Group Methods

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the use of group methods has become more prevalent within a diverse range of business and management disciplines, including but not limited to logistics (Rodrigues et al., 2010), business communications (Byers & Wilcox, 1991), information systems (Stahl et al., 2011), supply chain management (Rose-Anderssen et al., 2010) and marketing (Fern, 1982; Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003). This disciplinary based literature, however, has concerned itself primarily with the practice of the method, affording little attention to the diverse knowledge constituting assumptions that can underpin its use (although, see Calder, 1977; Rose-Anderssen et al., 2010; Stahl et al., 2011 for rare exceptions). Problematically, such a preoccupation with methods in isolation 'obscures the link between the assumptions that the researcher holds and the overall research effort, giving the illusion that it is the methods themselves, rather than the orientations of the human researcher, that generate particular forms of knowledge' (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 499). More recently, Cunliffe (2011) enriches Morgan and Smircich's seminal framework, which drew attention to the importance of situating qualitative methods within broader philosophical debates, through her account of the increasing complexity of qualitative research choices. Cunliffe attributes this complexity to developments in metatheoretical perspectives,

organization theory, research methods and approaches to theorization. In short, she argues that considering our metatheoretical positioning provides a basis for 'building crafted, persuasive, consistent, and credible research accounts' (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 647). It is with this in mind that I attempt to explore and delineate different schools of philosophical thought and their implications for the practice of group methods, as one mode of knowledge production.

Broadly speaking, scholars have highlighted that philosophical consensus does not prevail in qualitative research (Bryant & Lasky, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007), which is characterized by a proliferation of forms underpinned by diverse, and often competing, philosophical assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). The variety of understandings regarding the nature of qualitative research illustrates the possibility that different interpretations, which emphasize particular philosophical and procedural variations, underpin the use of what on the surface appears to be the same method or technique. It is hoped that this chapter can go some way towards developing the practice of group methods within the business and management domain through enhancing researchers' awareness of the relationship of philosophical issues to the design and application of the method itself. I argue that group methods can serve the interests of researchers from a variety of philosophical traditions, but understanding the practical implications of this variability is crucial to appropriate and effective use of group work from any given stance. In taking such an approach, I am working on the premise that engagement with research philosophy is a cornerstone of effective research practice rather than a distraction from the real task of 'doing' research.

The chapter is organized into three core sections. First, the antecedents of group methods are briefly outlined in order to contextualize their origins and uses. Second, the chapter delineates how researchers from diverse philosophical positions may variably conceive the method in order to develop a typology of group methods for business and

management research. This section aims to expose the implications of diverse assumptions about ontology and epistemology for the practice of group methods in order that researchers may be better equipped to adhere to the tenets of quality criteria appropriate to their research tradition. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the key lines of argument advanced in the chapter.

Antecedents of Group Methods

Much of the business and management literature on group methods limits itself to acknowledging the benefits and drawbacks of the technique(s) (e.g. Byers & Wilcox, 1991; Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003; Rodrigues et al., 2010). Within their methodological accounts, few scholars – even indirectly – attend to the marked differences that reflect the distinctive intellectual priorities of the two fields from which group methods emerged: social psychology and psychotherapy (Morgan, 1997; Rook, 2003; Stewart et al., 2007).

In sum, group methods within the social psychological tradition emphasize within-group research that is evaluative in its purpose, direct in its questions and low in respondent interaction. In this way, it has arguably influenced what is often referred to as the 'group interview', which does not have the explicit interest in-group interaction commonly associated with 'focus groups'. Early uses of group methods within social psychology date back to World War II, where researchers sought to advance understanding of the persuasiveness of propaganda efforts and the effectiveness of training materials for troops (e.g. Merton & Kendall, 1946). Psychotherapeutic uses of group methods emerged from the priorities of clinical diagnosis and treatment, and Moreno's (1934) use of psychodrama and play therapy is considered seminal work within this domain. Here, researchers favour group methods that are more developmental in orientation and design, placing less emphasis on evaluative tasks: 'compared with groups conducted in the social psychological tradition, the clinical approach is more likely to emphasize interactive group discussions and activities;

individuals' deep-seated thoughts and feelings, and extensive, wide-ranging and spontaneous expressions' (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 6).

The intellectual tension between the two disciplines from which group methods originate, and the epistemological assumptions of their advocates, is often obscured by technique driven discussions and only becomes apparent in vague notions about what constitutes 'scientific research' or adequate knowledge (Stewart et al., 2007). Consequently, few researchers adopting group methods today are aware of these historically competitive ideologies and that the 'resulting focus group hybrids reflect varying degrees of psychotherapeutic and social psychological influence' (Rook, 2003, p. 40). One of my aims here is thus to address the potential methodological and epistemological confusion which may befall business and management scholars by outlining a typology of how researchers from different philosophical traditions might variably conceive group methods. Having outlined the social psychological and psychotherapeutic antecedents of group methods, the chapter now locates the method within commonly debated philosophies within the business and management domain, namely: neo-positivism, interpretivism and critical management studies.

Towards a Typology of Group Methods in Business and Management Research

The preceding section outlining the origins of group methods suggested the technique (or any given technique) is infused with philosophical commitments; methods are not neutral tools and are tied to different perspectives on how social phenomenon should be studied. In short, group methods can serve the requirements of many different philosophical positions along the subjective-objective continuum (Coule, 2013). This, however, raises significant questions about the design, conduct and analysis of group methods in meeting the demands of associated sets of diverse quality criteria. Indeed, there have been calls for social

researchers to adapt and expand the dominant 'market research' models of group work to take into account their own purposes and theoretical traditions (Hopkins, 2007; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). In this spirit, I now aim to delineate the implications of various philosophical schools of thought familiar to organization and management researchers for the design, conduct and analysis of group methods.

Group Methods and Neo-positivism

The domain of business and management research has and continues to be influenced by the intellectual and methodological priorities of positivism, resulting in a form of 'qualitative positivism' or neo-positivism (Duberley et al., 2012; Prasad & Prasad, 2002). Of particular note in the context of group methods, Calder (1977) considered the method from a philosophy of science perspective within the marketing discipline. Significantly, Calder's basis for judging the three distinct approaches to group methods, which he terms 'exploratory', 'clinical' and 'phenomenological', is premised on ideal criteria for 'scientific' research.

The marketing, logistics and business communications literature is thus awash with concerns about the ability of group methods (and qualitative research more broadly) to form the basis of impartial, rigorous and reliable knowledge (see Calder, 1977; Byers & Wilcox, 1991; Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003 for conceptual discussion of the method and Rodrigues et al., 2010 for conceptual discussion with case examples of empirical group work). Wells (1974, p. 134) depicts this unease by questioning, 'how can anything so bad be good?' Yet the method continues to be used, perhaps largely due to its perceived instrumental usefulness to management practitioners (Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003; Rodrigues et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the aforementioned concerns about the subjectivity of group methods often result in them being relegated to a junior, preliminary role within neo-positivist research endeavours. This manifests in various ways. For example, researchers tend to use group methods to generate

or select theoretical ideas and hypotheses for subsequent deductive testing and for developing and piloting operational aspects of future quantitative research, such as the wording of questionnaire items (see Calder, 1977; Rodrigues et al., 2010; Zeller, 1987 for discussion of the nature and application of group methods from a neo-positivist standpoint). For the most part, neo-positivistic researchers see the value of group methods as acting as a precursor to scientific knowledge, subsequently generated by more rigorous and reliable quantitative techniques. Its use is often, therefore, limited to contexts where little is known about the phenomena of interest (Byers & Wilcox, 1991; Rodrigues et al., 2010).

In practising group methods, the methodological rigour and reflexivity emphasized within the neo-positivist stance has resulted in strict protocols and recommendations regarding executional details (Stewart et al., 2007) in order to minimize the chances of 'technically problematic methodological lapses' (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 24; also see Haynes, 2012). Here, the management researcher, as moderator of the group, is central to achieving objectivity and the production of quality data: 'A focus group and its resulting information are only as good as a moderator [and] her or his knowledge of focus-group approaches and procedures' (Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003, p. 21). Within a neo-positivist approach to group methods, the researcher adopts the position of detached observer during data collection with the goal of reducing threats to the objectivity and value of resulting data (Calder, 1977; Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003; Rose-Anderssen et al., 2010). The priority is control over the output of the group and much has been written about the role of group size (usually 8–10), composition (normally strangers to avoid pollution of data) and level of interaction among participants (low due to structured topic guide) in contributing to the controllability of group work (Morgan, 1998; Rodrigues et al., 2010). Stage-driven models that outline the steps of group work and the role of the researcher within each step abound the neo-positivist informed management literature that takes group methods as its focus (e.g. Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003; Rodrigues et al., 2010).

Positioning group participants as passive subjects, who hold (objective/factual) opinions and preferences, best expressed under the 'control' of the moderator, holds significant analytical implications. For example, a preoccupation with objectivity and neutrality has led some researchers to advocate assigning numerical values to data generated through group methods, which they propose can be manipulated to achieve greater insights into its 'meaning' and provide confidence of theoretical saturation (Byers & Wilcox, 1991; Rodrigues et al., 2010; Schmidt, 2010). Such assertions appear to embody the belief that the heart of the quantitative–qualitative debate is philosophical and not methodological (see Trochim, 2000). In other words, researchers may acknowledge some fundamental differences, but assume they lie primarily at the level of (epistemological and ontological) assumptions about research rather than at the level of data.

Table 7.1 provides an illustrative example of how a researcher with neo-positivist commitments may chose to code and analyse group data. The data is drawn from 19 participants across 5 focus groups conducted as part of my doctoral research and concerned with organizational sustainability in the non-profit sector. The opening question within the group sessions encouraged participants to conceptualize organizational sustainability. On reading through this section of the transcripts, a number of themes emerge. For the purpose of this example, seven descriptive categories have been identified and given a short label that represents the theme in the participants' response (1=human resources; 2=governance; 3=funding; 4=organizational development/planning; 5=collaboration; 6=strategic relevance; 7=demand for services). The appearance of a '1' under any given theme indicates that the participant mentioned the theme; a '0' indicates that the participant did not mention that particular theme.

[TS: Insert Table 7.1]

Table 7.1 Data table showing simple quantification of textual data

Table 7.1 allows the researcher to easily describe certain characteristics of their data, like that theme 3 (funding) was the most frequently mentioned in the consideration of organizational sustainability or that the majority of respondents touched on between 2 and 3 of the themes (the most common number of themes to be mentioned by respondents is 2). This kind of 'quantitative' content analysis can then be pushed further by examining the correlation between the themes based on which respondents addressed them (see Table 7.2):

[TS: Insert Table 7.2 here]

Table 7.2 Spearman rho correlation matrix

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

As depicted in Table 7.2, this kind of analysis shows that themes 1 and 3 are significantly positively correlated; people who touched on theme 1 (human resource) also tended to mention theme 3 (funding). Themes 5 (collaboration) and 6 (strategic relevance) are also significantly positively correlated. Such an approach to qualitative data is, however, contentious and business and management researchers committed to alternative knowledge constituting assumptions would likely challenge the meaningfulness of 'opinions' or 'attitudes' that have been isolated from the context in which they were generated. The loss of content interaction between group members – and indeed between group members and researchers – is particularly contentious as the defining characteristic of much group work is 'the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (Morgan, 1988, p. 12).

Group Methods and Interpretivism

The discussion of interpretive research is not simple as the label subsumes a variety of genres, but perhaps the unifying feature is the attempt by researchers in this tradition to access and understand participants' intersubjective, culturally derived meanings to explain behaviour in everyday business and management contexts through *Verstehen* (Johnson et al., 2007). In attempting to understand processes of symbolic 'world-making' (Schwandt, 1994), rather than a ready-made world which is awaiting discovery, interpretive research sets itself apart from the neo-positivist tradition. From this standpoint, questions about the reliability and generalizability of group methods that are pervasive among neo-positivist researchers who use the method become less meaningful as the values and preconceptions researchers bring to interpretative acts are acknowledged through reflexive practices. In other words, the researcher's representation of actors' reality is seen to actively contribute to its creation (Haynes, 2012).

A phenomenological approach to group methods is not uncommon within the business and management literature (see Calder (1977) and Kehoe & Lindgren (2003) for conceptual discussion of group methods from this perspective). More specifically, it is perhaps most prevalent within the marketing discipline due to its ability to provide 'A chance to "experience" a "flesh and blood" consumer. It is the opportunity for the client to put himself in the position of the consumer and to be able to look at his product … from her vantage point' (Axelrod, 1975, p. 6). Such an approach is positioned as being both instrumentally useful and predicated on the active involvement of the researcher through 'interactive personal contact' (Calder, 1977, p. 359). Notably, however, several scholars who advocate the use of phenomenological approaches to group methods remain driven by positivistic quality criteria for evaluating research and thus have concerns about the lack of prescriptive procedural protocols and extent to which facilitative behaviour is left to the idiosyncrasies of individual researchers. Subsequently, phenomenological group work is argued to produce everyday (non-scientific) knowledge by such scholars (Calder, 1977;

Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003), despite the well established idea that interpretive approaches should be judged by criteria that are significantly different from those used to evaluate the rigour of neo-positivist research (Prasad & Prasad, 2002; also see Johnson et al., 2006 for a comprehensive delineation of evaluation criteria for research informed by different philosophical traditions).

Notwithstanding the above tensions and contradictions, we can take from the discussion of phenomenological approaches to group work that the underpinning assumption within this tradition is that the foundation for explaining human action is understanding how people actively establish and re-establish the meanings they use to organize experiences (Johnson et al., 2007). The resulting implications for group work – when compared to neo-positivist approaches – are less (researcher imposed) structure; less researcher control in facilitating the group and greater interaction between group members; smaller group sizes (usually 5–8 people); openness to groups of strangers, pre-existing groups or both (Bill & Olaison, 2009; Calder, 1977; Kehoe & Lindgren, 2003).

Analytical approaches are likely to involve some form of interpretive content analysis based on the premise that it 'retains something of the richness of transcript data, while ensuring that the great mass of data thus generated are analysed systematically and not selectively' (Frankland & Bloor, 1999, p. 145). This technique is based on qualitative data indexing (see Dey, 1993; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), the purpose of which is to facilitate comparative analysis by gathering all data on a particular topic under one heading, in order to make the study of material manageable for analysis purposes. It is important to note that indexing is distinct from the activity of exclusive coding of material (as in the previous example) in that there is no necessity, at the indexing stage, to settle on a final interpretation of an item of text; rather, each piece of transcript is assigned several, non-exclusive index-codes referring to the several analytic topics on which it may bear. The objective of indexing should be to simply pose a number of possible interpretations,

deliberately delaying a final interpretation until the text item can be compared systematically with the entire spectrum of text items carrying the same index code(s). The emphasis in the indexing process is on inclusiveness (including initially all possibly relevant material), rather than on exclusiveness. The indexing process is cyclical. New index-codes may emerge in later transcripts and the researcher then returns to earlier texts to add the new index code to them. Thus, indexing is essentially inductive in nature, with categories emerging from the analyst's absorption in the text:

> Recalling the events of the focus group itself, the analyst has a participant's 'pre-understanding' of the transcript and understanding is deepened by submersion in the text. Analytic categories are generated through this understanding and these categories, applied to the text, deepen analytic understanding, which in turn stimulates greater elaboration of the analytic categories, which are in turn applied to the text, and so on. The process is not reductive: the data are retained in richness and context, but comparative analysis is facilitated. (Frankland & Bloor, 1999, p. 147)

The brief example of data in the extract below (Box 7.1) illustrates how the method could be applied (F is the female facilitator; P1 and P2 are male Chief Executive Officers of non-profit organizations; P3 is a female Chief Executive Officer). Again the example is drawn from a section of the transcript relating to the opening question, which encouraged participants to reflect on how they make sense of organizational sustainability.

[TS: Insert Box 7.1 here]

Other interpretivist researchers would advocate devoting more attention to group transcripts as 'talk' and focusing on the complexity of interaction (Beach, 1990; Kitzinger, 1994; Myers, 1998). There are a number of approaches to conversation, which may differ in some respects, but all tend to share assumptions that identities are negotiated in discourse

(and thus focus on how group members set up and work out roles); talk is organized moment to moment by participants (and therefore look at how they define sections, rather than defining sections as analysts); talk is sequenced, one thing after another (each 'utterance' is considered in terms of what came before and after) (Meyers & Macnaghten, 1999). Here, consideration will be given to a short example showing how participants redefine topics. It may seem that the researcher's topic guide sets topics for discussion within-group work. A closer examination of transcripts, however, can demonstrate how participants shift and evolve a particular topic, sometimes in unpredictable ways, so there are often several potential topics at play. Consider the passage below from a focus group with the Chairs of three voluntary organizations (P1 and P3 are male; P2 is female; *** indicates that a name/place has been made anonymous).

[TS: Insert Box 7.2 here]

Note that, at the beginning of each turn, participants acknowledge the topic (human resource sustainability), but, by the end of their turn, they have often introduced one or more new topics that are to be taken as related. For instance, participant 1 (P1) introduces the topic of human resource (HR) sustainability as being important in the consideration of organizational sustainability, and goes on to talk about the nature of short-term funding; by stressing the impact that short-term funding has on HR sustainability he presents the second topic (funding) as relevant. Participant 2 follows by acknowledging the impact that the current funding environment has on the HR system, but implies that high turnover of staff is accepted as a 'given', due to her organization's funding arrangements. She does, however, go on to relate the short-term nature of posts – largely due to the short-term nature of funding – to a decline in staff morale, and a situation whereby the organization is having to provide 'hope' to staff through a process of funding posts from the organization's 'reserves'. Again, P3 acknowledges the topic of HR sustainability and the negative impact of short-term

funding on this valuable resource. He then goes on to link short-term funding to central government policy initiatives, and introduces the wider external environment in which non-profit organizations operate as an important determinant of their very survival, adding yet more relevant new topics to the debate. Thus, the topic can shift as the discussion develops, while at each stage it remains relevant. Such a set of transitions is typical of many long passages in the transcript in which the moderator does not intervene; each participant marks their contribution at the beginning as relevant to the current topic, but within each turn, the participants can shift the context and interpretation for that topic.

Group Methods and Critical Research

Theoretical resources from Marxism, Labor Process Theory, Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism can all be said to inform the 'broad church' of critical management research. Moreover, the principles of critical management underpin a number of intellectual movements such as feminism and environmentalism. The unifying feature of critical endeavours within business and management research is perhaps the challenge they pose to instrumentalism, structures of domination, asymmetrical power relations and what is naturally taken for granted (Adler et al., 2007). A defining characteristic of critical approaches then, is their attention to promoting emancipation (Duberley et al., 2012; Stahl, 2008) – a foundation that sets them apart from the neo-positivist and interpretivist traditions previously discussed.

The potential of critical group methods has been recognized by social researchers generally (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Webb & Kevern, 2008) and management researchers specifically (see Bill & Olaison, 2009; Stahl et al., 2011 for empirical examples). From this vantage point, the importance of power in social interaction becomes of central importance. In a practical sense, this manifests in researcher's sensitivity to power issues in everyday procedural choices, such as topics. By way of example, Bill and Olaison (2009) propose what

they term an indirect approach to group work through utilizing role-play. These authors do not claim that such an approach to producing knowledge removes the power imbalance between researchers and research participants, but emphasize the potential it provides for co-creation between researchers and participants:

A role-play has a script with rules and constraints, but it also leaves room for the group's decision-making abilities, analytical acumen, and, most importantly, the experience, emotions and imagination of its members. Our scripts also had rules … and the participants started their roleplaying in a specific setting that they could not initially control or co-create … To solve the task, or 'to play the game', the participants first had to accept the setting and script, and then they had to co-create it and give their own characters life. (p. 9)

What such scholars are attempting to do, is mitigate to some degree the inherent danger that group work 'chases its own tail' by 'offering up its own agendas and categories and getting those same agendas and categories back in a refined or filtered or inverted form' (Potter & Hepburn, 2005, p. 293). Stahl et al. (2011) conclude that group methods, when designed and executed from a critical perspective – can contribute to both researcher and participant emancipation. In respect of participants, the authors advocate attempts to enhance empowerment and the voices of the less powerful through application of rules to promote an 'ideal speech' situation, the strategic placement of participants within the room (based on a pre-group assessment of how timid or dominant participants were likely to be) and involving them in analytical processes. For business and management researchers, the potential for emancipation lies in the role of participant discourses in challenging researcher's assumptions about their topics of investigation. Put differently, group members can (often inadvertently) call into question taken for granted assumptions underpinning particular disciplinary knowledge systems. The nature of group work within this tradition thus calls for critical examination of how researchers make sense of their own fieldwork

experiences. Reflexive processes are designed to pay attention to how group accounts are 'influenced by their authors' social positions and by the associated use of power-invested language and convention in constructing and conveying the objects of their research' (Adler et al., 2007, p. 11; also see Haynes, 2012).

'Critical' group work often involves small numbers of participants (5–8) from pre-existing groups, as these are the networks in which people might normally discuss (or evade) issues, form ideas and make decisions. In analytical terms, power relations and their corresponding reality constructions are the required foci. In other words, management researchers question both other's truth claims and how they themselves construct meaning and make truth claims (Haynes, 2012). Reflexivity becomes a moral or ethical project that gives consideration to how group context and broader cultural/institutional features encourage or suppress certain points of view rather than a tool for effective research in the neo-positivist sense of the term. At a practical level, researchers who take seriously the contextual, situated nature of accounts and how they become legitimized are much more likely to advocate analytical strategies such as conversation analysis (Antaki, 1994; Greatbatch & Clark, 2012), narrative analysis (Maitlis, 2012) and discourse analysis (Dick, 2013). By way of example, lets revisit one section of text from one participant in the previous example with a specific focus on how they orient to and actively construct an account of organizational sustainability and the different positions adopted in conversations.

[TS: Insert Box 7.3 here]

Here, critical scholars would be interested in the way P3 positions his contribution by establishing mutual ground between his account of sustainability issues and the account constructed previously by P2 in lines 1 and 2 through an enthusiastic 'receipt token' (Dick, 2013). Here P3 provides explicit approval of P2's account and warrants her version of reality by endorsing the idea that the source of trouble lies with short-term funding and its impact

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on staffing continuity. P3 then prefaces the reduced efficacy of his organization's work (line 15/16) by suggesting that it is not an internal problem within his organization but a consequence of the central state's transient approach to social problems (lines 10–12). Just this very brief illustration is useful in showing how critical group work may be used to examine the ways in which narrative accounts are constructed in order to establish the 'facts' of organizational life on a particular issue within a particular context.

Conclusion

I have attempted to highlight in this chapter that group methods – or indeed any data collection method – cannot be viewed as an 'interpretive' or 'critical' method per se. The mere adoption of a method does not say much about the philosophical tradition underpinning its use. Decisions regarding group design, conduct and analysis are informed by researcher's knowledge constituting assumptions, which heightens the importance of critical engagement with both the theoretical and practical issues around group work. Neo-positivistic approaches for example, which encourage researchers to present themselves as removed, objective nonentities whose role it is to document the 'subject's' point of view, are not commensurate with interpretive understanding (Cunningham-Burley et al., 1999). As we have seen, however, they remain commonplace within business and management studies. Nevertheless, we have also seen that researchers committed to alternative perspectives are exploring different approaches to conducting, understanding and theorizing group work (Bill & Olaison, 2009; Rose-Anderson et al., 2010; Stahl et al., 2011; Steyaert & Bouwen, 2004).

The typology of group methods presented thus offers an alternative conception of group methods, by seeing them as existing in a field of tensions between different logics (Coule, 2013). This encourages the acknowledgement of ambiguity in the aims, processes and outcomes favoured in particular approaches to group work and goes some way towards bridging the gap between philosophical assumptions and method to encourage considered

fieldwork practices. I would encourage researchers adopting group methods to articulate and reflect upon their particular philosophical commitments and subsequent methodological consequences. Questions about the design, conduct and analyses of group work are not simply technical or practical questions, but are rooted in particular theoretical traditions that significantly influence research aims. While group methods are becoming increasingly established, how they are adopted and adapted to serve diverse and often competing philosophical perspectives is of significant importance. In this chapter, I have suggested a typology of group work within diverse philosophical traditions in order to encouraging more informed choices about how researchers relate to group methods. The idea, however, is to encourage productive lines of thinking rather than provide an exact map of the terrain. It is my intention that the ideas suggested should not be seen as another complication or additional burden to researchers, but a way of avoiding becoming trapped in certain ways of thinking about group work and knowledge production.

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