Qualitative Research: An Overview

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• www.vivaafrica.info
References


References

1. Flick C1  http://tinyurl.com/msm8j63
2. Creswell 2012 C3  http://tinyurl.com/lrrhz3r
5. Neergaard 2007  http://tinyurl.com/k5naf3w
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11. Flick 2009  http://tinyurl.com/p4wcfvl
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13. Miles and Huberman  http://tinyurl.com/lut4zjj
Session Overview

• The objective of this session is to provide participants an overview of and introduction to qualitative research. The session will discuss the key characteristics of qualitative research and its relevance to researchers.
The Fruit of Qualitative Research

There once lived a man in a country with no fruit trees. A scholar, he spent a great deal of time reading. He often came cross references to fruit. The descriptions enticed him to undertake a journey to experience fruit for himself.

He went to the marketplace and inquired where he could find the land of fruit. After much searching he located someone who knew the way. After a long and arduous journey, he came to the end of the directions and found himself at the entrance to a large apple orchard. It was springtime and the apple trees were in blossom.

Patton (2002, p. 3)
The scholar entered the orchard and, expectantly, pulled off a blossom and put it in his mouth. He liked neither the texture of the flower nor its taste. He went quickly to another tree and sampled another blossom, and then another, and another. Each blossom, though quite beautiful, was distasteful to him.

He left the orchard and returned to his home country, reporting to his fellow villagers that fruit was a much overrated food.

From Halcolm’s *Inquiry Parables* - Patton (2002, p. 3)
The Fruit of Qualitative Research

What happened to the scholar?

Being unable to recognize the difference between the *spring* blossom and the *summer* fruit, the scholar never realized that he had not experienced what he was looking for.

From Halcolm’s *Inquiry Parables* - Patton (2002, p. 3)
Qualitative Research: Relevance?

• "The initial position of the social scientist and the psychologist is *practically always one of lack of familiarity with what is actually taking place in the sphere of life chosen for study*" (Blumer, 1969, p. 33).
Qualitative Research: Relevance?

• "The initial position of the social scientist and the psychologist is practically always one of lack of familiarity with what is actually taking place in the sphere of life chosen for study" (Blumer, 1969, p. 33).

Deductive Approaches are usually taken....
Qualitative Research: Relevance?

• “Despite all the methodological controls, influences from interests, social and cultural backgrounds are difficult to avoid in research and its findings.

• These factors influence the formulation of research questions and hypotheses as well as the interpretation of data and relations.”

Flick (2009, p. 14)
Qualitative Research: Relevance?

• The need to formulate such subject- and situation-related statements, which are empirically well founded, is a goal which can be attained with qualitative research.

Flick (2009, p. 14)

So…what is qualitative research?
Qualitative Research: Defined

• Several Definitions exist.

• Definitions are influenced by the author’s research paradigms and approaches.

• Definitions tend to focus one or more of the steps of the research process – research design, data collection, data analysis et cetera.
The Research Process

Research process is the step by step process of creating and carrying out a research project.
Qualitative Research: Defined

• Qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3)

• Qualitative research “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 37).
Qualitative Research: Defined

- Qualitative research is an **effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there** (Patton, 1985).

- Qualitative research “**inquiry that is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational. The dominant methodology is to discover these meanings and interpretations by studying cases intensively in natural settings and subjecting the resulting data to analytical induction**” (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996).
Qualitative Research: Defined

Qualitative findings [research] grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) **in-depth, open-ended interviews**; (2) **direct observation**; and (3) **written documents** (Patton, 2002, p. 4).

Qualitative research employs data which is expressed through (1) **interviews**; (2) **observation**; (3) **documents** and (4) **Audio-visual** (audio, pictures, mobile phone text, social media, video et cetera) (Creswell, 2009, p. 130).
Key Features of Qual. Research

Researchers are influenced by Research Paradigms and Assumptions

These influences affect the formulation of research questions and hypotheses as well as the interpretation of data and relations.
Key Features of Qual. Research

1. Appropriateness of methods and theories
2. Perspectives of the participants and their diversity
3. Reflexivity of the researcher and the research
4. Variety of approaches and methods in qualitative research

Flick (2009, p. 14)
Key Features of Qual. Research

1. Appropriateness of methods and theories
   • qualitative research's central criteria depend on whether findings are grounded in empirical material or whether the methods are appropriately selected and applied, as well as the relevance of findings and the reflexivity of proceedings.
   • The goal of your research then is less to test what is already known (e.g., theories already formulated in advance), but to discover and develop the new and to develop empirically grounded theories.

Flick (2009, p. 15)
Key Features of Qual. Research

2. Perspectives of the participants and their diversity

- Qualitative research takes into account that viewpoints and practices in the field are different because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them.

**Example:** Gender and Micro-small enterprises

- Do you own this enterprise?
  - Who makes key managerial decisions concerning the enterprise?
  - Inheritance, Gift (from spouse, relative, investor), Partnership

- OWNERSHIP HAS SEVERAL MEANINGS

Flick (2009, p. 16)
3. Reflexivity of the researcher and the research

- The **subjectivity** of the researcher **and** of those being studied becomes part of the research process.
- Researcher awareness of their own **orientations, biases or experiences and personal interaction** in the context with an emphasis on flexibility in the research.

Flick (2009, p. 16)
Research Activities are Often Iterative

• Flexibility of revisiting previous activities to revise their focus

• Rarely linear; it is more realistically cyclical

• Researcher needs to have a bird’s eyeview of the research process

Key Features of Qual. Research

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Flick (2009, p. 16)
Key Features of Qual. Research

4. Variety of approaches and methods in qual. research

• Qualitative research is not based on a unified theoretical and methodological concept.
  – Subjective viewpoints or direction interaction with the phenomena
  – The making and course of interactions
  – Reconstruct the structures of the social field and the latent meaning of practices

Flick (2009, p. 17)
## 12 Key Features of Qual. Research

*Patton (2002)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Strategies</th>
<th>Analysis Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data-Collection and Fieldwork Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analysis Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Why
- What
- When
- Where
- Who
- What
12 Key Features of Qual. Research

Design Strategies

1. **Naturalistic inquiry** - Studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; nonmanipulative and noncontrolling; openness to whatever emerges (lack of predetermined constraints on findings).

2. **Emergent design flexibility** - Openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations to change; the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge.

Patton (2002)
12 Key Features of Qual. Research

Design Strategies

3. **Purposeful sampling** – Respondents in samples or units of analysis are selected because they are “information rich” and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest;

- Selecting a **small, purposive sample** (not random) which may or may not be representative of the larger population.

Patton (2002)
12 Key Features of Qual. Research

Data-Collection and Fieldwork Strategies

4. **Qualitative Data** – Observations that yield detailed, thick description; inquiry in depth; interviews that capture direct quotations about people’s personal perspectives and experiences; case studies; careful document review.

5. **Personal experience and engagement** – The researcher has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study; the researcher’s personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon.
6. **Empathic neutrality and mindfulness** – An empathic stance in interviewing seeks vicarious understanding without judgment (neutrality) by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness; in observation it means being fully present (mindfulness).

7. **Dynamic systems** - Attention to process; assumes change as ongoing whether focus is on an individual, an organization, a community, or an entire culture; therefore, mindful of and attentive to system and situation dynamics.
Analysis Strategies

8. **Unique case orientation** - Assumes that each case is special and unique; the first level of analysis is being true to, respecting, and capturing the details of the individual cases being studied; cross-case analysis follows from and depends on the quality of individual case studies.

9. **Inductive analysis and creative synthesis** - Immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships; begins by exploring, then confirming, guided by analytical principles rather than rules, ends with a creative synthesis.
12 Key Features of Qual. Research

Analysis Strategies

Patton (2002)

10. *Holistic perspective* - The whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause effect relationships.

How does what I observe inform or explain the whole...what matters?
12 Key Features of Qual. Research

Analysis Strategies

11. **Context sensitivity** - Places findings in a social, historical, and temporal context; careful about, even dubious of, the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space;

![Context Venn Diagram]
Analysis Strategies

12. Voice, perspective, and reflexivity –

The qualitative analyst **owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective**;

- a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness;
- **complete objectivity being impossible** and **pure subjectivity undermining credibility**, the researcher’s focus becomes balance;
- understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness.
8 Key Features of Qual. Research

(Creswell, 2012)

1. Natural setting
2. Researcher key instrument
3. Multiple Methods
4. Complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic
5. Participants' meanings
6. Emergent design
7. Reflexivity - "position themselves"
8. Holistic account
Qual. Research Requires…

1. **Commit to extensive time in the field.**
2. **Engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis through the ambitious task** of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories.
3. **Write long passages**, because the evidence must substantiate claims and the writer needs to show multiple perspectives. The incorporation of quotes to provide participants’ perspectives also lengthens the study.
4. **Participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving and constantly changing.** These guidelines complicate telling others how one plans a study and how others might judge it when the study is completed.

(Creswell, 2012)
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(Creswell, 2012)
Designing Qualitative Research

(Creswell, 2012)

1. Preliminary considerations
   - Use of literature or role of literature review
   - Role of theory
   - Writing format for the qualitative project
   - Personal history, ethics, own background and interests

2. Steps to use in the conduct of the study
   - Paradigm and assumptions
   - Topic, and relevant literature
   - Review of literature
     - Knowledge of all the problems or gaps – issues, theories, methods, regions
     - Which of them are you interested in?
   - Research Methods
   - Sources of Data and Triangulation
   - Data Analysis
   - Ethics
Designing Qualitative Research

(Creswell, 2012)

3. Elements that flow through all phases of the research process
   – Time
   – Resources Needed
   – Ethical Considerations
**Ethical Considerations** (Creswell, 2012)

- Prior to conducting the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ethical Issue</th>
<th>How to Address the Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek college/university approval on campus</td>
<td>Submit for institutional review board approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine professional association standards</td>
<td>Consult types of ethical standards that are needed in professional areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain local permission from site and participants</td>
<td>Identify and go through local approvals; find gatekeeper to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select a site without a vested interest in outcome of study</td>
<td>Select site that will not raise power issues with researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate authorship for publication</td>
<td>Give credit for work done on project; decide on author order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Methods – Dr Richard Boateng [richard@pearlrichards.org]
Photo Illustrations from Getty Images – www.gettyimages.com
Ethical Considerations

(Creswell, 2012)

• Beginning to conduct the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ethical Issue</th>
<th>How to Address the Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Disclose purpose of the study</td>
<td>• Contact participants and inform them of general purpose of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not pressure participants into signing consent forms</td>
<td>• Tell participants that they do not have to sign form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect norms and charters of indigenous societies</td>
<td>• Find out about cultural, religious, gender, and other differences that need to be respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be sensitive to needs of vulnerable populations (e.g., children)</td>
<td>• Obtain appropriate consent (e.g., parents, as well as children)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ethical Considerations

(Creswell, 2012)

- **Collecting Data**

<table>
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<tr>
<td>• Respect the site and disrupt as little as possible</td>
<td>• Build trust, convey extent of anticipated disruption in gaining access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid deceiving participants</td>
<td>• Discuss purpose of the study and how data will be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect potential power imbalances and exploitation of participants (e.g., interviewing, observing)</td>
<td>• Avoid leading questions; withhold sharing personal impressions; avoid disclosing sensitive information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not “use” participants by gathering data and leaving site without giving back</td>
<td>• Provide rewards for participating</td>
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**Ethical Considerations**

(Creswell, 2012)

- **Analyzing Data and Reporting Data**

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<tr>
<td>Avoid siding with participants (going native)</td>
<td>Report multiple perspectives; report contrary findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid disclosing only positive results</td>
<td>Assign fictitious names or aliases; develop composite profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the privacy of participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, conclusions</td>
<td>Report honestly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not plagiarize</td>
<td>See APA (2010) guidelines for permissions needed to reprint or adapt work of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid disclosing information that would harm participants</td>
<td>Use composite stories so that individuals cannot be identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate in clear, straightforward, appropriate language</td>
<td>Use language appropriate for audiences of the research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations

(Creswell, 2012)

- Publishing Data

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Type of Ethical Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Share data with others</td>
<td>• Provide copies of report to participants and stakeholders; share practical results; consider website distribution; consider publishing in different languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not duplicate or piecemeal publications</td>
<td>• Refrain from using the same material for more than one publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Complete proof of compliance with ethical issues and lack of conflict of interest, if requested</td>
<td>• Disclose funders for research; disclose who will profit from the research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structure of the Plan

(Creswell, 2012)

Example 3.3  A Theoretical/Interpretive Lens Format (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 58)

Introduction
  Overview
  Topic and purpose
  Significance for knowledge, practice, policy, action
  Framework and general research questions
  Limitations
Structure of the Plan

(Creswell, 2012)

Example 3.3  A Theoretical/Interpretive Lens Format (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 58)

Literature review
- Theoretical traditions and current thoughts for framing the question
- Review and critique of related empirical research
- Essays and opinions of experts
Structure of the Plan

(Creswell, 2012)

Design and methodology
Overall approach and rationale
Site or population selection and sampling strategies
Access, role, reciprocity, trust, rapport
Personal biography
Ethical and political considerations
Data collection methods
Data analysis procedures
Procedures to address trustworthiness and credibility

Appendices (entry letters, data collection and management details, sampling strategies, timelines, budget, notes from pilot studies)
Qualitative Research: Relevance?

"The initial position of the social scientist and the psychologist is **practically always one of lack of familiarity with what is actually taking place in the sphere of life chosen for study**" (Blumer, 1969, p. 33).
Types of Qualitative Research

1. Narrative Research
2. Phenomenology
3. Grounded Theory
4. Ethnography
5. Case Studies

Identify one paper in your discipline which used each of the above approaches and read the paper

In 300 words, discuss how the method was used to address the research problem