elements of the workplace that would otherwise be invisible or overlooked have been made visible, and as such enable us to shed new light on our organisational understandings. In line with the *Art of Management and Organisation’s* 2020 conference theme, we could understand this advancement in the field as a form of activism. The authors in our volume are artists in their own way and are using their arts-based methods to disrupt, to confront and to question the status quo. Art can be used as a mechanism of protest, as a way of speaking truth to power and as a sense of possibility to fuel motivation for change. We are firm believers that art is created for and engaged with not just for arts’ sake, not in an abstract pursuit of beauty, but with an activist purpose to challenge, to mock, to shine a light where it has not shined before. Whether it be performance art such as Dance or a socially engaged practice such as using Food or Knitting facilitate experiential learning or as a method of disseminating research knowledge, art is a form of political

currency for actively addressing the social structure. Here, in this book, authors have embraced topics such as organisational change, power, social responsibility, and resistance and have successfully brought this together using arts-based methods. We hope our readers will see this volume as a call to explore the unseen aspects of art as activism in relation to management and organisations, as well as an object of activism.

Broadly we hope that the methods presented in this book will empower researchers and permit them to think differently and practice differently when designing and planning research projects. It is worth remembering the words of Edgar Schein when he identified six contributions art and the artist can and do make to 'other elements of society like business and government' (2013: 1).

- Art and artists stimulate us to see more, hear more, and experience more of what is going on within us and around us.
- Art does and should disturb, provoke, shock and inspire.
- The artist can stimulate us to broaden our skills, our behavioural repertoire, and our flexibility of responses.
- The role of the arts and artists is to stimulate our own aesthetic sense.
- Analysis of how the artist is trained and works can produce insights into what is needed to perform and what it means to lead and manage.
- Art puts us in touch with our creative self.

And so, we hope this book and the creative and innovative approaches our authors present provoke, shock, inspire and stimulate you and your research...

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