

Pre-assignment 3 Get started  
10<sup>th</sup> November 2022  
Baolin Yang

In this essay, I commented and reflected on two qualitative empirical studies with instructions from editorial articles. In the first section, I briefly introduced the two articles I selected and stated the main reasons why I selected them and why they are attractive to me. Next, focusing on theoretical framework, data collection and analysis, and findings, I reviewed the two research and compared their main differences. Then, I discussed the two studies theoretical insights and their contributions to literature. In the last section, I shared my key take-aways about writing a qualitative research paper and relevant thoughts and questions.

### **Introduction of selected articles**

I have started paying attention to a broad question that how the special working context of platform economy influence gig workers' identity and organizational identification when I was working on my master's thesis. To be specific, I am interested in how gig workers perceive who they are in the platform economy where algorithms take over managerial tasks instead of humans. Along this line, I selected the first article Flexing and floundering in the on-demand economy: Narrative identity construction under algorithmic management (Anicich, 2022) which explored how algorithmic management influence the narrative identity construction of platform workers.

Given the facts that leaders and coworkers are not involved in on-demand economy and customers is the only group of humans whom platform workers regularly connect to in their daily work, I am curious about the role of customers in the process of platform workers forming their identity and organizational identification. In other words, under the context of being managed by algorithms, interactions with customers related closely to platform workers' perceptions of their work. Thus, focusing on the relationship between employees and customers, I found the article written by Cardador and Pratt (2017), that is, Becoming who we serve: A model of multi-layered employee-customer identification. Although the context of this research is traditional organizations rather than on-demand economy, I believe that we can draw

inspiration from its insights on how customers influence employees identification.

Besides, the research of Anicich (2022) partly examined the effect of interaction with customers on platform workers narrative identity construction. Thus, the two articles together provide a comparative perspective to investigate how customers influence employees identity and identification in different contexts.

### **Review and comparison of the articles**

In this section, concentrating on theory framing, data collecting and analyzing, findings presenting, I reviewed the two articles and compared their main differences.

The two research theoretically framed in different ways. Cardador and Pratt (2017) discussed previous theories and pointed out their problems and then introduced and elaborated on their theory and contributions to literature. They intend to explore their research question in the focal organization and examine the generalizability in the comparison organization. However, their data demonstrated that the comparison organization actually serve as a counter example which failed to prove their theory. In a coherent way, they further investigate alternative explanations. This “accident” made this research look like a variance-based case study which aim to unpack explanatory variables (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018). Anicich (2022) compared narrative identity construction among workers who are in and fully outside of traditional organizations and indicated the research gap. Then after stating research methods, Anicich (2022) presented findings starting from explaining the sociotechnical context of on-demand economy. The difference in theory framing may caused by the situation that multiple existing studies have explored employee-customer identification while little research has investigated the narrative identity problem in the context of on-demand economy.

Anicich (2022) and Cardador and Pratt (2017) employed diverse research methods to collect data. Anicich (2022) adopted autoethnography approach, conducted 40 semi-structured interviews, and compiled documents, comments and information from resources including forums and meetings, collecting data from both internal and external perspectives. To be

specific, Anicich (2022) worked as a courier on food delivery platforms with logging 130 h of driving time and completing 238 deliveries. During his working, he participated three meeting. To supplement autoethnography, Anicich also conducted interviews to collect extra data. To avoid the convergence of information, interviews are recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Anicich (2022) also reviewed both formal and informal information includes drivers comments and job reviews in online forums and documents from platform company websites and emails. I do appreciate that Anicich (2022) applied autoethnography to explore on-demand economy workers narrative identity construction. When I worked on the topic algorithmic management, I found it is difficult to gain a deeper understanding of gig workers and their work through interviews and surveys. And gig workers often complained that researchers should experience by themselves rather than keep sending them surveys as onlookers. Further, ethnographic methodologies allow researchers to capture aspects that usually be ignored or unlikely be covered in surveys and retrospective studies (Van Burg, Cornelissen, Stam, & Jack, 2022).

Cardador and Pratt (2017) observed two organizations (one is focal organization and one is comparison company). Their primary data sources are semi-structured interviews and analysis of company documents. Interviewees constitute of organizational employees and their customers. The aim of interviewing customers is to verify employees interpretation of their relationships with customers. 41 employees and 5 customers were interviewed at the focal organizations while 12 employees and 6 customers were interviews at comparison organization. In addition, organizational newsletters were analyzed as a main source of data. Although the writers described both of organizations as less than 50 employees to justify their comparison, I think that 44 and 12 mark a big difference in sample size. And their texts seem to serve for hiding the difference, which to some degree violated the transparency principle (Bansal & Corley, 2012; Pratt, 2019).

Although the two studies employees various research methods, both used grounded theory approach to analyze data. They revised their research question and adjusted their focus based on data collected in the first round to make the study coherent. In an iterative pattern, they

coded data and linked them to literature and theory back and forth to elaborate their theory on an empirical basis.

Both studies used figures to present their findings. In a visual way, figures display the whole model, the sequence or phases of events, interactions of concepts and events within it using brief texts and graphics. Compared to texts were distributed throughout pages, figures enable readers (at least for me) to capture the whole theory by providing a general view. In alignment with the point that figures are an effective way of unfolding methodological processes especially for complicated ones (Pratt, 2009), Anicich (2022) presented an overview of data collection and analysis process. Besides, Pratt (2009) found that “figures particularly good for depicting processes”. On top of figures, Cardador and Pratt (2017) used tables to present their findings and evidence. Tables allow writers to display each of main theme they concluded and corresponding quotes as proofs in a structured way (Pratt, 2019). From my point of view, reading tables is an easier and faster way to follow up and catch the arguments of writers.

### **Theoretical contributions of the articles**

The study of Anicich (2022) filled the gap in identity construction of on-demanding workers. Although platform economy has gained increasing attention over the past years, how gig workers identify themselves remains unknown. Anicich (2022) explored how sociotechnical context influence platform workers identity construction in negative and positive ways. Further, by introducing the concept of narrative flexing, Anicich (2022) identified intrapersonal and interpersonal mechanisms in which workers engage in narrative flexing.

The study of Cardador and Pratt (2017) contributed to workplace identification literature. By challenging previous assumption that workplace identification is anchored in organizations, Cardador and Pratt (2017) found that the employees identified themselves strongly with their customer group and showed that this process is more about we becoming like them rather than they becoming like us. This research theorized the conceptualization of multiple layered employee-customer identification and revealed that employees achieve collective-level self expansion and role-level self expansion from familial and occupation perspectives (Cardador

& Pratt, 2017).

### **Personal take-aways**

The most important lesson about qualitative research methods I learned is that comprehensive methods matter. I found that although the research methods used in the two research are not the exactly same, both studies provided more than one perspective to examine their research question. For example, Anicich (2022) collected data from internal (autoethnography) and external (interviews and documents) perspectives. In a similar vein, Cardador and Pratt (2017) not only collect data through interviewing organizational employees but also validate employees interpretations by interviewing customers. The two articles set good examples of comprehensive methods, showing that comprehensive research methods allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon they are interested in and not blind by specific source of data. Bansal and Corley (2012) suggested that comprehensive and transparent methods offer accounts of data source and analysis and credibility of researchers, leading to the trustworthiness of the emergent theorizing.

An interesting “shock” I experienced is the differences in aspects including theorizing between qualitative and quantitative research. I was surprised to find that the qualitative researchers adjust or changes their research questions during the process of data collecting and analyzing and this situation occurred more than once in both articles I chose. I used to do quantitative research and what I have been taught is that hypothesizing after results are known is something to be avoided. In the light of Bansal and Corley (2012) and Bansal et al. (2018), the way of theorizing explains the difference: qualitative research follows an inductive logic while quantitative research follows a deductive logic. Therefore, it is of great importance to adopt an appropriate research methodology according to research questions. For instance, qualitative research is the better choice if the research question is situated in new or understudied empirical contexts where there is a scarcity of prior work.

## Reference

- Cardador, M. T., & Pratt, M. G. (2018). Becoming Who We Serve: A Model of Multi-Layered Employee–Customer Identification. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(6), 2053–2080. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1201>
- Anicich, E. M. (2022). Flexing and floundering in the on-demand economy: Narrative identity construction under algorithmic management. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 169, 104138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2022.104138>
- Bansal, P. (Tima), Smith, W. K., & Vaara, E. (2018). New Ways of Seeing through Qualitative Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(4), 1189–1195. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.4004>
- Van Burg, E., Cornelissen, J., Stam, W., & Jack, S. (2022). Advancing Qualitative Entrepreneurship Research: Leveraging Methodological Plurality for Achieving Scholarly Impact. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 46(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1042258720943051>
- Pratt, M. G. (2009). From the Editors: For the Lack of a Boilerplate: Tips on Writing Up (and Reviewing) Qualitative Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 856–862. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.44632557>
- Bansal, P. (Tima), & Corley, K. (2012). Publishing in AMJ —Part 7: What’s Different about Qualitative Research? *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(3), 509–513. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2012.4003>