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In Defense of Being "Native"

The Case for Insider Academic Research

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Within organizational research, the subject of insider academic research has received relatively little consideration. By insider research, we mean research by complete members of organizational systems in and on their own organizations. Insider research can be undertaken within any of the three major research paradigms—positivism, hermeneutics, and action research—selected and presented in this article. First, we revisit some of the established research paradigms to see what position they might have on insider research. Second, we explore the dynamics of insider research under the headings of access, preunderstanding, role duality, and managing organizational politics. Our conclusion is that within each of the main streams of research, there is no inherent reason why being native is an issue and that the value of insider research is worth reaffirming.

Keywords: *insider research; research paradigms; positivism; hermeneutics; action research; reflexivity; access; preunderstanding; role duality; organizational politics*

Within the continuing considerations of the nature of and approaches to organizational research, the subject of insider academic research has received relatively little consideration (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005), and when it does, it is an argument against going native. In the context of discussing funded qualitative research, Morse (1998, p. 61) makes the following point strongly: "It is not wise for an investigator to conduct a qualitative study in a setting where he or she is already employed and has a work role. The dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and they may place the researcher in an untenable position." Abstracting from the particular context regarding funded research, this statement expresses a commonly held view in very clear terms. It is this view that we subject to critique in this article. Indeed, we are countering it.

By insider research, we mean research by complete members of organizational systems and communities in and on their own organizations, in contrast to organizational research that is conducted by researchers who temporarily join the organization for the purposes and duration of the research (Adler & Adler, 1987). Insider research also may be undertaken as collaboration between insiders and outsiders (Adler, Shani, & Styhre, 2004; Bartunek & Louis, 1996). What is central to this article is how complete members may undertake academic research in their own organizations while retaining the choice of remaining a

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member within a desired career path when the research is completed. Self-ethnography, as outlined by Alvesson (2003), is similar to our understanding of insider research:

> A self-ethnography is a study and a text in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a "natural access," is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants. The researcher then works and/or lives in the setting and then uses the experiences, knowledge and access to empirical material for research purposes. (p. 174)

In our understanding of insider research, the research task is more formal, thought out, and planned than is the situation outlined by Alvesson, in which the research task is almost incidental.

Academic research primarily is focused on theory development and may or may not be concerned about actions or practice. Insider research typically is seen as problematic, and indeed, frequently is disqualified because it is perceived not to conform to standards of intellectual rigor because insider researchers have a personal stake and substantive emotional investment in the setting (Alvesson, 2003; Anderson & Herr, 1999; Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). Insider researchers are native to the setting and so have insights from the lived experience. Rather than this being considered a benefit, insiders are perceived to be prone to charges of being too close, and thereby, not attaining the distance and objectivity deemed to be necessary for valid research. We are all insiders of many systems—our families, communities, and organizations—and the knowledge we have of these systems is rich and complex. We are arguing that as researchers through a process of reflexive awareness, we are able to articulate tacit knowledge that has become deeply segmented because of socialization in an organizational system and reframe it as theoretical knowledge and that because we are close to something or know it well, that we can research it. Reflexivity is the concept used in the social sciences to explore and deal with the relationship between the researcher and the object of research. We acknowledge and use two forms of reflexivity—methodological and epistemic—as outlined by Johnson and Duberley (2000). Epistemic reflexivity focuses on researchers' belief systems and is a process for analyzing and challenging metatheoretical assumptions. Methodological reflexivity is concerned with the monitoring of the behavioral impact on the research setting as a result of carrying out the research. This requires us to follow the research procedure and protocols identified and demanded by the different research traditions. In a separate but not disinterested vein, Bourdieu's notion of social praxeology, in which reflexivity and relational thinking are central, supports our focus on this neglected area (Everett, 2002).

Inquiry from the inside and inquiry from the outside are two modes of inquiry presented by Evered and Louis (1981). They juxtapose the two approaches. *Inquiry from the outside* refers to traditional positivist science, in which the researchers' relationship to the setting is detached and neutral. The basis for validity is measurement and logic. Researchers act as onlookers, and they apply a priori categories to create universal, context-free knowledge. In contrast, inquiry from the inside involves researchers as actors immersed in local situations generating contextually embedded knowledge that emerges from experience. Evered and Louis's use of *inside* and *outside* does not equate with our use in this article, which refers to organizational membership.

Who does insider research? Whereas the term *research* is not always applied to the inquiry and outputs of those who reflect on their own experience (Barnard, 1938; Schon, 1983), in

our view, such reflective practice does not warrant exclusion. It is becoming increasingly common for individuals who are participating in academic programs, particularly on a part-time basis in conjunction with full-time employment, to select their own organizational setting as the site for their research (Coghlan, 2001; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). Individuals make this selection on the assumption that the site with which they are familiar and have ready access can provide a more than adequate field setting for their research. It may be noted that by and large, this research does not get published in refereed journals, has difficulty in being accepted as real research, and frequently is referred to as a company project.

The aim of the article is to readdress the negative view and general neglect of the subject of insider research by affirming its theoretical academic value within the different research traditions. Our consideration of insider-outsider research is not to be confused with the long-standing relevance debate between academic theory and practitioner interests. This question is not referred to in this article, because we are focusing solely on the development of academic knowledge. This focus on one methodology issue, the role of the insider, is a distinctive contribution to the broader debate on knowledge creation and transfer between practitioners and academics (Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001). We consider this subject by first revisiting some of the established research paradigms to see what position they might have on insider researchers carrying rigorous theoretical research. Second, we explore the dynamics of insider research under the headings of access, preunderstanding, role duality, and managing organizational politics.

Research Paradigms and Theoretical Development

Academic researchers engage in a dialogue of ideas (theory) and evidence (data) when they construct representations or theories of organizational and management activities. Organization and management theory is a contestable and contested "network of concepts and theories which are engaged in a struggle to impose certain meanings rather than others on shared understanding of organizational life in late modernity" (Reed, 1996, p. 45). Reed identified four key debates central to the rival theoretical claims: (a) the agency-structure debate, (b) the constructivist-positivist debate, (c) the local-global debate, and finally, (d) the individualism-collectivism debate. In addition, there is no clear consensus as to what counts as valid, worthwhile data or evidence (Stablein, 1996). Some researchers run well-controlled experiments, others conduct large-scale surveys, some others spend months in the field collecting ethnographic narratives, and still others deconstruct text. Hence, organizational researchers differ in their responses to the following three theory- and data-related questions:

1. What is the nature and role of theory in research?
2. What is the ultimate goal or aim of organizational studies?
3. What is the nature of representation in observational field studies? (Putnam, Bantz, Deetz, Mumby, & Van Maanen, 1993)

These differing responses constitute different epistemologies, and the resultant debate relates to the representational assumptions on which the knowledge claims made by different

scholars and theorists can be evaluated and legitimated. Different epistemological approaches encourage different kinds of reflexivity (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Theory implicitly is embedded in all research approaches. Pure description is laden with implicit power relationships, and all research operates from a theoretical slant.

Researchers' epistemological and ontological perspective determines what they consider as a valid, legitimate contribution to theory irrespective of whether we called it development, confirmation, validation, creation, building, or generation (Peter & Olsen, 1993). An objectivist view of epistemology accepts the possibility of a theory-neutral language; in other words, it is possible to access the external world objectively. A subjectivist view denies the possibility of theory-neutral language. An objectivist view of ontology assumes that social and natural reality have an independent existence before human cognition, whereas a subjectivist ontology assumes that what is taken as reality is an output of human cognitive process (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

In the social sciences, many different inquiry-research paradigms have existed and continue to exist and are differentiated in terms of their ontology, epistemology, and methodology. These various typologies have different labels with little consistency and use different dimensions of contrast (Deetz, 1996). Before the 1990s, these typologies and schema tended to consist of two ideal types with such labels as qualitative versus quantitative, positivism versus humanism, positivism versus idealism, and positive-empirist versus relativist-constructionist (Evered & Louis, 1981; Deshpande, 1983; Hirchman, 1986; Peter & Olsen, 1983; Reichardt & Cook, 1979). Since the early 1990s, the various schema tended to have three or more ideal types (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Heron & Reason, 1997; Perry, Riege, & Brown, 1999; Reason & Torbert, 2001). Guba and Lincoln identified and described four major paradigms that frame research: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Heron and Reason start from and extend Guba and Lincoln's framework to articulate a participatory paradigm for action research.

In the early part of the 21st century, the extant research methods and methodological literature acknowledge and recognize that today there are three main social research paradigms (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Johnson & Duberley, 2000, 2003; Table 1). This also is reflected in the commercial world, in which publishers such as Sage have identified three methodological streams and publish large, expensive handbooks with titles such as the following: (a) *Quantitative Research* (Kaplan, 2004), (b) *Qualitative Research* (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004), and (c) *Action Research* (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Like all typologies, it is an oversimplification with much variation within each type, and some overlap between types. This expected problem is not surprising given the historical nature and the ongoing academic debates that are the core of research methodology.

The dominant approach or paradigm in management and organizational studies has been positivism and its successors (explanation, hypotheticodeductive, multimethod eclecticism). These approaches are defined primarily by their view that an external reality exists and that an independent, value-free researcher can examine this reality. In other words, they adhere to an objectivist (realist) ontology and an objectivist epistemology. Positivists adopt a methodological approach toward reflexivity and concentrate on improving methods and their application (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

The hermeneutic tradition, the other main approach (sometimes referred to as phenomenology, constructivist, interpretivist, postmodern interpretivism, or relativist approach),

Table 1
Research Paradigms

Philosophical Foundations	Positivism	Hermeneutic and Postmodernism	Critical Realism and Action Research
Ontology	Objectivist	Subjectivist	Objectivist
Epistemology	Objectivist	Subjectivist	Subjectivist
Theory	Generalizable	Particular	Particular
Reflexivity	Methodological	Hyper	Epistemic
Role of Researcher	Distanced from data	Close to data	Close to data

Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2005).

argues that there is no objective or single knowable external reality and that the researcher is an integral part of the research process, not separate from it. This distinction is based on the subject-object dichotomy. This ontological, subjective-versus-objective dimension concerns the assumptions social theories make about the nature of the social world. This approach follows a subjectivist (relativist) ontology and epistemology. Postmodernism tends to adopt a hyperreflexivity that focuses on reflexive deconstruction of own practice.

The third approach, identified by Johnson and Duberley (2000), is critical realism, which accords with our action research. This approach follows a subjectivist epistemology similar to the hermeneutic tradition but an objectivist ontology. This approach concentrates on epistemic reflexivity, which looks at exposing interests and enabling emancipation through self-reflexivity. Positivism and its successors are concerned with generalization and universal knowledge, whereas the hermeneutic and critical realism is more interested in particular knowledge.

Positivist Tradition

Positivism has been built on the empiricist tradition of deductive-nomological and hypotheticodeductive models and aims at explaining the identity of the relevant generalizations of the event being studied. Research is seen as an objective process whereby the researcher, in the role of a detached observer, describes and explains particular social phenomena. For the positivists, theory consists of three basic components: (a) concepts or constructs, (b) propositions or statements linking these concepts together, and (c) rules for connecting concepts with the empirical world (measurement). Concepts are abstract terms or symbols that represent the common features of otherwise diverse phenomena (e.g., organizational effectiveness, job satisfaction). The positivists' approach involves the development of a theoretical structure or framework before its testing through empirical evidence. Concepts that represent an important aspect of the theoretical structure cannot be observed directly and need to be defined both nominally and operationally. Operational definitions try to link concepts to the empirical world, but their ability to capture reality is invariably problematic. Advocates of this approach stress the importance of reliability, validity, and accurate measurement before research outcomes can contribute to knowledge. Reliability is the extent to which measurement is free of variable errors. Validity is the extent to which measurement is free from systematic error. From this perspective, measurement is valid only in

the light of theory. Without concepts and their definition, it is impossible to design valid measures. The empiricist tradition has had a dominant position both in organizational studies and management science (e.g., Burns & Stalker, 1961; Gadiesh & Gilbert, 1998; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Miles & Snow, 1986). Given the all-importance of method, it is a little surprising that there is no tradition of the positivists' doing research from an insider position. This tradition argues that what is more important in the development of scientific knowledge and theory is not the sources of the theories or ideas, but the process by which those ideas are tested.

Hermeneutic Tradition

The hermeneutic tradition understands social reality by interpreting the meanings held by the social actors or members of the social group. This involves entering into the culture, understanding shared values, speaking the culture's language, and so on. The researcher is an engaged participant whose critical and analytic observation of the culture is integral to the research activity. Successful practice is the result of personal knowledge, judgment, and experimental action:

> Appropriate action is not based on knowledge of the replication of previously observed relationships between actions and outcomes. It is based on knowing how particular actors define their present situations or on achieving consensus on defining situations so that planned actions will produce their intended consequences. (Susman & Evered, 1978, p. 590)

In the hermeneutic tradition, the researcher ideally enters the research site with few or no theoretical preconceptions. Whereas this condition never can be realized fully in practice, researchers are encouraged to avoid premature conceptualization or theorizing and instead are encouraged to let the key themes or concepts on which theory will be built emerge from the empirical evidence. Theory, in the sense that an ethnographer is likely to use the term, is more helpful after one's fieldwork has begun (or in some cases, completed) than it is before. Theory (sometimes referred to as a symbolic system) is simply a way of abbreviating, of centering, of organizing, and of trying to make sense of experience rather than something to be constructed, deconstructed, tested, confirmed, disconfirmed, honored, or otherwise used to direct a study (Putnam et al., 1993). Thick description and narrative representation yield better insights than does research driven by theory and political implications. Researchers are merely the interpreters between the community they describe and the audience to which they report their findings. All formal knowledge can do is offer an account of the local context in time. Advocates of this approach will talk about such criteria as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability rather than reliability and validity (Stablein, 1996).

The situation is different for the hermeneutic approach, in which subjective interpretation is key to the research process. Here, the process demands that the researcher get close to the research subject. In its conventional sense, ethnography means a full-time involvement of a researcher during a lengthy period of time and consists of continuing interaction with the targets of research on their home ground. It is primarily carried out through fieldwork in which the ethnographer lives with or lives like those who are being studied, sharing firsthand the environment, problems, language, rituals, and social relationships of a group

of people. The researcher operates in the role of participant-observer. Ethnography joins culture and fieldwork by attempting to bridge the world of the ethnographer and the world of the target culture.

The classic Hawthorne experiments (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) and the subsequent work of such researchers as Dalton (1959), Roy (1959), Goffman (1961), Buroway (1979), Halle (1984), Whyte (1984), Jones, Moore, and Synder (1988), Zuboff (1988), Young (1991), Kunda (1993), and Schein (1996), to name a few, provide a rich legacy of studies on the complex life of organizations. For some authors—Buroway, Halle, Roy, Kunda, and Whyte—the research process involved becoming a temporary member of the organization to observe firsthand how life was lived. Others, such as Goffman, Zuboff, and Schein, came and remained as outsiders while interviewing and observing members of the organizations that they studied. Young was a complete member of his organization.

Critical Realism and Action Research Tradition

Action research focuses on research in action rather than research about action. It is participative in that the members of the system that is being studied participate actively in the cyclical process. Action research aims at both taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Gummesson, 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Susman & Evered, 1978; Toulmin & Gustavsen, 1996). As its intended outcomes are both an action and a theory outcome, action research does not recognize the distinction between academic and practitioner knowledge. According to principles of action research, the traditional split between research and action is, in many respects, a false distinction, and it typically is based on extreme views of what academic researchers are and what practitioners are. Gummesson builds bridges between the two by seeing both groups as knowledge workers, whereby each has a different emphasis in relation to theory and practice; one pecks at theory and contributes to practice, and the other pecks at practice and contributes to theory.

Theory development in action research is brought about through a cyclical process. There are two action-research cycles operating in parallel (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). One cycle focuses on the core action-research project through consciously and deliberately (a) planning, (b) taking action, and (c) evaluating the action, leading to further planning and so on. The second cycle is a reflection cycle that is an action-research cycle about the action-research cycle. This metacycle inquires into the enactment of the core action-research project and exposes engagement in the cycles of actions to critique and learning. This most challenging question deals with the extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from reflection on the story.

Action research has provided rich accounts of and reflections on interventions in organizations that have contributed to developing theoretical understanding of organizations and how they change. Important findings on such themes as managing resistance to change (Coch & French, 1948), cultural change (Jacques, 1952), health system change (Shani & Eberhardt, 1987), participative change (Whyte, 1991), and information technology–enabled change (McDonagh & Coghlan, 2001) have come through action research.

Action research provides the simplest basis for insider research. Interventions by managers and other complete organizational members offer interesting contributions to developing

understanding of the role of the manager and the internal dynamics of organizations (Coghlan, 2001; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). As researcher-interventionists work to enact change in their own organizations, their action-research approach enables rich insider accounts of their work and valuable understanding of what it is really like in organizations (Krim, 1988; Bartunek, Crosta, Dame, & LeLachleur, 2000).

Research Traditions and Insider Research

Research-methods books and articles describing and debating the empiricist positivist tradition never address the phenomena of insider research. Hermeneutic research using participant observation fieldwork long has engaged with and debated the role of the insiders in the research process. Action research provides the simplest basis for insider research. It involves change experiments on real problems in social systems within organizations. It focuses on a particular problem and seeks to provide assistance to the client system.

Adler and Adler (1987) describe three types of membership roles in ethnographic field research: peripheral member, active member, and complete member. The greatest difference between participation and complete membership (CMR) lies in the issue of going native. Complete memberships embrace the native experience, and this enhances the data-gathering process. Data gathering does not occur only through the detached observational role but through the subjectively immersed role as well. Alvesson (2003) argues that *observing participant* is a better term to use than *participant observer*. Participation comes first and only occasionally is complemented with observation in a research-focus sense. The opportunistic complete-membership role, as outlined by Adler and Adler, is closest to our idea of insider researchers. Complete memberships have an opportunity to acquire understanding in use rather than reconstituted understanding. Riemer (1977) argues that rather than neglecting at-hand knowledge or expertise, researchers should turn familiar situations, timely events, or special expertise into objects of study.

This orientation was abandoned partly during the classical era, in which participant observation replaced the life history and the emphasis shifted toward greater objectivity and detachment. Participation was accepted and accorded legitimacy, but subjectivity, involvement, and commitment were thrust aside (Adler & Adler, 1987). The classical school bifurcates the researcher into two separate parts: the participant role that interacts with members and forms relationships and the research role that gathers the data. In Adler and Adler's view, this distinction occurred more in theory than in practice and objectification of self occurred in the analysis rather than in the fieldwork. The style of the then-current epistemology was to suppress the membership role by analyzing the material from the outsider perspective and emphasizing detachment.

Researchers who undertake a research project in and on their own organization do so as complete members who retain the choice of remaining members within a desired career path when the research is completed. Insider research has its own dynamics that distinguish it from an external-researcher approach (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). The researchers already are immersed in the organization and have built up knowledge of the organization from being an actor in the processes being studied. Nielsen and Repstad (1993) describe insider research as a journey from nearness to distance—and back. Insider research also may be

undertaken as a collaboration between insiders and outsiders (Adler et al., 2004; Bartunek & Louis, 1996; Coch & French, 1948; Greenwood, 1999; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

An important aspect of insider research is the role the organizational system plays in having a stake in the research. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) reflect on how either or both system and researcher may or may not have a commitment to self-learning from the research. They outline a four-quadrant framework that juxtaposes intended self-study in action with no intended self-study in action on the part of both the system and the researcher. For instance, in traditional research approaches, there is a low level of intended self-study in action on the part of both. In action research, there may be disparity between them, as instanced by Krim (1988) when he undertook an action-inquiry research project relating to his own organizational role whereas the system made no commitment, and indeed, even opposed the form of inquiry in which Krim was engaging. In contrast, Bartunek et al. (2000) describe three insider-action research projects that addressed issues of operational improvement without any specific attention to the researchers' own learning in action.

The Dynamics of Insider Research

There are a number of significant challenges for those considering research in their own organization, which we will explore under the following headings: access, preunderstanding, role duality, and organizational politics. The consequences of these four challenges for the three main research paradigms also will be discussed.

Access

Primary access refers to the ability to get into the organizational system and to be allowed to undertake research. For outsider researchers, gaining primary access is the central issue they have to confront. Once they have obtained primary access, secondary access, seen as part of the negotiated primary access, is generally relatively easy to obtain. In contrast, the reverse is true for insider researchers. They are already members of the organization and so have primary access. Although they have primary access, they may or may not have secondary access, that is, they may or may not have access to specific parts of the organization that are relevant to their research. By parts of the organization, we mean not only functional areas such as departments but also hierarchical areas whereby there is restricted access to specific privileged information that may not be available otherwise. Insider researchers do find, however, that membership of the organization means that some avenues are closed to them because of their position in the organization. Clearly, any researcher's status in the organization has an impact on access. Access at one level automatically may lead to limits or access at other levels. The higher the status of the researcher, the more access she has or the more networks she can access, particularly downward through the hierarchy. Of course, being in a high hierarchical position may exclude access to many informal and grapevine networks.

Fundamentally, secondary access means access to documentation, data, people, and meetings. Krim (1988) worked at developing a successful labor-management participation

program in a United States city hall. This was part of his job as director of personnel for human-resource development. At the same time, he was enrolled in a doctoral program in a local university and undertook an action-inquiry approach to the setting up of the labor-management participation program as it was happening. Because his research project was part of his job, he had primary access to the actors and events that were shaping the development of the participation program. For insider researchers undertaking research in a positivist mode, secondary access depends on the selected research topic and the political perception of that topic. Organizational surveys are carried out infrequently by organizational members whose tasks are other than as an internal researcher, such as is the case of an internal-market researcher. The primary value of these surveys is to understand customer or employee opinions and perspectives on the company, the market it serves, or the work the employees do (Kraut, 1996). This article is not focusing on this practice-oriented knowledge, as our concern is why there is no published academic knowledge or theory from the positivists' tradition. For those following a hermeneutic approach, insider research tends to be covert, as reported by Young (1991), whose ethnographic study of the police force of which he was a member was done surreptitiously as such study was considered by his peers to be espionage. For those engaging in action research, in which the aim is organizational improvement or change or the resolution of a problem, secondary access depends on ownership of the project by senior management and its evaluation of the political effects of inquiry.

An important aspect of negotiating the research project is to assess the degree of secondary access to which one is allowed. Of course, what is espoused at the outset and then actually allowed may be different once the project is underway and at a critical stage. There may be a significant gap between the aspiration toward purity of research and the reality. How access is realized may depend on the type of research being undertaken and the way information is disseminated.

Negotiating access with superiors is a tricky business, particularly if the research project aims at rigorous theoretical work. It raises questions about the different needs that must be satisfied through the project. Insider researchers have needs when doing a solid piece of research that will contribute to general theory for the broader academic community. They also may have needs when doing a piece of research in the organization that will be of benefit to the organization. In general, researchers' superiors have needs regarding confidentiality, sensitivity to others, and organizational politics. Krim (1988) reported how, when his notes were pilfered from his computer and sent anonymously to a key protagonist, he had to deal with the perception that his academic supervisor was controlling the process from outside the organization. The above-outlined research-access challenges posed by either insider or outsider research do not invalidate any of the main tenets of different research traditions.

Preunderstanding

"Preunderstanding refers to such things as people's knowledge, insights and experience before they engage in a research programme" (Gummesson, 2000, p. 57). The knowledge, insights, and experience of the insider researchers apply not only to theoretical understanding of organizational dynamics but also to the lived experience of the researchers' own

organization. The lived experience can be limited to one section of a large corporation or a long, diverse, extensive association with a small organization. Preunderstanding extends the concept of epistemic reflexivity to explicitly include livid experiences. The advantages and disadvantages associated with researching a lived experience apply equally to all research traditions, but the role of the researcher's self is prioritized and dealt with differently. Positivists adopt a methodological approach, hermeneutic postmodernists a hyper approach, and action researchers an epistemic approach toward reflexivity. Nielsen and Repstad (1993) express it; using one's preunderstanding is a matter of moving from closeness to distance and back again. Stephenson and Greer (1981), in their reflection on ethnographers' researching their own communities, point to three sets of issues related to preunderstanding. First, are insider researchers in a better position to elucidate meanings in events with which they are already familiar? Second, will insider researchers seek out informants who are most like them, and therefore, not cover the full range of informants who can provide different sources of information? Third, what are the advantages and problems of occupying a familiar role in a particular social setting?

Nielsen and Repstad (1993) outline some examples of such experience and preunderstanding. Managers have knowledge of their organization's everyday life. They know the everyday jargon. They know the legitimate and taboo phenomena of what can be talked about and what cannot. They know what occupies colleagues' minds. They know how the informal organization works and to whom to turn for information and gossip. They know the critical events and what they mean within the organization. They are able to see beyond objectives that are merely window dressing. When they are inquiring, they can use the internal jargon, draw on their own experience in asking questions and interviewing, be able to follow up on replies, and so obtain richer data. They are able to participate in discussions or merely observe what is going on without others' being necessarily aware of their presence. They can participate freely without drawing attention to themselves and creating suspicion.

There are also some disadvantages to being close to the data. When insider researchers are interviewing, they may assume too much and so not probe as much as if they were outsiders or ignorant of the situation. They may think they know the answer and not expose their current thinking to alternative reframing. They may find it difficult to obtain relevant data because as a member, they have to cross departmental, functional, or hierarchical boundaries, or because as an insider, they may be denied deeper access that might not be denied an outsider. These pose considerable challenges to the manager-researcher and require rigorous introspection, integration, and reflection on experience to expose underlying assumptions and unreflected action to continuous testing (Argyris et al., 1985). The research challenges associated with preunderstanding derived from lived experiences and theoretical understanding apply to and do not invalidate any of the outlined research traditions.

Role Duality: Organizational and Researcher Roles

When insider researchers augment their normal organizational membership role with the research enterprise, it can be difficult and awkward and can become confusing for them. Jeffcut (1996) reported how he undertook covert and semicovert fieldwork in his role as an educational evaluator of trainers and trainees. He sought to record the actions and interaction of the trainers and trainees in real time as they formed and shaped the culture of the new

organization. Because he needed his data recording to be as inconspicuous as possible, he limited himself to recording activities to which his work role could be extended convincingly. His work role gave him substantial freedom regarding access and surreptitious data recording. At the same time, he reported how he had to manage a dual burden of working and/or researching, which made demands on his energy and focus of attention. Through time, he withdrew from his training role and became more immersed in his researching role.

As a result of trying to sustain a full organizational membership role and the research perspective simultaneously, insider researchers are likely to encounter role conflict and find themselves caught between loyalty tugs, behavioral claims, and identification dilemmas. This applies equally to all research approaches. Stephenson and Greer (1981) point to two issues related to role duality. First, what is the potential for role conflict and value conflict when researchers study a familiar setting? Second, are there problems relating to those who are researched after the research is completed? Young (1991) refers to a deconstruction of identity as he experienced a split between the anthropological reflexive analysis of his researcher role and the disciplined controlling requirements of life in the ranks of the police force. Homa (1998) reflected on what it was like to combine the roles of CEO and researcher as dual citizenship. In his experience, an intellectual excitement was awakened in him through the research (which he judged to be rare in executives). He developed specialist knowledge that contrasted with the generalist knowledge an executive tends to hold.

Whether the research is overt, covert, or semicovert affects whether data gathering is conspicuous or inconspicuous. As Whyte (1984) comments, research becomes more overt if the researcher's questions are perceived to be unusual. Even in overt situations, managing role duality may be difficult. Holian (1999) reported how her additional research role added a complex dimension to her organizational role. She found that when organizational members provided information to her in confidence, there was some doubt as to whether it was in confidence to her as a researcher or as a senior executive. Merely asking informants which hat they saw her wearing at the time did not resolve the uncertainty. If information was provided to her as a senior executive, she may have been authorized or even obliged to act on it to prevent harm to others. If it were provided to her as a researcher, she might not have the right to do so. Whatever the role, organizational members knew she was the same person and knew what they had told her and that she could not forget it.

Researchers enacting two roles affect their relationships with fellow organizational members (Adler & Adler, 1987). The new dimension of their relationship to fellow organizational members sets them apart from ordinary members. Their organizational relationships typically are lodged and enmeshed in a network of membership affiliations. These friendships and research ties can vary in character from openness to restrictiveness. Insider researchers are likely to find that their associations with various individuals and groups in the setting will influence their relationships with others whom they encounter, affecting the data that can be generated in working with them.

Nielsen and Repstad (1993) cite a number of specific role-duality-related advantages and disadvantages of insider research. Insider researchers may have a strong desire to influence and want to change the organization. They may feel empathy for their colleagues and so be motivated to keep up the endeavor. These are beneficial in that they may sustain researchers' energy and a drawback in that they may lead to erroneous conclusions. Insider researchers have to deal with the dilemma of writing a report of what they have found and

dealing with the aftermath with superiors and colleagues if they do, on one hand, and doctoring their report to keep their job on the other. When they are observing colleagues at work and recording their observations, they may be perceived as spying or breaking peer norms. Probably the most important issue for insider researchers, particularly when they want to remain and progress in the organization, is managing organizational politics.

This issue is handled differently in the different traditions. Positivists are expected to separate themselves via adhering to methodological principles of distance and objectivity and keep the two roles as distinct as possible. Hermeneutics researchers and postmodernist researchers are required to get as close as possible to their research sites, whereby there is little or no distinction between the two roles, and as action research is a collaborate, negotiated process, the two concurrent ongoing roles are constantly under review.

Managing Organizational Politics

Undertaking a research project in one's own organization is political and might even be considered subversive. Whereas those following a positivist approach do not have a concern for consequent practical implementation, the political nature of information in organizations requires insider positivist researchers to be aware of the political implications of their research. As insider hermeneutic research in the shape of participant observation tends to be covert; the researchers go underground. Young (1991) reported how there was a culture of secrecy within the police force of which he was a member. Social-science research was equated with claptrap, and anyone engaged in it ran the risk of being labeled a traitor and his or her promotion would be put in jeopardy. He refers to his work as writing espionage. For insider action researchers, politics is more explicit, and so they need to be prepared to work the political system, which involves balancing the organization's formal justification of what it wants in the project with their own tacit personal justification for political activity. Throughout the project, they have to maintain their credibility as an effective driver of change and as an astute political player. The key to this is assessing the power and interests of relevant stakeholders in relation to aspects of the project. Political knowledge was a critical element in Krim's (1988) city hall organization. However, as he points out, his understanding of the informal knowledge-based power structure was inadequate when he underestimated the connection power of one particular individual whom he tried to replace. That person was able to muster considerable support to resist Krim's efforts to replace her, and severe confrontational conflict ensued.

Conclusions

In this article, we have questioned the established tradition that academic-theory-driven research in organizations is conducted best by outsiders, and we have explored the subject of insider research. We have defined insider researchers as those undertaking research in and on their own organizations while a complete member, which in this context, means both having insider preunderstanding and access and wanting the choice to remain a member on a desired career path when the research is completed. Insider research typically is disqualified because it is perceived not to conform to standards of intellectual rigor, because insider researchers have a personal stake and substantive emotional investment in

the setting (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Anderson et al., 1994). It is argued that insider researchers are native to the setting, and therefore, they are perceived to be prone to charges of being too close and thereby not attaining the distance and objectivity necessary for valid research. We have challenged this viewpoint and shown how insider research, in whatever research tradition it is undertaken, is not only valid and useful but also provides important knowledge about what organizations are really like, which traditional approaches may not be able to uncover. In our view, insider research is not problematic in itself and is respectable research in whatever paradigm it is undertaken.

In considering insider-research projects, potential researchers, through a process of reflexivity, need to be aware of the strengths and limits of their preunderstanding so that they can use their experiential and theoretical knowledge to reframe their understanding of situations to which they are close. They need to attend to the demands that both roles—organizational roles and the researcher role—make on them. They need to consider the impact of organizational politics on the process of inquiry, who the major players are, and how they can be engaged in the process. These issues pertain to insider research irrespective of whether the research is undertaken in a traditional positivist or hermeneutic mode or through interventionist action research. We close with the words of Merton (1972, p. 44):

> Insiders and outsiders in the domain of knowledge, unite. You have nothing to lose but your claims. You have a world of understanding to win.

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