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*Preface***Philip C. Candy**

If you were to interview people about what they understand by the word *research*, and what it means for them, especially in a university context, you would get an astonishing array of responses. For some people it would be thought of in terms of promotion criteria, a hurdle to be jumped in order to be tenured or promoted. For others, it would be a defining characteristic of what it means to be an academic; the opportunity to investigate topics in an area of interest and expertise, to discover new knowledge and to supervise the up-and-coming generation of young scholars doing the same. For some it is a defining characteristic not of an individual academic, but of a school, department, faculty or even an entire institution, and for others again it would be associated with earning income through partnerships or commissions with outside bodies such as government departments, corporations, communities or professional associations. For many it would represent a respite from the pressures – not to say the drudgery – of teaching or administration, whereas others would experience it as a challenging form of work about which they might feel uncomfortable or even ill-prepared. In short, for some it is a pragmatic construct, yet for others an almost mystical and transcendental ideal, the way in which new knowledge is created and the boundaries of our understanding are expanded.

Of course research is all these things. Like the allegorical elephant in the Indian parable, immortalised by John Godfrey Saxe in his poem “The Blind Men and the Elephant: A Hindoo Fable”, where the elephant is simultaneously seen as a wall, a rope, a spear, a fan, a tree and a snake, research has all the characteristics and qualities attributed to it, and others besides. It is a multifaceted concept, and as such it has attracted a great deal of attention and discussion.

In many ways, of all the forms of scholarly work, research at first appears to be the most public. Unlike teaching (which happens between an instructor and a group of learners), application (which tends to be limited to a particular community or client group) and integration (which is an intellectual feat generally appreciated only by other scholars), research commonly involves some kind of critical assessment of its initial proposals by funding agencies and other approval mechanisms, monitoring of its conduct through progress reports, peer review of its products – at which time it is publicly evaluated – and, beyond that, an exposure to a wider critical readership through publication. In

the digital era, this exposure can be extremely broad, leading to readers or consumers in every corner of the globe accessing the product – whether it be a book, research report or scholarly paper – and forming a judgement about its utility, accessibility and quality.

At one level, then, it might seem superfluous, or at least counter-intuitive, to focus on a domain that is already so well known and so public in its outputs and its impacts. However, this book approaches the subject of research from an unusual – arguably even a unique – perspective and as such it potentially contributes to our understanding in new and fresh ways.

First and foremost, the focus of this book is not so much on the products of research as on its processes. By processes I don't mean approaches and methods, about which a great deal is already known, but more particularly about its inner dynamics – how it is actually undertaken. Whilst the literature is replete with normative claims about how research should be undertaken, and some historical reports of how, in a particular setting, it was undertaken, the focus of this book is to describe the research effort – warts and all – as it happens. This kind of in-vivo reportage is unusual and offers the chance to view research as a lived experience, not as a recipe or as a static set of products and outcomes.

Linked to this, the chapters in this book concentrate on the social, intellectual and emotional context of research. We certainly know a great deal about the mechanics of research, ranging from the challenge of initially finding a research question or problem, through discovering what has already been investigated, to the creation of a research design, the conduct of the inquiry – whether in a laboratory, community, workplace, library or some other setting – and finally making sense of the data and writing them up in a useful and accessible form. But relatively less is known about how researchers go about their work, and what makes them tick. Thus, this book is distinctive in a second way.

A third novel feature is the book's concentration on research teams. By far the lion's share of available literature concerns the work of individuals, yet even the most gifted and successful individual researchers are indebted to the work of others. As Newton commented, "If I see further, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants." More prosaically, many researchers are part of a team, yet the internal workings of research teams are relatively unexplored, and there has been relatively little attention to the question of how collaboration affects and influences both the dynamics and the products of research. A moment's thought, however, shows that, when people work together on a research project, they are obliged to negotiate a range of issues – everything from timetables and personal writing styles to much deeper matters such as ideological orientations and methodological preferences as well as ethical concerns such as who should get recognition or credit for particular insights or knowledge claims.

It is instructive that what research evidence does exist about teams has – at least until recently – tended to focus on scientific research in laboratory groups (see, e.g., the seminal work of Cohen, Kruse and Anbar [1982] on "The Social Structure of Scientific Research Teams"). One of the lasting legacies of C. P. Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture, and the book to which it gave rise, *The Two Cultures*, has been the realisation that research tends to be carried out in very different ways in the sciences and the liberal arts, social sciences or humanities. Part of the popular mythology – often portrayed in books and movies – is that of scientists (always white-coated) working together in their laboratories, whereas historians, linguists, philosophers, lexicographers, mathematicians, theologians, sociologists and others are commonly portrayed in their studies, littered with books, papers and half-drunk cups of coffee, working in isolation.

Of course neither of these stereotypes is accurate. Sometimes scientists work at their benches and in their laboratories on their own, and likewise sometimes social scientists work together, sharing resources, planning inquiries, reading and commenting on one another's drafts. Thus, this book is remarkable for yet another reason: it focuses on the experiences of research teams in the social sciences and humanities. Accordingly, it has the potential not only to challenge our preconceptions and stereotypes, but also to contribute to our understanding of the research process in relation to a different set of disciplinary perspectives.

As if that isn't enough, this book offers yet further novel insights because it draws so heavily on the experiences of the authors, presenting their insights in their individual and authentic voices. So often researchers are themselves absent from the situation being researched, and we are left with a somewhat remote and detached perspective, wondering what the participants make of the situation or whether they would talk about it in the same terms as the researchers do. In this case, the authors have courageously turned the spotlight onto themselves, and reflected on their own experiences as researchers, authors and colleagues. This represents a fifth way in which this breaks the mould and tackles its subject from an innovative perspective.

So what are the standout insights and knowledge claims arising from this approach? Of course these are just my personal impressions and insights, and I fully acknowledge that others might have a completely different set of reactions to this anthology. Nevertheless, I identified five major recurring themes from reading this collection of essays.

The first and most enduring insight is the "messiness" of collaboration. Whatever the benefits of collaboration – and there are certainly many – there is little doubt that collaboration in research entails a good deal of give and take. This level of compromise does not always come easily to people, especially if they are accustomed to working in relative isolation, and it can be very challenging. It can add to timelines and at time cause some frustrations, especially when collaborators have different ways of working, different

timelines or different workload priorities. This messiness can be even more pronounced when there is a disparity in the relative power of the collaborators. One example is the potentially fraught relationship between senior and more junior colleagues, where differences of opinion may be resolved not by logic and the power of argument but by coercion on the one hand and acquiescence on the other. Another challenging and even confrontational situation is that which arises between supervisors and graduate students. This situation is difficult enough because of the inherent tension of the supervisor being simultaneously cast as a main supporter and encourager and, additionally, as a gatekeeper for the academic standards in the discipline. However, it can be even more difficult when the partners are also work colleagues, because they have two sets of power relationships to negotiate in any attempt at collaboration.

The inherent messiness of collaboration is exacerbated when ethical issues are at stake. In the interests of moving a project forward, individuals might be prepared to compromise, especially when there are compelling logical reasons and arguments to do so. However, deeply held beliefs (or sometimes prejudices) are not so pliable, and collaborative research occasionally puts people into conflict and confrontation with one another. Thus collaboration can expose rigidities that might not be evident for a solitary scholar; this is particularly pronounced when ethical concerns are raised. These may be about the substantive issue being researched, the methods for collecting data, how the research information is to be stored, transformed and interpreted, and how the results and interpretations are to be presented. Thus, collaboration can be difficult when ethical considerations are highlighted; indeed what some participants might not see as a problem might prove to be a stumbling block or even a show-stopper to someone else.

To counterbalance these difficulties and challenges, one of the positive aspects of collaboration is that it can help participants to be more productive and more resilient, especially when they might feel downcast and disheartened. It is a regrettable fact of organisational life that workplaces, despite a superficial bonhomie or an ostensible commitment to cooperation, can be somewhat alienating places. Discourses of competition, promotion and individual advancement that commonly attach to research can have the unfortunate effect of driving people apart rather than together. As a result, research can be a solitary – even a lonely – experience and, without the support of others, it is relatively easy for a researcher to give up. However, being part of a team can be hugely motivating, and this can lead individuals to persist when otherwise they might have lost momentum. It is not only the positive effects of encouraging and supporting those whose enthusiasm might otherwise be flagging; even holding people accountable can provide a structure and expectations that carry participants forward through the loss of focus, confidence or commitment that often characterises intellectual efforts.

A fourth feature of collaboration that struck me is the claim that it commonly leads to superior outcomes. No doubt individual researchers can produce work of outstanding quality and, given the right alignment between their interests and experiences, the research brief or projects they are given, and the amount of time and number resources made available, an individual can produce research outputs of great quality and impact. However, the evidence from this study supports the contention that, at least as far as scholarly inquiry is concerned, “two heads are often better than one,” and that a team is able to produce outcomes that may prove to be superior in terms of their breadth and depth, their accessibility and usefulness, and their intelligibility to a wide readership. This stems in part from the ability of team members to concentrate on part of a larger whole, perhaps aligned with their specialist areas of expertise, in part from the mutual encouragement and support they provide to one another, and in part from subjecting their ideas – and especially their writing – to the crucible of critical feedback. All things considered, it is a pleasing finding of this work that collaborative teams, on average, produce findings and products of greater quality and utility than many individual inquirers would be able to do on their own.

This leads me to my fifth and final reflection, and a major insight from this project, which is that team-based researchers commonly report their experience as demanding but rewarding. Not only do they learn from one another, gaining insights that might have eluded them working in isolation, and coming to respect different approaches and perspectives, but they supplement, elaborate, improve and refine one another’s work which is rewarding in its own right. Despite the tensions, the troubles, the challenges and the setbacks involved in collaborating, most of the participants reported that they felt respected and listened to, that their ideas contributed to a superior outcome where the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

We live in an essentially individualistic society where many of the glittering prizes – higher salaries, professional recognition, greater autonomy and freedom of action, awards and accolades – commonly accrue to individuals. Yet most of our significant advances, including the creation of knowledge, are achieved not by individuals, however brilliant, or by sudden breakthroughs (although the case of Kekulé’s Benzene ring is one celebrated exception) but by steady incremental contributions and by collective, team-based endeavours. It is perhaps fitting to quote the authors themselves:

We have achieved more in our . . . first year of operations than many of us expected, and there are certainly grounds for cautious . . . optimism. . . Writing the book has undoubtedly enhanced our understanding of and regard for one another, as well as heightened our awareness of the multiple contexts in which we are functioning. Certainly we are even more convinced than at the outset of this stage of our collective journey

that the strengths of collaborative research . . . far outweigh the limitations.

In introducing this set of essays, I commend the authors for their courage in subjecting their experiences to critical scrutiny. I believe that this book adds significantly to our knowledge about an important but neglected facet of research – namely the dynamics of collaboration in teams – and that it will do much to encourage those who might be hesitant about putting their ideas out into the public arena to consider collaborating with others. As is evident from this present book, this approach has the potential to enhance our understandings and the quality and range of our common knowledge base. Surely no research effort can hope for more than that.

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