

Q-METHODOLOGY, A MORE ACCURATE READ OF PUBLIC OPINION

PR prof Len Barchak (McNeese State U, Lake Charles, La), finds one of the major problems with most research methods is they lose huge pieces of information because they lump together groups of respondents. Worse still, survey questions are constructed according to the suppositions researchers have at the onset. For these & other reasons, Barchak advocates Q-Methodology.

- “The problem with traditional research is it packages respondents in a category,” he told *pr*. Example: the average American woman is white, 38, 5’6”, size 12 with shoulder length brown hair & 1 child. “If you’re trying to sell diapers to the ‘average white woman,’ you’ll miss a heck of a lot of people.”

According to the precepts of Q-Methodology (*pr* 11/17/97 & 5/30/83), **people organize according to their psychological make up -- not politics, age, gender, income or other demographic factors.** “‘Women’ are not homogeneous. The ‘black vote’ -- what is that?” Barchak parallels Q-methodology’s treatments of its subjects with character development in fiction or films. Similarly, Q treats people as what they are: an organized network rather than a list of attributes.

Q IN THEORY

Q was developed in the 30s by William Stephenson, a physicist/psychologist who wanted to reveal the subjectivity involved in any situation -- aesthetic judgment, poetic interpretation, perceptions of organizational role, political attitudes, bereavement, perspectives on life & the cosmos, etc. An outline of how Q works:

1. **As in physics**, where “the wave of propagation is nothing until it is measured,” Q doesn’t suppose anything until subjects are interviewed. “Instead of a researcher sitting down & thinking up a hypothesis & deciding what a problem is ahead of time, why not find out the issues?”
2. **As in psychology**, Q interviewers get respondents to talk with non-directive interviewing. “You interview people the way a psychologist would, with open-ended questions. This allows them to talk about their ideas”
3. **This type of interviewing yields a realm of varying opinions** -- but, as he puts it, “The world is essentially simple. What you will discover is they can be boiled down to 7, plus or minus 2”
4. **Q then conducts further interviews** based on qualifiers of these 7 or so factors. “You add 2 or 3 questions for each. Now you can do the research based on these variations”

Barchak says President Clinton uses Q-Methodology & develops 7 different communication strategies for the varying opinions on a given issue, & uses them according to the audience he’s addressing.

Happy Holidays to everyone! This is the last issue of 1999, giving staff & printer a much needed rest. Our offices *will* be open for business, however, so call, fax or e-mail your requests. Look for our in-depth, special topic, First-Of-The-Year Issue on January 3, 2000.

THE DUTCH DO IT WELL; FORECASTERS PREDICT THEY WILL PROVIDE THE MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

As desire for meaning & authenticity clash with manipulative, often anti-human technologies, managers are seeking ways to move organizations forward in real time, while retaining employee engagement without which success is not possible. Despite its relative smallness, the Netherlands has been as influential as any nation in shaping the modern world. Who settled New York *and* the East Indies? Who tolerantly housed the Pilgrims after King James forced them out of England & before they came to America? Who discovered tea & coffee, arguably the most influential products of all time on economies & lifestyles -- even politics? Now they’re at it again.

“Step on heads to get ahead?” “Nice guys finish last?” According to trendwatchers, these credos will be passe as the Dutch style of management takes hold. These forecasters predict the Dutch mgmt style will be to the 21st Century what the Japanese model was to the 80s. Already, the Dutch are gaining more US corporate clout as they acquire companies. *Investment Dealers Digest* notes that takeovers such as VNU NV’s \$1.18 billion purchase of Nielsen Media Research are a growing trend. Not to mention Phillips, Royal Dutch Shell & other global giants headquartered in the Netherlands.

A MORE HUMANE APPROACH

According to thinktank Brand Futures, the Dutch recipe for management -- & social policy -- is bound to become the dominant model for global thinkers. Indeed, the values long held dear in the Netherlands are becoming fashionable in the US & elsewhere as people search for a more humane approach to progress than was witnessed during the ambitious 80s.

This mgmt style is sometimes referred to as “Polder Thinking” or the “Polder Approach.” This refers in a literal way to the area’s terrain; & figuratively to the nation’s easy-going, usually decentralized work style, which allows lots of part-time and “flexcurity.” Polder also includes little gov’t intervention in business practices -- save the advocacy of a consensus-building body comprised of employers & employees’ federations. Brand Futures refers to it as “Theory N”, comprised of:

- **Pragmatism.** “With much of the country built on reclaimed land (polders) & below sea level, the Dutch have had to be organized, efficient & compact to make the most of what they have.... The pragmatic Dutch take great pains to forge an approach that works *for the good of all involved*” -- a basic pr tenet
- **Modesty.** For the Dutch, modesty is a prized business asset. All ideas & participants are welcomed & taken seriously. Flaunting is frowned upon. “Being unassuming & understated doesn’t mean being weak or unprepared: the Dutch are more than happy to gain an advantage by dealing with people who underestimate them.” (They brought it on themselves)



- **Tolerance.** The Netherlands is the world's third most densely populated country, with 457 inhabitants per square kilometer (the US has 28). "The Dutch were thus forced to become expert practitioners of tolerance (where N.Americans or Australians, by contrast, could just move further west or into the bush). As a result, they have adopted a very practical "live and let live" approach that has yielded adeptness at compromise & consensus building -- other basic pr tenets
- **Flexibility, Adaptability.** Keys to any organization's success today -- whether globally or practicing inclusivity. The Netherlands has assimilated many peoples & cultures. Flexibility is an integral part of its people's egalitarian approach. "To promote flexibility, Dutch businesses are not stratified or hierarchical. Their loosely structured style allows them to make decisions easily & quickly
- **Multiculturalism/Multilingualism.** "Part of creating a winning global strategy [or adapting to the new face of the US] is being able to understand local people, customs & culture. No other nation is better equipped for this than the Netherlands." Half the population is bi- or multi-lingual and 3/4s speak English

WILL THE WORLD GO DUTCH?

According to World Population Databank, the Netherlands is 55th in terms of population, but its

economy is the world's 15th largest. This small nation has always followed the beat of its own consensus-building drummer, and BF believes that soon the rest of the world will be following it, too.

TECHNOLOGY MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR EVEN THE MASS MARKETER TO ASSUME THE ROLE OF THE SMALL PROPRIETOR

In *The One to One Future*, so state authors Martha Rogers & Don Peppers. Business was built on relationships with customers & information the storeowner knew about each, allowing the owner to:

- Solve problems for them individually
- Shift service or product offerings to meet changing demands or tastes
- Sell more products to each of them

Therefore, the 1-on-1 relationship encourages loyalty.

WAL-MART PROVIDES A CASE TO TEST THEIR HYPOTHESIS

The service experienced by a customer in a local hardware store (*customers want to be served, not sold*) influenced the customer's behavior to such a

degree that she expressed her positive feelings in a letter to the local newspaper -- concluding such personalized (valued) service would be impossible in a Wal-Mart.

Is she right? Pepper & Rogers say it needn't be the case. But in Latin America -- probably more intent on selling than serving -- Wal-Mart realized \$60 million in losses over several years, as reported in *Forbes* Dec. 13. Among the mistakes:

- Huge parking lots for Mexicans without cars (& bus stops far from the perimeter)

- Stocking shelves with leaf blowers in urban San Paulo & ranch dressing in Argentina
- Narrow aisles created barriers in Brazil for crowds of once-a-month (payday) shoppers

Wal-Mart executives are learning: new-store planning has shifted from headquarters in Arkansas to foreign countries, where planners can listen to customers in order to better serve them. There's irony here: Wal-Mart's reinvention of floorwalkers, now called greeters, was a symbol of its intent to go 1-on-1. But it also reinforces the giant chain's claim, when attacked for killing local retailers, that there are advantages beyond just price that local stores can offer when Wal-Mart moves in.

MUST-READ FOR PRACTITIONERS: MEGATRENDS' NAISBITT REVISITS HIGH TECH/HIGH TOUCH WITH DISMAYING FINDINGS

The French Academy pronounced in the 80s that, until now, humankind had been forced to concentrate on nature -- but henceforth would have to concentrate on *human* nature. While the evidence for this prediction was & remains strong, all we hear about, it often seems, is high tech. E-world. Genome. Engineered genetics. Etc. When Naisbitt enunciated the concept of HTHT 30 yrs ago, it was an attempt to find balance between nature (science, engineering, discovering our universe) & human nature (psychology, sociology, anthropology, religion).

- "No longer are high touch activities simply a balance to the high technology in our lives. High touch is becoming the human lens by which we must understand technology", he & 2 co-authors write in *High Tech High Touch* (Broadway Books, 274 pp.)

DIRECT RELEVANCE TO PR

1. For Schools, Colleges & Org's Working with Them:

Electronic games, nearly all violent, gross \$16B in US alone while Hollywood only grosses \$7B. The worst school shootings are directly related to video games, according to the Army's training expert. In one, the shooter hit 8 targets with 8 bullets, aiming as the game taught him. Trained law enforcement personnel average 1 hit for 5 bullets

2. **For Employers Concerned About Workplace Violence:** Are the violence industries training the person who will enter your premises with a weapon? How lawsuits against violence marketers may tame their practices as it has tobacco & gun manufacturers
3. **For Healthcare:** Possible downsides to the wonders of decoding the human genome. If we all become genetically "perfect" & therefore similar, what if an unanticipated virus arises from nature that we can't control? Does it wipe out human life?
4. **For Cultural Institutions:** Is the Specimen Art Movement a brave new frontier or ...
5. **For Gov't Agencies:** What issues will gov't be asked to control or regulate as the HTHT struggle unfolds? Will untoward events -- which usually do occur in new technologies -- bring resistance, even panic? Might you be asked to anticipate -- or handle in the crisis stage?
6. **For Anyone:** a thought-stretching read. Oh, brave new world!