

## Qualitative data analysis:

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# **Qualitative data analysis: exploring themes, metaphors and stories**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the processes and outcomes of using three different forms of data analytic processes to analyse the same set of qualitative data. The dataset are 24 in-depth qualitative interviews with taxi drivers about their experiences of dignity at work. To enable an effective comparison of techniques, three types of analysis are used which rely on similar categorization processes: template analysis; story analysis; and metaphor analysis. In presenting the analysis the aims are to draw attention to the research questions and opportunities for theorising that might be enabled by a given analytic approach and highlight some of the rich variety of analytic approaches available to the qualitative management researcher. Hence we offer a novel, empirical account of the practical use of these three approaches with the intention of potentially expanding the analytic toolkit of other qualitative researchers and promoting the use of a range of different forms of qualitative data analysis. It is argued that given the increasing trend towards standardisation in qualitative management research, it is important to promote alternatives within the qualitative researcher's analytic toolkit.

# **Qualitative data analysis: exploring themes, metaphors and stories**

## **Introduction**

There has been a long tradition within European management research of the use of a range of approaches to inform the collection and analysis of qualitative data (e.g. Knoblauch, 2005; Gummesson, 2006; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), accompanied by evidence that European journals are more favourable to qualitative research than their US counterparts (Üsdiken, 2014). However, although there has been extensive debate about the use of various philosophical traditions in qualitative research (Prasad, 2005; Duberley, Johnson and Cassell, 2012), there has been relatively little discussion about the comparative merits of different data analytic strategies. There is considerable variety in what can be characterised as qualitative research data. Textual data can be produced from a number of sources, for example interview or focus groups transcripts, but can also be found in the public domain, for example websites, company documents or blogs (Lee, 2012; Holder-Webb, Cohen, Nath and Wood, 2009; Cho and Hue, 2010). There is also an increasing interest in ways of analysing visual data which is primarily qualitative (Bell and Davison, 2013; Whiting, Symon, Roby, and Chamakiotis, 2016).

The aim of this paper is to explore the processes and outcomes of using three different forms of data analytic processes to analyse the same set of data, therefore drawing attention to the findings that are revealed by different types of analysis; the alternative kinds of research questions that can be addressed; and the opportunities for theorising that might be enabled by a given approach. It is not our intention here to give step-by-step guidance to the use of these approaches. Rather, our intention is to highlight some of the rich variety of analytic techniques available to the qualitative management researcher. Hence the contribution of the

paper to the European methodological literature is to offer a novel, empirical account of the practical use of these three approaches therefore seeking to enable the potential expansion of the analytic toolkit of other qualitative researchers and promote the use of a range of different forms of qualitative data analysis.

Why is this issue important? As has been noted by a number of writers (e.g. Cornelissen, Gajewska- de Mattos, Piekkari and Welch, 2012; Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki and Pavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011; Cornelissen, 2017) there is an increasing move within the management and organizational literature to present formulaic approaches to qualitative research. Indeed, some authors have suggested a link between the prevalence of guidelines for good qualitative research and the likelihood of increasingly formulaic research designs (Authors, 2016). This trend towards formulaic approaches to qualitative research has been noted in other social science disciplines, for example Carrera-Fernández, Guàrdia-Olmas and Però-Cebollero, (2014) who note the prevalence of content analysis in qualitative research in psychology. The danger is that as researchers we are attracted to both what we are familiar with and what we see getting published, hence potentially missing out on the range of interesting methodological approaches available.

The dataset to be analysed here are 24 in-depth qualitative interviews with taxi drivers about their experiences of dignity at work. To enable an effective comparison of techniques, three types of analysis are used which rely on similar categorization processes: template analysis; story analysis; and metaphor analysis. The research project outlined is framed within an interpretivist perspective where the intention is to understand the subjective nature of reality construction (Prasad, 2005). Hence this also underpins the choice of approaches, all of which

are comfortably located within an interpretivist framework. The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, an introduction to qualitative data analysis is provided. Secondly, the research project is outlined. Thirdly, the three types of analysis are presented, and fourthly the contributions of them are discussed.

### **Approaches to qualitative data analysis**

A range of approaches to qualitative data analysis have been used within the management literature. Some authors working within a positivist and post-positivist tradition have sought to quantify qualitative data through content analysis so that it can be subjected to statistical analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Here, researchers are keen to see qualitative data aggregated in a way that makes it possible to conduct statistical analysis to produce the findings. Despite the debate about the extent to which this form of content analysis is actually a type of qualitative data analysis, it remains common within management research journals (Bluhm, Harman, Lee and Mitchell, 2011). A further popular way of analysing qualitative data is thematic analysis (e.g. Silverman, 2000; Flick, 2009; King and Brookes, 2017). Here the researcher looks for themes within the data and codes excerpts of the data accordingly into those themes. These themes can then constitute some form of codebook or template which enables a structured approach to data interpretation. Techniques based on thematic analysis tend to be fairly flexible in that they fit with most research questions, any textual data, and most philosophical stances (see King 2004; 2012; Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Miles and Huberman, 2014). Some analytic techniques are wedded to particular philosophical approaches so discourse analysis for example is a method located within social constructionism and post structuralism, whereas interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith 2008) works with idiographic data within a phenomenological paradigm.

Other methods are characterized by an explicit focus on the inductive process and here grounded theory is probably the most well-recognised form. Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and re-formulated by Strauss and Corbin, (1988), the aim is to derive theory inductively through the systematic gathering and analysis of data. Writers such as Locke (2001) have applied grounded theory in a management research context and there have been numerous discussions in the management literature about what constitutes appropriate grounded theory (Jones and Noble, 2007; Suddaby, 2006). Others have sought to amend grounded theory principles. For example, Charmaz (2006) presents a constructivist reformulation of the approach.

The linguistic turn in management and organizational research in the 1980's led to a plurality of new forms of analytic methods where the focus is upon talk and language use, for example discourse, stories and narrative (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Wodak and Meyer, 2010; Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; Maitlis, 2012; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). Other approaches that focus upon language include rhetorical methods (Symon, 2007; Stanley, Mackenzie-Davey and Symon, 2014); and metaphor analysis (Cornelissen et al., 2008; Cassell and Lee, 2012). The visual turn in organization and management studies is also encouraging the investigation of analytic approaches which may have been prevalent in other fields, for example semiotics (Plakoyiannaki and Stavrou, 2017). Other authors have also promoted specific techniques for use alongside particular methods for example the comparative analysis of organizational case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Although a richness of techniques are available for the analysis of qualitative datasets, explicit accounts of using different types of analytic methods either together or on the same dataset are relatively rare. This is despite the regular use of methodological triangulation in data collection (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) and studies that have sought to analyse the same research issue from different epistemological traditions (e.g. Kelemen and Hassard, 2002). Two notable exceptions are Frost et al.(2010) who report the experiences of four researchers using four different analytic techniques upon the same piece of data, and Pritchard (2012) who comments upon the ways in which different forms of qualitative methods can be used together within a project. Pritchard (2012) provides examples of mixing the following methods: interviews and twenty statements tests; a tracer study within an ethnographic project; and ethnography and discourse analysis. In the Frost et al. (2010) study, analysis was carried out by four researchers of one single semi-structured interview transcript using grounded theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis, IPA and narrative analysis. Each researcher was then interviewed about their experiences of the process. The discussion focuses upon the analyst's confusion about their own role in the write-up of the account and their wariness about analysing an interview that they had not conducted, rather than as in this case, with the interpretations offered by the different analytic approaches.

This lack of attention to combining qualitative methods is surprising given the large amount of discussion that has taken place within the literature about the relative advantages of mixed methods, albeit with a focus on mixing qualitative and quantitative methods (e.g. Bryman, 2007). Indeed most qualitative researchers tend to choose one approach to their data analysis and then stick to it. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, given that some data analytic approaches are attached to philosophical positions researchers are keen to avoid the difficulties that are associated with mixing approaches, for example ontological oscillation

(Weick, 1995). Secondly, the delineation of alternative forms of qualitative data analysis is a relatively recent phenomenon in qualitative management research. One of the reasons why the documenting of approaches has occurred is due to the need for qualitative researchers to have some credibility associated with their analytic approach. Pritchard (2012) refers to this as a 'brand identity' and highlights how ascribing to a given methodological brand may offer some comfort to qualitative researchers in that it provides clear guidelines on how the quality of such work can be assessed. Such guidelines are potentially muddled by the application of different methods.

In this case, the idea of using different types of data analytic strategies had not initially been considered when the research project was planned. Rather it was a serendipitous outcome of the interview schedule design and our research interests, instead of an explicit pre-planned opportunity. It is important to explain why the interview schedule was constructed in such a way to enable the use of different techniques. The research question was a general one about taxi drivers' experiences of customer abuse. Such a general research question lays itself open to a variety of modes of data collection and analytic techniques and the nature of the interview schedule and the questions asked lent itself to the three different types of analysis chosen: template analysis, story analysis and metaphor analysis. In relation to template analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews are often analysed using thematic or template approaches (Cassell, 2015; King, 2004; 2012), hence this was how we had initially envisaged analysing the interviews. However, additionally we were keen to elicit stories from respondents as part of the interview process. The reason for this was that story analysis was used in previous work we had conducted about customer abuse and was found to be a way of facilitating respondent's talking about what could be difficult or sensitive issues (Authors, \*\*\*\*). We therefore included in the interview schedule a number of questions deliberately designed to elicit stories. These included: Can you tell me a story about a difficult customer?



Tell me a story about one of your favourite customers? And, tell me a story about one of your least favourite customers? These were used in a similar way to a critical incident approach (Chell, 2004) and designed so that we could follow the story analysis methods of Gabriel and Griffiths (2004). Once the interviewees had told us their stories we followed them up with further questions prompted by the story as is usual with critical incident technique and this form of story elicitation method.

We had also included a question in the interview schedule designed to elicit a metaphor from respondents. The reason we had inserted this question towards the end of the interview schedule was that both the literature and field of customer service are particularly dominated by the metaphor of customer sovereignty, for example the customer as ‘king’ (see Korczynski, 2002). However we were keen to investigate the metaphors that service workers chose to relate their own experiences of customer interaction to see how these may differ from that traditionally used to characterise the service relationship. Hence we asked:

We are interested in what it is like to be a taxi driver. If you were to choose a metaphor for what it is like to drive a taxi what would you choose? For example being a taxi driver could be like the lone ranger going out into the night; you could see it as being like a predatory lion always on the look-out, or like a guardian angel taking people home to safety in the big city. What would you say that being a taxi driver is like?

Once the interviewee had thought of a metaphor we asked them for an explanation as to why they had chosen that particular metaphor so we understood how it made sense to them. Hence this was the process through which we ended up with an interview schedule and dataset that enabled the three different types of analysis to be applied. Therefore the key question that forms the basis of what follows is: What are the contributions of the three types of analysis in

terms of findings that are revealed by them; the different kinds of research questions that can be addressed; and the opportunities for theorising that might be enabled by a given analytic approach. We now turn to the research project.

## **The research**

The research project was designed to investigate issues surrounding dignity in service work through an investigation of taxi drivers' experiences of customer abuse. Customer orientated service work is an important part of our economy accounting for a large part of all employment (Nixon 2006). One of the most significant factors that impacts upon the dignity of workers in the service sector is the direct contact they have with the customer. As Lucas (2011) suggests, dignity in blue-collar service work is a challenge given the subordinated role of the service worker. Here we were particularly interested in the experiences of men given that there is a scarcity of literature that focuses on men in traditionally male dominated service occupations (Nickson and Korczynski, 2009).

The research sample comprised of twenty-four taxi drivers from a large English industrial city. The drivers drove what are traditionally known as 'black cabs' or 'hackney cabs' in the UK where customers hail them down whilst they are driving on the streets and then sit in the back of the cab for the journey. Taxi drivers are interesting for a number of reasons. Apart from being a mainly male population they are self-employed, whereas most of the literature in the area of customer service focuses upon arenas where service workers are actively managed. This is also potentially dangerous work in that drivers are isolated, work anti-social hours and the nature of the next passenger is always unpredictable (Davis, 1959). The

interviews were conducted between 2011/12 which was before the taxi industry was revolutionised by the emergence of Uber.

Semi-structured individual interviews which lasted between 35 and 60 minutes took place in the back of the driver's vehicle. Drivers were recruited in two different ways. Initially we worked with one of the largest companies of hackney cab drivers in the city and they circulated a flyer to all drivers asking those that were interested in taking part in the research to come forward and volunteer. This generated a sample of seven drivers for interview. The two researchers also visited the taxi ranks in the city to talk with drivers. This generated the final 17 interviews. In some cases drivers booked in to be interviewed in a parking space at the University at a later time, whereas in others the interview took place in the cab whilst the taxi driver was waiting to move up the rank. Of the 24 interviewees, 23 were male and one female. Their average age was mid-forties and eight of the drivers were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The interviews covered a range of questions about the drivers' experiences of customers including different types of customer behaviour and their own responses towards it and more general questions about the job. The interview schedule covered questions on their background; their experiences of customer abuse, customer service; and perceptions of dignity, together with the questions outlined earlier that were designed to elicit metaphors and stories. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcribing service. Each form of analysis was conducted separately by the first author. The types of data analysis are now outlined.

### **The types of analysis**

We now address each of the analyses in turn outlining the process and the contribution, including the research questions and opportunities for inductive theorising that emerge.

### *Template analysis*

As stated earlier, template analysis is a type of thematic analysis where the aim is to create an analytic template in which the data can be categorised. As King and Brookes (2017) highlight, thematic analysis is ever present within qualitative organisational research with the aim of identifying, organising and interpreting themes in textual data. Template analysis (King, 2004; 2012) is a form of generic thematic approach in that it is not tied into any particular theoretical or philosophical position (King and Brookes, 2017). It has been used on many different types of qualitative data, for example interview data (Kenny and Briner, 2010); case study data (Waring and Wainwright, 2008); diary data (Radcliffe, 2013) and visual data (Simpson, Slutskey and Simpson, 2012).

### The process

The template analysis conducted followed the conventions outlined by King (2004; 2012). As King and Brookes (2017) suggest, all forms of thematic analysis have two key processes, defining themes and organising themes. In this case all of the interview data was categorised into the analytic template. The template was initially devised inductively through the creation of thematic categories by reading through three transcripts. This initial template was then entered into Nvivo to enable the coding process. As the other transcripts were coded into the template by cutting and pasting chunks of data, the different thematic categories and sub-categories developed. Where appropriate, categories were sub-divided or inserted. A final version of the full template is shown in Table One.

Insert Table One about here

### The contribution of template analysis

In this section we focus upon what this analytic approach highlighted within the data. When compared to other methods there were a number of distinct advantages that template analysis offered: the systematic organisation of the whole dataset enabling specific questions to be asked; the comparison of all respondent comments on particular issues; and the emergence of patterns through the comparison of chunks of data. Taking the systematic organisation of the whole dataset first, the template enabled, for instance, key questions to be asked of the data. An example is that one of the aims of the research was to identify the different types of abuse faced by customers. Here incidents and comments about customer abuse could be coded into the various categories of abuse. Within the template the category of customer abuse was divided into 9 types: attacking the cab; bilking; direction disputes; racism; robbery; rudeness and stropiness; swearing, verbal and general abuse; unexpected abuse; and violence and physical abuse. Hence a simple question such as what type of abuse did the drivers suffer from could be answered by looking at just one area of the template.

The second advantage of template analysis is that it enables an overall picture of the experiences of every driver in relation to a particular question. In some cases this can lead to unexpected findings. Two examples are offered here. The first emerged from the process of constructing the template. Initially any comments about other drivers were coded under the sub-category of abuse (other drivers) as they tended to refer to how other drivers responded to abuse. However, it became apparent that drivers regularly made a range of comments about other drivers that extended beyond those associated with abuse. Therefore 'Other drivers' became a thematic category on its own in the template with a number of different sub-categories. When this data from each driver was considered together, it was apparent that this was an important way of understanding how the drivers accounted for customer abuse in

that they would say that although they worked hard to do a good job, it was other drivers that gave taxi drivers a bad reputation. This finding was something we had not originally anticipated, yet it was identified through the process of constructing the template.

A second example comes from the customer relationship part of the template. On examination of the links across the data in this theme, a particularly interesting finding that emerged was that taxi drivers reported that they were often actively involved in emotion work, particularly in relation to managing the emotions of the customers in the cab. Drivers reported that they could assess someone's emotional state – or work them out – within a few seconds:

“You do get very good people skills but you also get this sort of sixth sense. So you tend, when you're driving along looking for a job, you tend to be eyeing the people up before you've got them in the cab. You become very aware of, not stereotypes but the behaviour of when they are walking and the swagger and the looks. You sort of sense that it is a good job or it could be trouble... ”.

Once a driver had assessed a customer's emotional state they could then seek to minimise any disruptive or abusive intent that the customer may have:

“I mean the thing is, when you get a mad customer or somebody that's stressed out, you've got to understand why they are stressed out and ask them ‘are you in a rush?’ You know by their face or their attitude, analyse that and identify it and then solve it.”

This finding, again something that we had not initially anticipated, emerged because the structure of the template enabled us to consider each of the drivers' comments about the customer relationship together. We could see the prevalence of emotion work and the different ways in which it was handled by different drivers.

A third contribution of template analysis is that in looking at links and patterns across themes it enabled previously unrecognised theoretical links to be identified. An example here is that the use of template analysis helped to identify that for the drivers' good customer service and dignity were very much inter-linked. Some of the data extracts that were coded under 'definitions of good customer service' were also dual coded under 'definitions of dignity'.

For example one driver when asked what dignity at work meant for him replied:

"Basically it's treating people like human beings, please and thank you, open the door, present a clean cab, for a start, that doesn't stink of BO and the like. Treat them with a smile, open the door and ask them if there is anything you can do to make them comfortable. If they say 'no bugger off I don't want to talk to you but I'm going to such a place' that's fine".

Hence dignity is equated with good customer service. Similarly another driver answered that question in the following way:

"I think it's just giving...what I say to people is, I say if there is an old lady, imagine that old lady is your mother. So you're going to jump out and open the door for them and give that attitude. That's what I try and tell the new drivers. When I work a shopping area and they've got bags, get out and help them. 'Are you all right? Get in and put your seat belt on.' I think then you're giving them a bit of dignity, aren't you really?"

This is an interesting theoretical finding given the focus of the research upon how customer service workers experience dignity in the workplace as the implication is that dignity is located within the customer service relationship. Here the suggestion is that whereas in the literature dignity is seen as potentially threatened by a customer service role (Lucas, 2011), this interpretation is suggesting that the relationship between the two may be more complex for this group of workers in that dignity may be enhanced as well as threatened by the service role. The template method enabled the identification of this through the comparison of different data chunks within the themes.

### *Story analysis*

Within the field of story and narrative analysis there is considerable debate about what constitutes a story and what constitutes a narrative (e.g. Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1997). Rather than focus upon narrative, our interest here is in storytelling. There is a rich tradition of analysing stories within management and organizational research indeed Rosalie, Boje, Carlon, Downs and Saylor (2013) identify seven different storytelling paradigms that have been used in the literature. Here we are using an explicit form of story elicitation and analysis that draws on the work of Gabriel (1991; 2000). Gabriel (2017) suggests that a story describes “a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary” (Ricoeur, 1984: 150). The definition of stories here draws upon folklorist interpretations of stories with simple but resonant plots and characters (e.g. Czarniawska, 1997). There is some ambiguity here in that stories may be real or imagined. This means that as Gabriel (2017) suggests, the story teller has a unique privilege of poetic license in that stories may not provide accurate accounts of real-life events but they do provide insights into the meanings accorded to such events and how people interpret them. Stories also have an entertainment purpose and draw upon broader cultural narratives that both the storyteller and the audience will be familiar with.

In this case we were interested in story elicitation, deliberately eliciting stories from research participants as part of the research process (Gabriel and Griffith, 2004). This is different from research that focuses upon naturally occurring stories within company films or documentation for example (e.g. Boje, 1995). Within the management literature stories have been elicited in a number of ways. For example some researchers have asked participants to



write stories. Katila and Eriksson (2013) asked Finnish business school students to write a detailed description and story about the performance of a new CEO. In some cases the CEO was called David Wilson and in other cases Diana Wilson hence enabling the researchers to look at the differences in story content according to gender. Other researchers have elicited stories as part of an interview process as we do here, for example as part of exploring the knowledge held by different groups (Ferneley and Soreperez, 2009).

### The process

The approach to analysis taken here was informed by the procedures for story elicitation outlined by Gabriel and Griffiths (2004). As stated earlier, a critical incident approach was used where participants were invited to tell their stories. In terms of analysing the stories we did the following. Firstly, the transcripts were read through carefully and stories were identified. Secondly these stories were categorised into eight different types. The first six categories of stories were derived from Gabriel and Griffiths (2004) who organised stories as follows: comic stories: these create amusement which might also be at the expense of the story-teller; epic stories: here the theme is heroism, achievement or struggle; tragic stories: invoke pity or fear for the victim or can focus upon undeserved misfortune; romantic stories: incidences where humanity triumphs over negative or difficult forces; gripes: focus upon personal injustice and injury but without any significant emotional content; and reports: not full stories, but rather descriptions of happenings or events without any emotional content.

During the process of coding the stories it became apparent that there was also the need for two other categories of stories that emerged as a result of the distinctive nature of this sample and their work context. One was for those that focused just on customer abuse as the majority of stories fitted into this category. The second was for another category of stories which were

the opposite of gripes. These were stories where drivers were appreciative of customers, hence this category was labelled ‘Appreciation’. In line with the approach of Gabriel and Griffiths (2004) stories were also coded in relation to their theme and the emotions that were associated with the story. A total of 107 stories were identified. Table Two shows the different types of stories, the number in each category, and offers some examples.

Insert Table Two about here

### The contribution of story analysis

When compared to other methods there were a number of distinct advantages that story analysis offered: drawing attention to the emotional aspects of the customer experience; shedding light on the performative aspects of the work; and enabling the theorisation of the episodic. Taking the first issue of bringing out the emotional aspects of encounters, in telling their stories of being on the receiving end of customer abuse the drivers highlighted the range of emotions they experienced both during an abusive encounter and afterwards. These included fear, anger, frustration, regret, annoyance, a desire for preservation, disgust, and the feeling of resignation in some cases. Therefore these stories were rich in detailing the most difficult aspects of their daily work. For example:

“The worst customers we’re getting now are ..... obviously I’m from an Asian background, I’ve got a beard and that, and so it’s these young kids coming back from Afghanistan. We get a lot of grief from them now. The worst one was, not this weekend but the one before, we picked a group of four of them up. I didn’t know they’d come back from Afghanistan. And he got in the cab and straightaway he started. The other 3 were fine and trying to calm him down but he was “I’ve been to Afghanistan because of you! It’s your fault, you f’ing this and f’ing that.” I took him to where he was going luckily there was a police car parked up next to it. I didn’t say anything to the police; I just wanted him out of the cab. But if I had ended up on a street somewhere, dropping him off and the police weren’t there, he would have had a go at the cab”.

Here the story enables the driver to convey his anger, but also his feelings of resignation about such an event. Other emotions were also highlighted by other categories of stories. For example, the epic stories were detailed accounts of where drivers had become involved in taking home customers who had found themselves in trouble for one reason or another. One involved a driver taking a man home who had got lost in the city after a stag night out which involved a 50 mile drive. Another involved a driver who was being followed after picking up a woman from a domestic violence refuge. These stories concluded with the driver feeling proud of what they had done in potentially difficult circumstances, even if their actions had left them out of pocket. Tragic stories focused upon some of the difficult experiences that customers, rather than drivers had encountered. One focused upon a driver taking home a teenager who had run away from a care home, whereas others focused upon the stories that passengers would tell drivers about the troubles in their home lives. Such stories led to the drivers expressing empathy and concern for the customers.

A second contribution is to draw attention to the performative aspects of work. As has been reported by other researchers who have conducted story analysis (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004), the performative aspects of story-telling highlight the interactive role of the researcher as listener, where the pleasure and entertainment of the audience is a key part of the process. With the comic stories for example, we would laugh along with the driver as they were being told. For example, the one female driver interviewed told the following story which was categorised as comic:

“ I’ve had a nun, believe it or not, she went up to the convent in \*\*\*\* and she came out and was about £4 short. She said she would go in to get more change to give me. I sat there and nothing, so I knocked on the door and this other lady came, this nun. I said ‘I just came from High Street in \*\*\*\* and I just dropped somebody off.’ ‘Oh that was Sister \*\*\*\*\*.’ I said ‘oh right, well she was coming in for more money.’ She said ‘I’ll just get her for you.’ So this lovely old nun comes to the door, puts her hand on my head and blesses me and shuts the door. I’m thinking ‘great, brilliant!’ And I

stood there .... I'm thinking and I'm waiting for her to come back. Nothing! I had to just drive away. So straightaway I was back on the taxi rank and I was telling the drivers and they all thought it was funny. So for a while you get a nickname and mine was "nun on the run" for a while because she's not paid me. They were coming out with all stories [saying] I should go to the church at the side of it on Sunday and take the money out of the [collection] box".

The focus of the comic stories was often the driver being surprised by the unexpected behaviour of the customer and indeed of the customer's one-upmanship. Such behaviour could potentially lead to the driver being in a humiliating position, but the humour in the story made the telling instead an enjoyable, shared encounter. For example, part of the fun element of the story above is that the driver shared it with her male colleagues who teased her as a result. The performative nature of stories meant that this method also tended to highlight the more extreme experiences that the drivers' encountered.

A third contribution is that the stories enabled the theorisation of the episodic. There has been an increased interest within management research more generally about the contribution that episodic research can make to our understanding of phenomena (e.g. Shockley and Allen, 2015). This has led to the development of technological methods to capture episodes, such as the development of smart phone aps and video cameras to access episodes such as transitions between work and non-work activities for example (e.g. Whiting et al., 2016). The focus upon episodes led to us starting to theorise that dignity at work, rather than being a fixed concept, could be understood as continually fluctuating as a result of the variety within customer service interactions. So dignity could be present within one customer interaction (or episode) but not another.

### *Metaphor analysis*

The final form of analysis presented here is metaphor analysis. The interest in metaphors within the management and organization field has led to an increased amount of research where metaphors are part of the analytic process, and a range of different approaches to metaphorical analysis have been used in management and organizational research. Some researchers generate metaphors to help us understand a phenomenon, for example Harvey's (2002) use of the metaphor of 'Alice's adventures in wonderland' in the study of HRM in Africa and Tyler and Wilkinson's (2007) use of the metaphor of 'corporate anorexia' as a way of understanding the desire for slenderness in contemporary corporate life. Hence the researcher imposes their own metaphorical framework on the data. Researchers can also identify metaphors through interrogating a dataset to identify the metaphors-in-use (El-Sawad, 2005; Cassell and Lee, 2012). For example Cassell and Lee (2012) looked at the different metaphors trade unionists used to describe learning representatives initiatives, through a reading of interview transcripts to identify metaphors-in-use.

An alternative approach involves deliberately encouraging research participants to generate metaphors. In this method, and in a similar way to the story analysis outlined in the previous section, metaphors are deliberately elicited. For example in their study of how women deal with conflict in the workplace, Burrell, Buzzanell, and McMillan (1992) explicitly asked women what conflict in the workplace was like hence directly encouraging the production of metaphors. In a similar way Tracy et al. (2006) used metaphor elicitation to understand bullying at work, enabling abused workers to characterise how the process felt. Metaphors elicited by participants who had been targeted by workplace bullying likened themselves to vulnerable children, slaves, prisoners, animals, and heartbroken lovers. Hence the elicitation of metaphors is a way of accessing individual sensemaking around a particular experienced phenomenon.

### The process

As stated earlier, a specific question was included in the interview schedule to elicit metaphors. Some drivers also used metaphorical language in other parts of the interview and this was noted in the analytic process. The analysis progressed as follows. Firstly the transcripts were read through carefully and incidences of metaphorical language were identified. Cornelissen et al. (2008) suggest that one of the key issues in conducting this kind of analysis is to be explicit about the metaphor identification process. In order to be classified as an instance of metaphorical language, a phrase had to fit in with the following sentence “Being a taxi driver is like ....” or “Taxi driving is like ...”. Most instances of metaphorical language within the transcripts were in response to that question. The next stage of the process was to seek to code the metaphors thematically. Nvivo was used here to help cut and paste the metaphors into different thematic categories which were inductively generated from the data. This led to five categories of metaphors. The first four categories were fairly coherent and were labelled as heroic, confidante, the unworthy, and predatory metaphors. The final category was diverse and focused upon the role of the taxi driver and work process more generally. This was therefore a miscellaneous category. A summary of the metaphor categories and some examples are provided in Table Three.

Insert Table Three about here

### The contribution of metaphor analysis

When compared to other methods there were two particular aspects of the data that metaphors enabled access to, firstly individual sensemaking around the nature of the customer

relationship, and second differential interpretations of the same phenomenon. The first point to note is that in comparison to the two approaches previously outlined, metaphor analysis relied on a far smaller part of the transcript data. Indeed given that the focus was upon metaphor elicitation, in most cases this may have been the response to just that one question in the interview schedule.

An interesting outcome was that the metaphors that drivers chose all focused the nature of the customer relationship, hence highlighting its centrality to their work experience: a useful research finding. The most potent contribution of the metaphor analysis was to draw attention to different aspects of sensemaking about that customer relationship and alternative characterisations of the customer service role. Hence here we learned that customer service could be enhancing. For example, the first category of metaphors (heroes) saw drivers in a very positive way, portraying them as heroes who seek to protect customers. As a driver suggested when discussing customers who didn't have enough money to get home::

“I think deep down I would still take them, especially if it's a girl. The lads can look after themselves but you wouldn't want a girl in the middle of nowhere vulnerable.... I think even some of the lads you take home; some are quite small and vulnerable. So even if a lad said 'I'm a bit short' chances are I'll say 'no matter, another mile won't kill me.' So I'm a knight in shining armour to get you home”.

The second set of metaphors (confidante) also highlights an enhancing aspect of taxi work, where drivers form a communicative relationship with customers and listen to their views and problems. Drivers used the example of the agony aunt or barmaid here to highlight how customers regularly share quite personal or sensitive information with them during the short period of time they are in the back of the cab:

“Yeah, an agony aunt! It’s like being an agony aunt because you get everyone coming in and everybody wants to tell you about their life. Everybody wants to tell you what is going on in their life, whether it be good or bad, what they’re doing. And like I said, I think people can just off load so much onto you in maybe the 10 minutes to an hour they’re with you and they can walk out of the taxi and they just poured their hearts out to you, and sometimes you feel really sorry for people because sometimes they’re telling you things that’s making them upset. And you’re like ‘are you all right?’ And you feel like giving somebody a cuddle and then you think ‘it’s a total stranger.’ A lot of taxi drivers, not being a female, aren’t touchy feely, but you want to give them a big hug, and you’re thinking ‘a total stranger here.’ So you sort of empathise with everybody. But I would sum it up as I think you’re an agony aunt”.

These metaphors again drew attention to an additional dimension of customer service that drivers’ provide: that of a listening ear. For some of the drivers, listening and engaging in conversation more generally was seen as a key – though unwritten – part of their customer service role. In contrast, the other two categories of metaphors (the untrustworthy and predators) were far more negative and placed the taxi driver as someone worthless in relation to the passengers they carried. Here drivers described themselves as being bottom of the food chain or like a piece of muck stuck on someone’s shoe. So metaphor elicitation draws attention to how within the customer service relationship, the drivers can go from being heroes and confidantes, to being treated as the lowest of the low. Therefore the process enabled a succinct summary of the drivers’ sensemaking processes around their experience of customer service.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Table Four presents a summary comparison of the three analytic approaches. In terms of their contribution we can see that whereas template analysis enables questions to be asked of the whole dataset; the analysis of stories enables a focus upon the emotional and performative aspects of work; and metaphor analysis upon individual sensemaking. As well as enabling



different research questions, we would suggest there that there are alternative opportunities for inductive theorisation that flow from the different foci. For example template analysis enables the identification of theoretical linkages through the technique of chunking different transcripts together; story analysis enables theorisation of the episodic; and metaphor analysis enables theorisation about sensemaking. These are also highlighted in Table Four.

Insert Table Four about here

In comparing and contrasting the different analytic approaches our contribution here has been to draw attention to some of the different opportunities available to researchers when faced with analysing a qualitative data set. It is our aim here to draw attention to the rich variety of approaches that can constitute the qualitative management researcher's toolkit and by offering this introduction to their potential we invite readers to try those that might be new. By making the most of a variety of approaches we highlight the potential of qualitative research to generate a variety of theoretical insights and address a range of different research questions. We noted earlier that researchers tend to stick to approaches they are familiar with, hence this begs the question of when researchers have the opportunity to try and test out new methods. In order to encourage researchers to use such techniques we need to see an increased variety of analytic approaches taught on doctoral programmes and similar development programmes aimed at early career researchers. Given the ongoing pressures on academics to publish, unless researchers learn to use different techniques and become practised in them they will be reticent to use new approaches.

In terms of the contribution of this paper to our understanding of qualitative research, beyond highlighting the insights from the methods with the intention of encouraging the reader to explore them further, a number of lessons can be learned from this experience. The first is that for a range of different analytic tools to be applied, the data clearly needs to be collected

in an appropriate format. Earlier we stated that we had set up the interview schedule in a way that meant that we could elicit stories and metaphors as part of the interview process. However, this was initially done as a result of the research questions that we wanted to address. This leads to the question of whether researchers could use these methods when the interviews had not being explicitly set up in a similar way. Within naturally occurring talk, people do tell stories and use metaphors. Hence a researcher analysing interview transcripts for example could look for these in their data. However, if the concern is primarily with story or metaphor analysis, than the elicitation methods that we have used here clearly mean that there is a greater amount of this type of data generated. Our suggestion here would be that when designing an interview schedule, researchers can look for opportunities for including different types of questions that facilitate different forms of analysis. Hence there is a need to consider potentially different analytic tools before an interview schedule is finalised. This kind of approach will suit some interview designs rather than others and is better placed in a semi-structured, thematic interview format (Cassell, 2015).

A further question is how these methods can be used together to provide insights into a phenomenon such as the links between customer service and dignity at work. Having conducted each of these analyses separately so far it would seem that combining the different methods would enable a richer variety of insights into the data than might emerge from one approach alone. However, Pritchard (2012) suggests that there is little guidance for qualitative researchers who wish to use different types of qualitative methods in the same project. In reflecting upon our experience of writing this paper, one of the challenges faced is how such detailed qualitative analysis from these different methods can be summarised and presented in one paper, given the word length constraints. Here for example, we have been

able to provide only a cursory introduction to the methods in use when there are rich and detailed literatures on each of the approaches.

Furthermore, the suggestion that different methods provided answers to different research questions inevitably complicates the reporting process. To focus upon one specific research question with one method of data analysis is potentially neater. As Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) highlight, researchers are expected to present findings in a way that conforms with a positivist perspective, so the emphasis is upon the presentation of ‘facts’ or ‘findings’. Using different methods however, draws attention to the ambiguity that is inherent within the qualitative data analytic process and the problematic nature of ‘findings’. This has implications for how the research write-up is assessed. There may also be additional complications that our choice of three methods has not enabled us to explore. The analytic approaches chosen here do not necessarily contradict each other philosophically in that they can all be comfortably used within an interpretivist framework which is our own preferred stance. However, a researcher choosing other types of approaches might encounter the challenges that emerge from applying mixed qualitative methods from competing paradigmatic stances. In looking at this in a more positive way, there are exciting opportunities here in terms of inductive theorising and the combination of the different theoretical insights. The next stage perhaps is to examine the findings in more detail and combine those theoretical insights to see what inferences can be made.

In conclusion, from our perspective as analysts, this process has left us with a feeling of far greater insights into the data than we believe we have had in other projects where we have just focused upon one analytic approach. These insights have emerged from the diversity of foci that the three different methods have offered. We are not suggesting that other

researchers choose the three analytic techniques that we have here, but rather that opportunities are taken to explore the different interpretations of phenomena enabled by different analytic approaches. At a time when there is increasing standardization in published qualitative management research (Cornelissen, 2017), we are keen to champion diversity in analytic techniques.

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**Table One: The thematic template**

1. Background of the interviewee
  - 1.1. Cab ownership or rental
  - 1.2. Family
  - 1.3. Initial expectations of the job
  - 1.4. Previous jobs
2. Customer abuse
  - 2.1. Location and time of abuse
  - 2.2. Frequency
  - 2.3. Suggestions for combating abuse
  - 2.4. Responses to abuse
    - 2.4.1. Changes in behaviour
    - 2.4.2. Dealing with it at the time
    - 2.4.3. Family
    - 2.4.4. Other taxi drivers
    - 2.4.5. Police
    - 2.4.6. Switching off
  - 2.5. Types of abuse
    - 2.5.1. Attacking the cab
    - 2.5.2. Direction disputes
    - 2.5.3. Not paying doing a runner aka bilking
    - 2.5.4. Other customer anti-social behaviour
    - 2.5.5. Racism
    - 2.5.6. Robbery
    - 2.5.7. Rudeness and stroppy
    - 2.5.8. Swearing, verbal and general abuse
    - 2.5.9. Unexpected
    - 2.5.10. Violence and physical abuse
3. Customer relationships
  - 3.1. Emotion management others
  - 3.2. Emotional labour self
  - 3.3. Listening
  - 3.4. Sussing someone out
  - 3.5. Talking
  - 3.6. Understanding and empathising
4. Customer service
  - 4.1. Bags and doors
  - 4.2. Customer as always right
  - 4.3. Definitions of
  - 4.4. Extra aspects beyond the call of duty
5. Customers
  - 5.1. Business people
  - 5.2. Celebrities
  - 5.3. Drunk
  - 5.4. Elderly
  - 5.5. Ethnic groups
  - 5.6. Men
  - 5.7. Regulars

- 5.8. Teenagers and young people
- 5.9. Women
- 6. Dignity
  - 6.1. Definitions
  - 6.2. Threats to
- 7. Job characteristics
  - 7.1. Cost of running a cab
  - 7.2. Feel bad
  - 7.3. Feel good
  - 7.4. Flexibility
  - 7.5. Negative aspects: dislikes
  - 7.6. Pay and income
  - 7.7. Positive aspects: likes
  - 7.8. Private hire drivers
  - 7.9. Training and licensing
  - 7.10. Unexpected nature of the job
  - 7.11. Variety
  - 7.12. Waiting about
  - 7.13. Working hours
- 8. Other drivers
  - 8.1. Ethnic minorities
  - 8.2. Exploiting customers
  - 8.3. Female
- 9. Stereotypes
  - 9.1. Extorting money from customers
  - 9.2. Impact of previous customer experience
  - 9.3. Other stereotypes

**Table Two: The story categories and examples**

<b>Type of story (based on Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Emotion</b>
Abuse	33	Racism	Fear / anger
Comic	22	Imaginary passengers	Mirth / incredulity
Gripes	10	An irritating customer	Irritation / annoyance
Appreciation	10	Eric Cantona	Pleasure
Epic	10	The lost man	Pride / satisfaction
Romantic	10	Edna	Warmth
Tragic	8	The court trip	Sadness/ surprise
Reports	4	Other drivers	

**Table Three: The identified metaphors and examples**

<b>Metaphor category</b>	<b>Example from the category</b>
Heroes	Missing link
	Unsung hero
	Guardian angel
	Knight in shining armour
	Public servant
Confidante	Hairdresser
	Agony aunt
	Barmaid
	Actor
The unworthy	Underling
	Robot
	Bottom of food chain
	Piece of muck
Predator	Lion
	Vultures
	Rat
	Dog eat dog
	Lamb / wolf
The Job	An opinion
	An adventure
	A blank canvas
	Hairdressers

**Table Four: Comparison of the methods**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Potential research questions</b>	<b>Opportunities for inductive theorisation</b>
<b>Template analysis</b>  (using whole dataset)	Systematic organisation of the whole dataset.  Enables comparison of all respondent responses on a given issue.	Enables direct questions to be asked of the data, for example what types of customer abuse do the taxi drivers' face and how do they deal with abuse?	Process of devising the template draws attention to unexpected findings of patterns.  Enables the focus on patterns through the comparison of chunks of data and identification of linkages
<b>Story analysis</b>  (using identified stories)	Drawing attention to the emotional aspects of the phenomenon.  Shedding light on the performative aspects of work.	Can lead to a focus upon just one aspect of the research, as asked by the story question as a critical incident.  Facilitates access to emotions, so can address questions about how participants feel about aspects of their working lives without asking directly.	Enables theorisation of the episodic, for example that dignity fluctuates within each customer service encounter.
<b>Metaphor analysis</b>  (using identified metaphors)	Captures a richness of individual sensemaking or understandings about an aspect of the topic.  Enables differential interpretations of the same phenomenon to be surfaced.	Accessing meaning and sensemaking around a research topic, for example how do taxi drivers understand the nature of the customer service relationship?	Enables theorisation of how sensemaking occurs and what is idiographic and what is shared.