

Interactive comment on “Measuring perspectives on future flood management on the Rhine: application and discussion of Q methodology” by G. T. Raadgever et al.

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GENERAL COMMENTS

This paper has the potential to become a very useful addition to the meagre number of publications using the Q-method to study and help resolve societal conflict about essentially technical matters. My major comment is that the authors have not sorted out for themselves whether they wanted to write a methodology paper or a paper about different perspectives on flood management of the Rhine. As a result, their message (if any) gets lost. If they wanted to write a methodology paper, they should

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have included more detail about the Q-method. If they wanted to publish a contribution on flood management of the Rhine, they should have given more context (what is the problem, is there a conflict, are their other studies available, what is the novelty of this study, etc) and references about that. In that case, their Discussion could have referred to that context, showing the relevance of the results. My feeling is that it would be more useful to write less comparing the method with other methods and more on the specific context, in order to show the usefulness of the Q-method. Another major comment that paper is written for an audience likely to be different from the journal s audience. This problem needs to be addressed as well.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

1. P 443, line 8-9. Distribution fitting is no obligation for the Q-sorting process. In my experience, forcing a normal distribution on Q-sorting would not really allow for the variation in personalities (people who tend to have extreme viewpoints and people who tend to moderate themselves or to hesitate and nuance a lot would end up with totally different distributions). Furthermore, as you write yourselves that the selection of the statements is “more an art than a science , it is better not to force a normal distribution on rating these statements.

2. P 443, line 11-15. The authors rightly stress the importance of cross-comparison (between rankings of statements) by the respondent. How was this done if there were no face-to face interviews? How can you check, with this online tool (which I did not try), with your respondents that they have cross-compared all their rankings? In general also, the respondents are assisted by the researcher, who actively looks for contradictions in the Q-sorting, or asks the respondent to think again and to (better) make up their minds about a particular statement.

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3. P 446, line 1. I have always thought the data matrix cannot be factor-analysed if there are more columns than rows (more Q-sorts than statements to Q-sort). This is one of the characteristics of the Q-method, and also one of the reasons why one cannot have too many respondents, nor too many statements. But here, the authors have analysed 47 Q-sorts on 46 statements. So am I wrong?

4. P 452, line 12-13. The authors are aware of the remaining researcher s bias in applying Q-methodology when they write “The results depend directly on the analyst s selection of the statements, (...) so that the general political and ideological values of the researcher may exert some influence. There will always be researcher s bias and our aim should be to minimise it. In that respect, Q-methodology is already a big improvement compared to other elicitation techniques. The researcher can add some extra checks (not always suggested in the textbooks). One rule is not to rephrase a statement, or else, to use as much as possible the statements as they were uttered or found in the literature. Secondly, I was wondering if the authors have obtained Q-sorts of respondents they had interviewed before in the statement-collection phase (concourse). In that case, there is a way to double-check if the selected statements of a particular respondent correspond to the reality as perceived by that respondent (and not by the researcher).

5. I did not find any paragraph about piloting the Q-sorting to refine the statements selection and formulation and take out redundancies.

6. I did not find any details about the way statements were structured. What was the actual theme, what were the sub-themes (if any)? Surely, if one has 46 statements, there is a way to group them ad hoc?

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7. P 454, line 10-15. Of course, in aggregating views, the initial richness gets lost! The whole idea is to summarise and to create an overview to work with later on. I am still left wondering (see general comments) how these results will be used. The authors are a bit hesitant about that. What is their main message?

8. Figures 1-4. These are not clear at all and need to be better introduced in the main body. What is the link with the results and what is their use? Would it not be possible to explain them as part of, or in lieu of, the descriptions of the three perspectives in the text? It would be easier for the reader to see the application of the argumentation theory at work. And what is the researcher's bias here?

9. Appendix A should be integrated in the main body (for the context, see general comments).

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