Abbott, Andrew. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*

Chapter 1 Explanation

Ethnography

Historical Narration

Standard Causal Analysis

Small N Comparison

Formalization

Consider the three D chart on p 29. Can we explain?

Chapter 2 Basic Debates and Methodological Practices

Basic methodological differences: SCA – ethnography – history. On p. 64 he describes these as a "Rock-Paper-Scissors" (roshambo) situation. Explain.

History trumps SCA by historicizing categories. What does that mean?

Ethnography trumps history by undercutting the idea of historical continuity.

SCA trumps ethnography by generalizing.

Let's get the current "first" topic of each of our 1 semester sisters on the table (4?). Now we assign each student one of them and we spend five minutes looking up the difference between each of the following and then writing a few sentences which explains this debate in terms of the topic you have been assigned.

Example: suppose you have the topic of community coalitions against substance abuse and the debate you have is contextualism vs. non-contextualism. You look it up in Abbott and he says "contextualism means that social phenomena are inevitably contextual and cannot be analyzed without taking into account context whereas non-contextualism means that things do have meaning independent of context." What does this mean? Well, one version might be that there are such things as community coalitions and they can be talked about in general. The contextualist, though, might counter that coalitions against homelessness and coalitions against substance abuse are fundamentally different and a coalition in the suburbs is just not at all the same as a coalition in the city.

Have seminar members "rehash" basic debates

positivism v interpretivism

analysis and narration

behaviorism and culturalism

individualism and emergentism

realism and constructivism

contextualism and non-contextualism

choice and constraint

conflict and consensus

transcendent and situated knowledge

Chapter 3 Introduction to Heuristics

(83.8) "Most research projects…start out as general intersts in an area with hazy notions about some possible data, a preference for this or that kind of method, and as often as not a preference for certain kinds of results."

Polya (81-2)

Understand the problem

Plan the solution

Carry out the solution

Look back at the solution

**** Have students go over the list on p 82.**

Consider the Four Stages of learning about almost anything:

One : Having nothing to say

Two : You pick a perspective and become an Xist

Three : Work to master other perspectives

Four : You are comfortable with broad repertoire

DEF: What exactly is a heuristic?

Simple Heuristics

Additive

"It works here but will it work here?" "More data."

Consider a new dimension. Contingency theory. Control for variable x.

Add a theoretical or methodological wrinkle

Topics and Commonplaces

Aristotle's Four Causes

DJR: 1-3 as "because motives" 4 as "in order to motive"

material ..... immediate physical and material cause

formal/structural ..... shape as cause

effective ..... what forces something to happen

final ..... aims, goals, purposes

functional causes ..... does everyone get what one of these is?

Necessary vs. Sufficient .. Press for examples.

Kant's Categories

Quantity

unity ..... what are the units of analysis? why are they thus lumped? are they unities in fact?

plurality ..... numbering the entities. how to count them? what constitutes few or many?

totality — what's the overall picture? is it one phenomenon? questions of homogeneity or monolithicness.

Quality

reality — reification – natural or social?

negation — try saying no. think about falsification – how would you know if you are wrong?

limitation — what do you include/exclude? where do you draw the boundaries? why? time, space, other qualities. a case of what? in terms of generalizing

Relation

substance/accidents — ontology – what here are things and what are properties? what is changeable and you still have "one of these"?

causality/dependence — see Aristotelian categories above.

reciprocity — consider chicken or egg issues.

Modality

possibility/impossibility — think about three types turning into 2x2 table where is the fourth type? Are there sociological "impossibility theorems"?

existence/nonexistence — Think about nominalist vs. realist problem

necessity/contingency — Interaction effects. What else matters? If we control for something, what might happen?

Burke's Five keys of dramatism

action — what are people doing?

agents — who

scene — where does action happen

agency — what can who do?

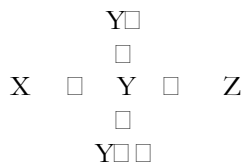
purpose — why do people do it

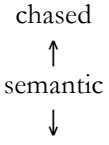
Morris' three modes of language

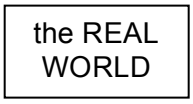
syntactic — relation between elements in system

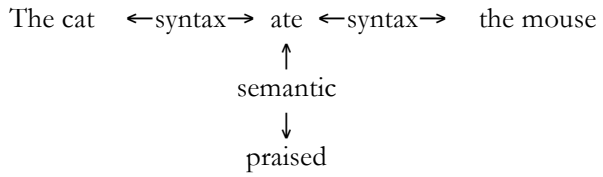
semantic — relation between system elements and things outside system to which they refer

pragmatic — relation between symbolic statements and context of action in which they appear









Chapter 4 Search and Argument Heuristics

Search Heuristics

- Analogies (114)
- Borrowing Methods (118-20)

Argument Heuristics (120)

- Problematize the obvious (120, 123ff)
- Reversals (121)
- Make an assumption (122)
- Reconceptualize (134)

Chapter 5 General Heuristics : Description and Narration

General focus here is "how we actually imagine our object of study as something in the world" – let's keep an eye on whether he pulls this off.

Descriptive

All three of the descriptive heuristics have to do with how we cast our glance on the world.

Changing Context

Start by recognizing that anytime we talk about something we are dealing with figure and ground. The object of focus and its surroundings. The latter are often conventional, taken for granted or not even seen. The relationship between them is frequently taken for granted – we fall into set patterns of what is the figure and what is the ground.

EXAMPLE: Hochschild *The Managed Heart*. Previous work saw emotions as noise in the workplace or strictly an outcome, reaction to work life. She turned it around and looked at emotions as what some people are making in the workplace and what they are paid for producing.

Exercise: Take a given project and try to identify foreground and background. What are you taking to be the important and relevant factors and what are you acknowledging but leaving in the background?

Exercise: What are you primary dependent and independent variables? Your subsidiary?

Changing Levels

First step is to recognize that there are levels and that our first foray into a topic generally lands on a particular level without, perhaps, having intentionally selected it instead of something else.

Braudel gets folks to start thinking of history in terms of really big places and really long times. "Zooming out" both spatially and temporally.

EXAMPLE: I want to study community activism so I think about interviewing activists. But what about looking at organizations? Or networks of organizations? Or the "activist industry"? Or the cultural mindset of activism?

Setting Conditions: Lumping and Splitting

The basic idea here is to recognize that the categories we start out with as defining the "universe" are often arbitrary.

Try this: lump together what others have separated (tag sales and losing your virginity) or split things that others have lumped (feminist theory: all women's experience not the same).

QUESTIONS

Is this phenomenon bigger than what I am focussing on? Is it a part of something bigger?

OR

Am I lumping together things that may actually come in different shapes and sizes? More than one flavor?

OR

Is this group I am studying really different/unique or am I just assuming that at the outset? Importance of comparison: a study of Latino teenage girls finds X but maybe X is just a property of teenage girls or maybe just a property of teenagers or maybe just of people.

Narrative

Stopping and Putting in Motion

A sort of lumping and splitting of time. See how easily we grab things that are dynamic and stop them treating them as static (such as "the civil rights movement"). One tactic is to focus on the dynamics of things that we've treated as static.

Another is similar to the group comparison issue above. Just as studying group X requires a comparison so that we can be confident that something is related to Xness and not just something more general that X is a subset of, so to with time. We sometimes need to stand back and ask time comparison questions: was this thing I am seeing today there yesterday? What is changing? What is staying the same?

Especially important when studying something that involves you arriving on the scene at a particular point in time. You take everything you see as given but need to learn what trajectories things are on. Somethings just appeared and so are new to everyone. Other things might be new to you but are veritable institutions to the locals. And some things are about to disappear and everyone's known that but it strikes you as a surprise.

Think about path dependence, hysteresis (Hysteresis represent the history dependence of systems), etc. How many steps back does such dependence go? Are the things we are seeing now the product of factors from way back?

Taking and Leaving Contingency

Contingency as a tricky concept. Partly it means uncertainty. Partly it means depending on other things outside the realm of consideration.

Harrison White's work on vacancy chains is about contingency because it says where an individual's career goes is really about vacancies finding her than vice versa.

Piore and Sabel ***The Second Industrial Divide.*** Perhaps mass production was not inevitable. The usual story is that industrialization has but one foreordained trajectory. Finding examples of alternatives

raises questions about what conditions (contingencies) lead to it – what conditions support mass production and what conditions lead to alternatives. Small firm networks, flexible production.

NOTE: compare similar move in Weber's analysis of capitalism. Recognizing that capitalism does not follow exactly the same trajectory in all cases he asks what cultural factors might have been behind Western capitalism. Those who take Western capitalism as paradigmatic do not look for any contingent factors.

Perrow *Normal Accidents*. Moves in opposite direction. Rather than conventional idea that accidents are wildly unpredictable (that is, highly contingent) events, Perrow argues they are normal aspects of certain kinds of systems. In fact, the thing to do is to look at how systems vary and make some predictions about which ones will have accidents. He says complex systems with lots of feedback loops and parts that are multiply linked combined with tight coupling (lack of slack, play in the system, lag times, and so forth) tend to experience systematically produced accidents: you can expect them.

Analyzing Latent Functions

Functions is another thing that can be tough to get one's head around. Avoid simple, naïve functionalism. We are not here talking about justifying social practices on the idea that they must serve a purpose if they exist. Rather, the point is that there may be positive feedback supporting the existence of a social practice that is different from its acknowledged purpose.

EXAMPLE. Edwards Contested Terrain. Rethink history of management. Human relations was not as much a reaction against scientific management as was claimed. Both were ultimately about creating a docile and obedient and pliable workforce.

Analyzing Counterfactuals

As Abbott says, this is about asking "What would have happened if…?" Why is this useful? When we narrate we have a tendency to slip into Y followed X in sequence therefore Y followed from X causally.

Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth*. Point: rather than take as bible truth the received wisdom about the role of railroads in American economic development, ask what might have happened if you took them out of the picture. Then you spin out the narrative and if the results you get look a bit like what we saw anyway then it undermines the idea that the railroads were really the driving force that made the difference.

An Aside

Abbott's talk of latent functions of college education and mention of one of these as a piece of the marriage market puzzle suggests an interesting (maybe) project: where do women's college heterosexual students meet life mates? Is there a net delay in marriage? Or focus on other colleges? Or is there an average change in marrying at one's own level?

Chapter 6 Fractal Heuristics

Definition: same pattern at all different scales

Positivism v interpretivism

Don't be afraid to move back and forth across these "divides" – example is the quantitative study of sociology of culture.

Analysis and narration

Behaviorism and culturalism

Individualism and emergentism

Realism and constructivism

Contextualism and non-contextualism

Choice and constraint

Conflict and consensus

Transcendent and situated knowledge

Chapter 7 Ideas and Puzzles

Tests of Ideas

1. Look for data that I can try my ideas out on.
2. Think about implications – if my idea is correct, what would I expect to find if I looked at X?
3. Roger Gould as example: "Well, if that's true then…" what happens? Analogy… draw diagram.
4. Try it: "The more the merrier."
5. Importance of Falsifiability
6. Ideas that can't be wrong can't be interesting.
7. Universal predicates are not interesting. So what if X is socially constructed?
8. Look for "how" or "consequences of" or "compared to"
9. Good ideas have alternatives.
10. Ideas without empirical referents are not interesting.
11. self critique

Other People

1. bad interactive testing (shootouts and random opinion (man talk))
2. mutual challenge
3. Things do not sound to others as they sound to you. You have to be interested in how they sound to others. We are not in this business as solo practitioners.

4. THUS (1) listen carefully to others asking for clarification (2) don't nod and say yeah if the other person is not being clear. IT IS RUDE TO DO DO.
5. Use criticism to improve how your idea is expressed. It may turn out to be better than you thought.
6. What do you learn from others?
7. steps you left out of the presentation of the argument
8. assumptions that were omitted or not recognized
9. differences in meanings people give to words
10. The five sentences and a stranger test. Can you make it clear and interesting?

Literature

1. Hard for undergrads but basically you have to work with what's there and how things have been conventionally approached as your first point of reference.

Good Taste in Ideas

1. "The foundation of good taste … is broad reading" (231).
2. Do not read everything as if studying for an exam.
3. Do not avoid reading things that are beyond you or not what you are looking for or not from a perspective you are comfortable with.
4. Read good stuff too. Ask for and seek "role models" in terms of written pieces you wish you'd written.

Intellectual Personality

1. Figure out what your (one) great weakness(es) is (are).
2. orderliness -- flexibility
3. breadth -- focus
4. imagination – follow-through
5. lumping – splitting
6. self confidence (239)

   tricky concept actually – layers – self confidence can hide other things, lack can appear as haughtiness and so on.
7. emotions – go ahead and give in and wallow but remember that ultimately thinking is social
8. realize you have to have time alone with your ideas

Puzzles

1. Got to know background before you can see a puzzle in the figure.244
2. Personal or Social Motivations

   Moral-political puzzles rooted in one's political commitments – often a bit repetitive

   Identity Research 246

   Negative personal experience motivated research
3. Or maybe the world itself is puzzling.