

**Digging Deeper:  
Researcher's emotions  
as a methodological tool  
in understanding board dynamics**

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Researcher's emotions are one of the largely ignored aspects of qualitative research, which this study aims to address. In the conventional literature, researchers are advised to maintain an appropriate cognitive distance from the research participant to produce a rational account that can satisfy the academia (Glimore and Kenny, 2014). This even holds true for ethnographic research where researchers are actively engaged in the field and are part of the research

process. The pressure of keeping an appropriate distance with the research participant often makes them silent about their emotional experiences in the field (Coffey, 1999) or over simplistic in representing their emotional engagements with the research participants (Glimore and Kenny, 2014) even when emotions are the main focus of the study (Fineman, 2005). However, with the advent of the study on emotions, researchers are realizing the extent to which the emotional experiences of the researcher could be useful in understanding the phenomenon under study, specifically emotions (e.g. Munkejord, 2009; Bergman Blix, 2009; Kenny, 2008; Gilmore and Kenny, 2014). Emotions can even become a methodological tool whilst studying emotions. Our research aims to address this gap by highlighting the way emotions can be 'used' as a methodological device to understand the emotions of others.

This paper is basically drawn from a doctoral thesis of the first author where emotions in the public sector board governance were the main focus of the study. It was soon realized during the fieldwork that the researcher's emo-

tions became participative on many occasions specifically during the negotiation process to gain access in the field, and while interpreting emotions of board members within and beyond board meetings. In the first case, emotions acted as proactive devices that guided the first author in making quick strategic moves in gaining and maintaining access whereas in the latter her own emotions helped to understand the emotions of board members when they were congruent or different from that of board members.

In this paper, we will also shed light on various emotional risks involved in the main research that also induced powerful emotions among the board members as the revelation of their emotions challenged their 'illusion' of rationality. The encounters in the field were revealing and illuminate the methodological challenges faced by the researcher during the study of emotions in the public sector boards. The paper offers the possibility and encourages researchers to appreciate their own emotions as a significant methodological tool.

## Keywords

Emotions, organizational ethnography, board dynamics, public sector.

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