Composing Qualitative Research

By Karen Golden-Biddle and Karen D Locke, Sage Publications, 1995, Price: $ 38.95.

Writing is the most crucial aspect of academic living. 'Publish or perish' are the buzz words now. Writing is a delightfully painful process but the agony undergone by the academic who is writing a paper is not apparent in what he/she finally arrives at and there is a mysterious silence about the writing process in the world of publishing. Similarly, there is hardly any significant material on the processes involved in the act of writing for academic journals. Every one has ideas and every one wants to write. But how? This book addresses some of these issues. It is thus a refreshing contribution to the field and a pioneer attempt to record the processes involved in writing academic papers. It is intended "to break the silence about writing in graduate schools and organisational studies" and more broadly, "to demystify the process of writing". The authors enlist the help of rhetoricians and literary critics to present their points of view. Though the book is primarily intended for authors who want to contribute to management journals, it will also appeal to scholars who are interested in serious debates and discussions in academic journals.

Karen and Karen start with a critical background and information about the process of writing qualitiative research. Subsequently they take up the metaphor of 'story' (of course, the metaphor is highly jargonised in the media studies now) to illuminate the writing of research papers. The metaphor is primarily used because the story structure offers a good framework for academic writing. Stories contain a beginning, a middle and an end, plots and subplots, characterisation and so on, which are important features of any narrative and the authors rightly feel that these qualities must also be found in academic writing for better comprehension. The authors are concerned with the *what* and the *how* of writing as they are interdependent components of a written product and thus by invoking the metaphor it is possible to recognise the other aspects of the manuscript. In Chapter 3, there is an interesting discussion on how field data plays a major role in the confirmation of extant theoretical understanding and how important it is for the writer to be aware of this. The 'storyline' could also be a departure from the extant theoretical assumptions. In developing the ''storylines'', the authors feel that researchers generally use field data for two purposes: one, to take readers to the field and two, to bridge the gap between the field and the reader by 'signifying the theoretical meanings of data'. The storyline, thus, could either confirm the already prevalent theoretical assumptions or depart from them. There is a certain amount of ingenuity in the authors, characterisation of the storyteller. The storytellers are the writers who develop the character of the institutional scientist in their texts and also differentiate themselves as individual researchers. A detailed discussion on the construction and reconstruction of stories within the larger institutional context of academia and during the peer review process follows. Here the authors profile the review processes associated with seven published articles and incorporate actual reviewer and editor comments as well as author responses. Thus, at every stage, the book lends confidence to academic writers.

Having said all this, one cannot but notice certain inherent weaknesses in the book. It is heavily dependent on the 'protocol' method of collecting data which is liable to be fallacious.

Writers can only give a subjective view of what happens to them when they are writing. Writing is the process of transforming a few abstract ideas into a concrete entity. It is also an 'exploratory creative' process wherein the writer stumbles on something new while writing the paper. One cannot help feeling after reading the book, that it legitimises subjective judgment in writing. It is also very naive in its approach. It does not address the psycho-linguistic processes involved in the narrative. The findings seem to be merely 'commonsensical'. There are too many quotations drawn primarily from the earlier works of the authors, which detract from the credibility of the book. Besides the book does not take into account the fact that writing involves many problems in terms of discourse, syntax and vocabulary.

However, *Composing Qualitative Research* does fill a need, and hence provides value. As mentioned in the beginning, this is a pioneer work in the field and it deserves to be read by prospective scholars who wish to write for academic journals.

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Paths of Change : Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society

By Will McWhinney, London, Sage Publications, pp.272, Price : US $ 24.

The book *Paths of Change* is an excellent volume on change management. The author, Will McWhinney, deals with the core problems involved in organisational change. He shows how the act of problem solving is itself responsible for problems.

Paths of Change gives a new direction in the area of organisational change by initiating a discipline of praxis using concepts from psychology, sociology, anthropology and new methods of working with ontological and narrative concepts to produce intentional changes in society.

The book is a good combination of cases and theoretical inputs, being divided into six chapters with 'interludes' provided by the cases.

The author begins with a historical account of the changes that occurred between 1960 and 1978 in Western societies and organisations and finds that there is no theory of change, of internal action, which can be used to explain what has happened in the recent decades.

In the section which deals with the basic processes of resolution, the author shares his idea that since conflict arises out of attempts to make changes, the choice of path should arise out of our histories - recent and ancient, conscious and unconscious, personal and cultural. McWhinney talks about a theory of ways, and occasions on which various modes of resolution should be employed. However, he does not talk about new methods of problem solving but refers to those that are known and in practice. He calls this *metapraxis* which means moving out of one's own construction of reality and entering into a dialogue with multiple realities to reframe one's own and others' experience in alternative frameworks.

The components of his theory include : a map of four alternative realities; a guidance theory based on two great myths that have been used in many cultures over the past millennia, and the qualities required to deal courageously with the paradoxes of change and resolution efforts.

The chapter on 'Alternative Realities' talks about four realities: unitary, sensory,